The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Assistance Series

HARIADENE JOHNSON

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Q: The interview is with Hariadene Johnson who served in USAID for many years. Give us a sketch of your career in Foreign Assistance.

JOHNSON: I joined the USAID in September of 1967 as a Management Intern, a category which they no longer have, but essentially it was a Junior Officer Intern System. I retired in September of 1994 after 30 years with the Federal government. All of that in USAID; most of the 20 years in the Africa Bureau; and the other ten, more or less roaming around the Agency. For awhile there I specialized in islands. I worked in the Caribbean and the South Pacific Islands; then I did some work with the Asia Bureau; then the last four years I was with the Agency, I was with the Newly Independent States, Russia and Eastern Europe; and the final six months with the Clinton transition team which was headed by Golar Butcher (former AA for the Africa Bureau), who was a long term friend and former boss. She asked me to work on the transition, and I was more than happy too. That's somewhat of a sketch.

Q: Let's go back to where you grew up and where you went to school?

JOHNSON: I was born in Waco, Texas in 1942. I grew up there, stayed there really until I was 18 and went away to college. At that time, Waco was very much of a small, southern town. It was closer to East Texas than West Texas, but technically it is Central Texas. It was primarily a marketing town to the middle of the cotton and sorghum growing area. It is located half way between Dallas and Houston. There's a fine University in Waco, called Bailer University, which I refused to go to, and so I went to Austin to the University of Texas in Austin and got my graduate degree there.

Q: What did you major in?

JOHNSON: I majored in something called Plan Two.

Q: What's that?

JOHNSON: For Plan One you declared a major and had so many hours required in so many subjects. Plan Two was an attempt to set up a small college within the confines of a large University so that you had a core group of subjects, called Plan Two courses, which basically were liberal arts, and then you could take the rest of your credits anywhere you wanted to. Essentially, all of your courses were taught by full professors, even as a Freshman. They tended to be 25 to 30 people as opposed to the 300 people who were in the normal big sessions.

Q: You must have had some special qualifications to get into that kind of a program?

JOHNSON: Essentially, it was honors, a honors graduate from High School and then application scores on the SAT exams, things like that in terms of acceptance into the University. First, you were accepted into the University of Texas and then you were accepted as a Plan Two Major within that overall curriculum. Essentially, it wound up with letting you take graduate courses at the Sophomore level. I went Freshman year and went to Summer School and then my Sophomore year they started letting me take graduate courses.

Q: Was there any particular theme to the core of the Plan Two program that you took?

JOHNSON: Liberal arts. They had your basic courses. Essentially, you would have been required to take, English, History, Mathematics, Sciences. You just took Plan Two sections, so that instead of being in the larger classes you were in the smaller classes. Starting your Junior year, they more or less ran on a tutorial basis, like a graduate seminar. I ended up with a triple major in philosophy, government and sociology (which also qualified for Phi Beta Kappa) and graduated with honors. Considering that every course I took was a honor course, I am very proud of my accomplishment.

Q: Yes, of course. Was there anything in that that was related to foreign affairs?

JOHNSON: I took a lot of international courses in terms of Russian government, Latin American governments, since Texas is so close to Latin America. But, more than anything, it was just a straight Liberal Arts generalized type of program. My parents, of course, wanted me to get a teaching certificate so that I would have something to fall back on and I refused. The choice was basically, I decided that I didn't want to go to law school, I wanted to go to graduate school and be a college professor. Of all the things that I had studied, I enjoyed government the most, comparative government more than International Relations or U.S. diplomatic history. I went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison and got a Masters Degree there and was working on my Doctorate there in Political Science, International Affairs, Comparative Government. It was right at the height, well when I was at the University of Texas, it was pretty much at the height of the Civil Rights movement. When I was at the University of Wisconsin, it was at the anti war, anti Vietnam War stage. I got very depressed, essentially that what I was doing, I was going to the Library and looking up articles so I could write papers, which I was very lucky to get published, and then somebody else would go to the Library and look at what I had written in order to publish something else. It seemed like a very closed circle in the context of the Vietnam War where there was so much activism and so much feeling that you can change the world. And, coming out of the Civil Rights Movement, so much feeling that you know, being an activist and that you could change the face of the U.S. I really got to where I felt staying in college and looking towards being a college professor was simply too passive and that I wanted to get more involved in what was happening in the world.Q: Did you write a Master's thesis?

JOHNSON: I wrote a Master's thesis and it was a Comparison of the Role of the Military in nation building in Burma and in Indonesia.

Q: Why did you pick those countries? What led you into that?

JOHNSON: Fascination of differences. It was fun to study the United States and see how many problems we'd managed to overcome. But, for me it was more interesting to look then at other countries and see what was happening in those countries, especially in the developing world, and compare what they went through with the U.S. as a revolutionary "young nation" with the newly emerging countries.

Q: Was there some course or professor that caught your interest that got you on to that track, rather than something else?

JOHNSON: Probably the most important professor was a man by the name of Henry Hart. His area was South Asia. He not only was the one that I found his courses fascinating. I used him really as my advisor for a lot of the University work. He was also the one I talked to about leaving and going to work for the government. I remember this one discussion I had with him that I hated to quit. But, I felt I should go ahead and stay at Wisconsin long enough to get my Doctorate. Otherwise, I just felt I would be a quitter. He looked at me and he said, "But basically, you already have quit." And, he was right, I had. I got a fellowship with residence as a residence hall advisor. They paid tuition and books and then gave you free room and board. I moved up from there to head resident and was in charge of an eighteen hundred student dorm. There were 900 women and 900 men. The last year that I was at school, I sort of took one class which technically qualified me as a student and spent most of my energy in the dorm and in working with a couple of the different groups around town, the international students and things like that. Dr. Hart was right.Q: So, you did work with international students, I guess?

JOHNSON: We worked with a lot of international students at the University of Texas which really started me off. My primary area of activity was with the international student house and then with something called a model U.N. where we sponsored a model United Nations every year on the Texas campus. I worked in that and was the chairman of the group that planned it and then was also the Secretary General of the model U.N. my senior year where I helped run the whole thing. I came to a model U.N. program up here in Washington, D.C. sponsored by American University, Georgetown, and Catholic University, and Howard, altogether.

Q: What did that model U.N. do? What was it supposed to be?

JOHNSON: The Model U.N. was an attempt. It was sponsored by the American Association for the United Nations and probably in the last resort, it was an attempt to brainwash young people. It was for the U.N.'s good. It's a good thing. In Texas especially, where at that time you had billboards on the highway, saying get the U.S. out of the U.N. Just a strong right wing feeling that the United Nations was an evil, corrupt and ineffective organization. So, the model U.N. essentially had different groups signing up to represent countries. For example, the German Club, sponsored by the people who are majoring in German would sign up for Austria. Actually, we had delegations from Mexico to come as a representative of Mexico and then we'd get the Tridelts (fraternity) to represent Great Britain or France and the other universities. You can do it any scale you want to. Our particular scale was that we cover all of Texas and Oklahoma and Mexico. So, we had pretty wide ranging representation. Part of our job, the sponsors of it were then to find people who would provide housing and/or scholarships to cover meals and things like that. The last year when I was the Secretary General, we wound up with two different groups coming from Mexico; the Mexican Universities were very politicized. Much more so than the U.S. was at that time in '64. Probably much more than U.S. campuses ever were. So, we had two different feuding groups from the University of Mexico, both of whom showed up in Austin and said, "We're here as a representative of the University of Mexico." We got the Chancellor of the University and the Dean of students, and everybody got involved about why are we causing all of this trouble. The main sponsor, actually the one that got me more interested in working with international students at the University of Texas was the (YMCA ed?) YWCA, which was an off campus set up. At that point, I remember in my Freshman year, they were bombed. Somebody set off a bomb. It didn't hurt anybody, it did some structural damage. I remember in my Freshman year thinking, what are they doing over there that they are bombing them. By the time I was a Senior I was really active in Y programs and I used the thought, what kind of people bomb other people. Just a great deal I think, in terms of opening it up to possibilities and other avenues. Because it was an off campus organization it was desegregated from the very beginning with a lot of work from the Civil Rights movement.

Q: Well, that's an interesting beginning. From there and after your degree work, what did you do?

JOHNSON: It was fairly odd. A British friend of mine wanted to take the Federal Entrance Exam and the Management Intern Exam and didn't want to take it alone. She talked me into going and taking the exam just for somebody to keep her company. A French friend went and took it just in order to see how well his scores would come out. It was pure competition. So, the three of us traveled off to take this exam and all three of us did very well and were offered Management Internships and came to Washington to interview with different agencies.

Q: This was an exam where you took a written test and then you had an interview process?

JOHNSON: The basic Civil Service Entrance Exam was a written test. Then they compared your scores on a written exam and you did a follow-up, a special exam for the Management Intern Program and submitted your grades, your transcript and did oral interviews. Then, based upon their rating of you, your name went on a Management Intern Eligibility list, I guess is the way to put it. You were then eligible to talk to any government agency you wanted to and be hired as a Management Intern, if they were interested. Essentially, all the exam process did was say that you were eligible if somebody wanted to hire you, at the incredible grade of a GS-7, which was more than if you just did the Federal Service exam, then you started as a GS-5. Then, I wrote to USAID.

Q: Why USAID? How did you know about USAID?

JOHNSON: A professor, Dr. Ronderedon. He was one of the professors at Wisconsin with whom I took courses on Asia. He had a contract with USAID to do some work in Thailand and he used his graduate seminars to write up proposals. I remember I wrote something on transportation in Northern Thailand and the way it could contribute to nation building. Anyway, USAID seemed like, you know again, I was coming out of this feeling of wanting to do something. And, just being in academia was too passive, too irrelevant. So, I wrote USAID. The very first official letter I had back from USAID was from Henrietta Moore, who was a coordinator of the intern program, who informed me that USAID was in a hiring freeze and couldn't hire anybody and so therefore, thanked me for my interest, but said go away.

Q: That was what year?

JOHNSON: This was in the Spring of 1967. So, I came out and interviewed with the Defense Intelligence Agency and HEW at that point, Health, Education and Welfare before they split it up, just because I was curious. I mainly wanted to see the State Department. I called and set up an appointment with USAID. It turned out that USAID personnel was not in the State Department, they were over on East Street or something. So, I never did get to see the State Department, but Henrietta, when I went in and said hello, she said, "Well, as long as you're here, why don't you interview?" And, she sent me on a round of interviews with various parts of USAID. Like, Congressional Liaison, and the only one I remember was in the Africa Bureau. At that time, the different regional Bureaus had their own personnel authority so that you could interview with the Personnel Office for Africa, as opposed to the overall Central Personnel Office. So, the Africa Bureau offered me a Management Intern job, and I accepted and started work in September of 1967.

Q: Interesting. You went right in to it. What was your first assignment?

JOHNSON: Well, the first shock was I found out that when you start work with the government you got paid on a two week delayed basis and it would be four weeks before I got a paycheck. My second shock about then was, they failed to pass the USAID continuing resolution. They told all of us that we wouldn't be paid for a while.

Q: That's right.

JOHNSON: Other than that, I enjoyed it very much. So, I started in the Africa Bureau Personnel Office working with Fred Hann, and then did a rotation over in the Office of International Training; then a rotation on the Central West Africa desk.

Q: So, you were in a rotation mode?

JOHNSON: Essentially what they did under the intern program was they offered you an opportunity to take two to three months rotation in different offices. One, both to give you exposure to the Agency and also to give the Agency a chance to assess you and see what your talents were. In that particular year, 1967, we also had a series of seminars that they set up for the interns and the Office of Personnel Management ran seminars for interns from throughout the government. It was really a good program.

Q: What was your impression of the Agency at that early stage?

JOHNSON: Well, I found it very confusing. I would have to say, I don't know. You have to understand I came straight from Graduate School and both at the University of Texas and at the University of Wisconsin were very much activist campus when I was there. They were by no means the first of the line when the police started clubbing people or anything like that. But, it was a heavy period to be on campus and coming into Washington and the government, it just felt very, very much like a very small cog in a very large machine. That whole first year, '67-68, the Personnel people kept telling us to take a permanent job. If we rotated around the Agency, if we were offered a permanent job to take it immediately and not do the full year for the training program, because personnel spots were very tight and that there was no guarantee that they would have jobs for us at the end of the 12 month training period. There was an intern class that started in July of about 25 people and an intern class that started in September of about 15 people. Of that 35 or 40 people, I would say all but five had permanent positions that they found during the rotation period. There were five of us that were still on the books as IDI's (International Development Intern) when the rough of '68 hit, which was a major reduction and force throughout the Agency. It wiped out three years of intern classes essentially. There were five of us that were saved, because we were non competitive, because we were still considered in training roles. They ended up saving some of the others. Essentially, they downgraded people who were GS-11 or 12, they downgraded them to a seven and within six months they found ways to promote them back up. So, you didn't lose your entire generational leadership, but it made a major dent in it.

Q: That was a traumatic time then.

JOHNSON: Very much so, especially if you're essentially fresh hire. You know, last in and first to go kind of feeling. Also, a feeling that you looked around the Agency and you were seeing so many people who were essentially, through no fault of their own, just being totally disrupted. Sort of a strong feeling of, do you want to stay in this for a career. Is it something that you really see as being a 20 year career and essentially, the answer was no. I just said, it probably wouldn't work for a career, but I would stay as long as I enjoyed it and when I ceased to enjoy it, then I would go back to school. That was always my escape hatch. I figured that if you say you left your job to go back to school it looks ok So, that was always my escape hatch, that I would go to school. It turned out that USAID was fascinating. You work with an extraordinarily intelligent group of people. Both the people who were there on a permanent basis and the ones that you wind up hiring from the outside, from the Universities or later from private contractors. And, an extremely diverse group of people. I found it fascinating. I found the whole initial interest in how other countries differ from the U.S. and for the developing world, especially Africa in 1960s. It was like one country after another was becoming independent, and each one tried to chart their own way through those pre-independence days blues. It just seemed an extraordinarily interesting period to work with and to watch.

Africa came to independence much later than Latin America or Asia. It always seemed that we had fewer resources to play with than they did in other Bureaus. And, the point of that is, the bureaucratic in fighting about, do we get more than money But, part of it was that, I think in reality, anything that's old and established keeps getting its resources. You know, you get what you got before plus ten percent if the Agency can do it. If you're new, then you've got to elbow your way into the system. It doesn't happen overnight. You have to sort of inch it out. The African Bureau, because of the massive explosion to independence, e.g. in 1962 there were two independent countries; and by 1968 there were 38; and by 1975 there were 40. I mean, you just see countries, becoming independent every single day. Every time an African country became independent, the U.S. opened an Embassy, set up an USAID's scholarship program. But, then the African Bureau had to become extremely creative in terms of how do you manage a program that's over so many countries; so much difference; and use your resources, mainly your staff resources as well as you can. So, I think the African Bureau experimented with more different forms of organizational management than most of the rest of the Agency. Much of what we did in Africa later was adopted elsewhere with the other Bureaus.

Q: Could you give me an example? We won't spend a lot on that, but what are some?

JOHNSON: We set up the regional concept. which started out with an organization called RUA, which was Regional USAID in Washington, where you had an office in Washington that had every delegation of authority that a Mission overseas would have, up to having a director, a training officer, an executive officer, and a controller. It ran as a completely delegated mission for the countries assigned to that program. This was in '65, '66, '67. It was later duplicated almost exactly by the Eastern European Program in 92 and '93, where they ran an USAID Mission in Washington.

Q: What was the reason for doing that, do you remember, for the Africa program?

JOHNSON: The African organization was due to the desire for efficiency through concentration. You were running programs in 15 different countries and you simply didn't have the staff resources or the money to have a fully fledged mission in each country. But, you could have a mission in Washington that was running projects in those countries, but essentially then tried to handle all the project support from Washington. It was very much what happened in Eastern Europe, along with the security concern of being unwilling, I think to put that many Americans out in the field. But, the idea was that you could run programs from Washington. I think in the Regional USAID process, well both in the Regional USAID process and later in the Eastern Europe process is financially possible, it is a fact, that you can run a program out of Washington. The problem with it is that every system in the Agency is really set up to run differently and that you wind up with complicating your management tasks by a factor of eight to ten times. You make it harder for yourself than you otherwise would, simply because what you're doing isn't the way the system is supposed to work. Secondly, I think you wind up with a previous position to do projects, individually complete, self-contained projects. Simply because, you don't have people in country who can do a day-to-day dialogue with the host government that helps change a project into something broader. And, that's why I said, I think in a lot of cases, USAID wound up finding that doing the single intervention simply didn't have the mass or the weight to make all of the other related changes that needed to be made. You wound up... (I feel like I'm repeating a conversation I had with my State Department colleagues.) You want the opportunities where you could take a picture in front of a building we built, or you can cut a ribbon in front of the new school that had reopened. Those projects didn't make any lasting change in the educational system. I think in many ways, USAID people tend to be idealistic. They tend to think they can make a lasting change in the educational system. Many of our State Department colleagues don't. They figure the lasting ain't going to happen anyway, and so go for the full opportunity of the moment. Go for the short term impact.

Q: The impact for the moment establishes our relationship. That's interesting.

JOHNSON: As the program expanded, we began to get more and more funds and tried to run bigger programs. You couldn't do it out of Washington. You needed people locally. And, the first step in doing that was to establish essentially, what we called the sub-units of the established missions, which then would be responsible for the program, like there was one in the sub-unit in Senegal. It was also responsible for Mali, Mauritania; the sub-unit in Cameroon was responsible for Chad, Central Africa Republic, and Gabon. But, the full delegations of authorities were still held by Washington Then as the Sahel broke loose, the sails are out and attention focused on what was going on in that area

Q: This was the area that the Regional Office in Washington (RUA) covered, isn't that right?

JOHNSON: Essentially, the office in Washington, and I don't know if it was deliberate or not, but in effect it was the former francophone colonies. There were some 15, 16 former francophone colonies scattered from the west coast of Africa through central Africa and then down almost into southern Africa.

Q: This was a result of the Korry report; do you remember that?

JOHNSON: Well, the Korry report would go...yeah, I know the Korry report. What happened with the Korry report was like I was saying in the '60s we had a new country coming on the scene every week. We wound up with Embassies and USAID Missions in every single country in Africa. The feeling was very strong that we couldn't do that, that we had to cut back on the number of countries. And, Ambassador Korry wrote a report in which he essentially argued that you should have your core countries and then you could have these other countries that you provided some assistance to, but you didn't really make a major effort. I think at the time we had eight countries that were considered core countries. You had, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan on the east coast; and then you had Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana. Zaire was not one of the original Korry countries, because when I was Assistant Desk Officer on Congo, we had an exercise where we, well back up a second...

As part of the Korry report, you could do bilateral programs in these core countries, and then you did regional projects everywhere else. Regional became almost a question of how many angels can one fit on the head of a pin. They wound up with the definition that regional was working through a regional institution; regional was working with a project that benefited more than one country that it crossed a national border; or regional was something that had regional impact, even though it might be totally confined within one country. At one time when I was Assistant Desk Officer for Ghana and Liberia, they had an exercise of moving Zaire from the Regional list to the bilateral list. The request for approval went up to the Administrator and all the arguments were laid out as to why we should have a direct bilateral relationship with Zaire.

Q: But, this Regional Mission in Washington was a part of a regional approach, was it not?

JOHNSON: Right. It was the, well yes, I think the African Bureau was fairly creative. You could have said regional projects are only going to be programs through regional organizations and we will work with Paris and London to work with these countries, and you need a Mission in Washington to do that. The idea, I think ...(without having been there for the original arguments,) essentially the idea of a Regional Office in Washington was to bend the rules as far as you could. But, most people in Africa felt that it was a major foreign policy mistake to cut back to so few countries and essentially stop being active in others, and that some other countries that we were ceasing to be active in were very important in terms of what happened on the continent of Africa and also in terms of working with the other donors. You couldn't just have some being just American clients and others being the French clients. That was the wrong way to carve up Africa. So, the Washington Mission was in order to give somebody in Washington the same authority they would have had as in the field and then let them try and push the envelope as far as they could with the people in PPC (USAID Program and Policy Coordination Bureau) or the State Department.

Q: What was your first assignment then, regular assignment?

JOHNSON: First regular assignment was on the Ghana desk, working initially with a man on detail from State Department. His name I think was Smith and then later with David Shear and Steve Christmas.

Q: This was in 1968?

JOHNSON: '68-69. I stayed on the Ghana desk. Well, first of all when I was working, it was Ghana-Sierra Leone Desk; then it was the Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone Desk.. It sort of kept getting reorganized. With the core activities, for me anyway, were on Ghana, where I worked on the Ghana program. That was primarily working on the Commodity Import Program and Program Loan, which in an interesting sort of way was a precursor to the policy reform issues that the Agency as a whole discovered in the late '70s '80s.

Q: Let's talk about the Ghana program at that time? What was your understanding of what we were trying to do and why were we trying to do it?

JOHNSON: This is a booby trap, since I was working with you as the Mission Director in Ghana.

Q: You can say what you want.

JOHNSON: I don't know, I think originally.

Q: I didn't get there until 1970 anyway.

JOHNSON: But you were my boss in Washington. Do you realize that of my 30 years with USAID and you were my boss for 20.

Q: Right. I'll be darn. Well, let's forget that.

JOHNSON: It's all your fault. I started working on the Ghana desk and it was an extremely complex program in terms of what USAID did in those days. You had a combination of capital assistance and the big Volta Dam project, combined with private enterprise, Kaiser Aluminum Company, which was working with the power that the dam provided; a technical assistance program, providing assistance in a broad range of areas; and a policy-oriented commodity import program and PL480 program. We were trying to get the country to put together an economic policy package. At the time of independence, Ghana was very much under Nkrumah, who really espoused Pan Africanism and wound up wasting a lot of the resources that Ghana had at independence through various and assorted attempts to push Pan Africanism. By the time I started working on Ghana, it was totally broke, heavily in debt internationally and had gone through a military police coup, which at that time was unique. At that point the Ghana program was extremely complex. You were working with probably one of the better educated, trained people. In terms of most of the African countries, they did have a better formed base of educated leadership. Essentially, looking back on it, I think most of what we did was probably well intentioned, but somehow we weren't really making permanent changes. The Police Military group was followed by a national election, which was followed by a military coup. So, the politics of it were undermining most of what we did. As a general theme, I would say that what started in 1967 was a strong feeling conditioned in large part by the war in Vietnam, not interfering in internal affairs and that we were there to help them.Q: You mean the Vietnam War?

JOHNSON: Because of the Vietnam War when we were so strongly involved, you had a mind set throughout the rest of the Agency of not interfering and not intervening. I think in Africa you had that mind set. I think for people who worked in the Middle East countries or people who worked in Asia, they were more conditioned to U.S. influencing local politics. I think in Africa that we felt very much that we were there to help other nations make choices, but not to dictate what choices they took. And, that as a result, we wound up not really being well informed, I think about the politics of what was going on.

Q: What did you work on specifically in relation to the Ghana program?

JOHNSON: We had just started the Program Loan in Ghana, which was financing for a commodity import program (CIP) where the funds were released based upon agreement to certain policy conditions.

Q: Do you remember what the policy issues were?

JOHNSON: Most of the policy issues had to do with trying to come up with a exchange rate policy whereby the Ghanaian cedi would not be artificially maintained; you would not have capital controls. The country was afraid if they didn't have controls on the flight of capital you would have capital flight where all funds in the country would go elsewhere. The Ghanaian airline, at that point, wouldn't take cedis. If you wanted to buy a Coke on Ghana airways, you had to come up with dollars or pounds or something else. They wouldn't take the national currency. Most of the big policy issues were related to the foreign exchange.

The CIP itself financed certain groups of commodities. There was an attempt to finance commodities, which then made some contribution to development within a country, which was walking a very thin line between the kinds of currency controls that the government itself wanted and an open, more liberal type of import regime, which is what we were promoting. We were concerned about how they spent our money; we got very picky and we were very tight in controlling what they could and couldn't do. For example, we also had a PL480 program there. Essentially, it was a food aid program, but it financed manufactured or semi-manufactured commodities, which were not essentially food. We financed tallow, which went into some of the industrial factories there; we financed grey cloth, which is a processed and semi-bleached textile, just cotton. Rolls and rolls of cotton as opposed to financing wheat, or corn, or vegetable oil [ed]. Even the vegetable oil, that we financed, went into industry as opposed to food aid.

Q: Was that unusual?

JOHNSON: It was very unusual for the PL480 program at the time, and even later. I think over time it probably went more and more toward being straight food aid and being tied to some type of perceived shortage in agricultural production. Ghana was very much tied into the CIP where the two, both in terms of policy negotiations and in terms of commodities tried to have an impact upon the economy. You ran into really funny things in trying to provide the cotton for the textile factories in Ghana where the U.S. Department of Agriculture would absolutely go bananas over how much cotton cloth was being used. They could not believe that a country of X million population use, X plus Y yards of cloth.

Q: The local consumption.

JOHNSON: The local consumption. They were convinced that somehow they were black-marketing it and shipping it across the border to other countries. And, just to get into this extraordinary disagreements with the Department of Agriculture, because they had absolutely no knowledge of Africa and had you know, a blouse, coats, one and one-half yards of cotton, as opposed to a Ghanaian blouse might take six yards of cotton, because of the way it was constructed and sewn and overlapped and etc. etc. etc. Also, we were trying to provide textile machinery under the CIP, which could be used in the textile factories. I found out the extent of the various U.S. agricultural lobby interests over in the Department of Agriculture was one poor man in one little office in the back of the building who worried about exporting textile machinery and tried to promote it and thought it was a great idea and it was something that we should do more of. There were 99 other people (e.g. the Department of Commerce, ed) who were devoted to not increasing the competition that U.S. cloth faced, and so they didn't want us to help in the manufacturing and export of cloth. Later, in addition to the free trade and the NAFTA free trade zone fights of the '90s, we were exporting jobs to Mexico. In this case, the textile lobbyists felt very strongly that they wanted the textile production to be in the United States and then we could sell finished commodities to Ghana. We're talking about the difference between theoretical, logical demand in Ghana for U.S. manufactured cloth and effective demand, which was zero, the foreign exchange to pay for it was coming from the U.S. anyway. So, we were not cutting into American sales.

Q: How did they resolve the issue or did they?

JOHNSON: Yeah. We managed to get grey cloth under the PL480 program, as opposed to food, but we never managed to get textile machinery into the commodity import program [actually we did but the equipment had to be segregated in the production line for local production only! ed]. So, it was sort of half and half. For me, at that time, it was like theory logically knowing from academic studies, you know, and the different lobby groups with different positions. Knowing that in theory and seeing it in practice were two different things. As you walk into it and you see exactly what that means, as public policy is formulated and the impact, you know, long established lobbying groups and long established positions. The absolute total (disconnect, ed.).

Q: How was this textile program, as an example, helpful, or was it, to Ghana's development?

JOHNSON: Quite honestly I'm thinking I never really went back and looked to see what was the overall long term impact. I think that the time and theory was very much that it represented a low technology type of operation that could be run in an LDC (less developed country), where you had a labor force that could be trained for the tasks were required. Therefore, utilize a local product, i.e. Ghanaian cotton, provided employment or jobs for Ghanaians. In the long run, hopefully we provide export earnings as the cloth that was dyed and printed in Ghana could be exported to surrounding African nations. I don't know if any of that ever happened or not.

I ran into something similar years later when working in Uganda. I remember trying to explain it to a new Assistant Administrator that the analysis of a sugar factory for Uganda was based on the assumption that you could produce locally enough to replace all of the sugar that was being imported from Kenya, plus you could export it to Rwanda, Burundi, and Eastern Zaire which were closer markets for Uganda than Kenya. No one really ever did and this was like in the '80s and the Agency still didn't have a way to do it. The Rwanda mission was also planning a sugar factory, based on that they could then market the sugar to Burundi and Uganda. And, in the meantime, the Kenyans were trying desperately to help stabilize their economy which was dependent upon sugar exports for 30 percent of the country's earnings. Even when we got into looking more at private sector investments as opposed to government direct investments on the assumption that the private sector with realistic marketing analysis, somehow we always emphasized production, rather than marketing. Anyway, that was sort of 20 years later.

Q: That was an interesting perspective. Were there other things you worked on on the Ghana desk?

JOHNSON: I spent six months trying to convince myself that there was a difference between obligations and expenditures. So, seeing all the things that Junior Desk Officers do such as technical assistance and PIO/Ts (Project Implementation Orders) for technical assistance and general sort of mission support. The mission would send a cable and then you'd try and find somebody in the Agency who knew something about what they were talking about. The CIP was fun, because it was not something that Desk Officers usually did.Q: Did you write a program document for a CIP?

JOHNSON: The very first time overseas, actually. I did a couple of, I don't know if you'd say I wrote them. What I did, I took them around Washington trying to get them approved and negotiated their acceptance.

Q: Were they unusual or pretty standard?

JOHNSON: I think they were pretty standard. I don't really remember very much that was different about them. The first time that I ever went overseas in my entire life was to Ghana to work on the annual budget submission and do the commodity import portion annex of that submission; it was an absolutely, totally incredible experience.

Q: You know why?

JOHNSON: Almost every level. I guess my first feeling was, I get off the airplane and there were all these Coca Cola advertising billboards on the run from the airport into the town. It was like going to any American city. It was the lack of difference, you know struggling to see the difference. And, later when I had a chance to be more, I don't know if sensitize is the right word, I saw a broader picture than when I was sitting in a taxi and watching the billboards go past. When I had an actual chance, I sat down and talked to Ghanaians. It was very different, a very different society; very different perspective on everything.

Q: What difference did you observe?

JOHNSON: All over town as you drove around, there were these half completed buildings where someone would put in a floor or they'd get up to the bottom of the window sills and then they'd just be stopped for months at a time. As a negative construction, it certainly caused total confusion. But, I talked to some Ghanaians about why was that the way people did it. Was it inability to get mortgage funds so that you couldn't do the whole thing at once or was there a reason in back of it. They explained to me that it was very much the requirement in Ghana that if you did well that you helped out your family and they had an extended definition of who your family was. Going back two or three generations and coming forward with all the cousins and in-laws and everybody else. And, that in effect if you had a good job and you were in a good position and you wanted to build your own house, you couldn't save your money, because then people would know that you had money and they would want you to finance sister Tom's brother's second cousin's child's education fees. So, they'd put it into a house, but it was like they only had ten dollars, so they'd do ten dollars worth of work.

Q: Otherwise, a savings account.

JOHNSON: It was a savings account where your relatives could come live with you eventually, I guess after you got the house built. But, there was much a strong impact that family relations had on every decision you made. In terms of what job you took, how you spent your money, where you lived, how you lived. One other thing I remember: I was at the hotel and I was supposed to go out for dinner with a Ghanaian Police Lieutenant who was the first female Police Lieutenant that they'd ever had, period. So, she and I were going to go out for dinner and she came by the hotel and I was sitting in the lobby waiting for her to show up and there was this total complete chaos, because two of the guys, two of the doormen at the hotel, found a guy trying to steal tires out of the parking lot. They cornered him and they brought him into the lobby and had the counter man call the police and the police were going to come pick him up. This all sounds very normal, except for the fact that there were at least a hundred people who were attracted by the fact that they had arrested this guy and who started beating him up. Your two hotel people were doing their best to keep the guy from getting killed and everybody else was screaming and shouting and punching and clubbing. It was just an incredible mob scene. And, this Police Lieutenant showed up and explained to me that

As Desk Officer I was were very much into Ghana's debt rescheduling and working with the World Bank and the IMF on rescheduling a massive foreign debt.Q: How did you find that?

JOHNSON: Debt rescheduling is very much of a challenge. I had an economic background and absolutely nothing in the banking finance area. Actually, more a trade background. I got into the midst of all the nitty gritty of debt rescheduling.

Q: What was your job? What were you doing on it?

JOHNSON: Essentially, I was the Assistant Desk Officer at the time. I think they gave it to me because nobody else had ever done it either. So, since nobody had any expertise in it, they said, "Okay, see what you can do with it." Then I developed expertise and became the rescheduling genius. I remember with a great deal of gratitude some people at the Export/Import Bank. They spent hours trying to explain to me a hundred and eighty day credits and how that differed from other things and interest rates. Everything about international banking that they knew from the export-import side.

Q: The Export/Import Bank had loans, which were subject to rescheduling?

JOHNSON: Yeah, they had exposure, which we wanted to be rescheduled. We, of course had the big Volta Dam loans that would have to be rescheduled and the Kaiser Aluminum Company was in there, just a whole ring of characters besides just USAID.I think it was unusual for a Junior Officer to have that much exposure to the different agencies around town.

Q: What were you actually doing? What was your role?

JOHNSON: I forget who was the Ambassador, but it was when the new Ambassador was first going out. [Ambassador Hadsel ed] He made a point of getting all the different people who were called Ghana Desk Officers. You got the Ghana Desk Officer from State; the Ghana Desk Officer from USAID; the Ghana Desk Officer from Commerce; the Ghana Desk Officer from the Treasury; the Ghana Desk Officer from USDA. You know, you pulled all these different people together who were the Ghana Desk Officers, quote, unquote and tried to start up a process where we would talk to each other and partially results of that process, it really became more my role to represent Ghana. But, the other people were Ghana Desk Officers, but they really represented Commerce Department's attitude to Ghana, rather than trained to represent Ghana's position to the Commerce Department. I started in that process of all the Ghana desk people getting together and talking and recognizing what a different perspective each Agency rep had. But, it built into, the USAID Ghana Desk Officer was the representative of the country. Much more so than representing the U.S. to the country. That in effect the role of having to present the U.S. viewpoint was essentially the field missions. Frequently, whatever final paper or position we came to got transmitted out to the field, but I was the Ghana Desk Officer and I would try and make that position more flexible in terms of things that were important to the Ghanaians.

Q: Any ideas specific of what you did?

JOHNSON: The one that keeps coming back to my mind again, again and again was the PL480 program insisting that it was better to do food than it was to do commodities.

Q: I mean on the debt issue?

JOHNSON: On the debt issue, I was repeating things that the Mission sent into me. It was an area in which I had absolutely no expertise and no confidence to go with an independent point of view. It was just trying to make sure that the points that the Mission was making were made where they needed to be made to the other agencies and basically, One of the best things about working on Ghana was that you had a series of USAID Mission Directors in Ghana who had a lot of creditability in Washington. Dick Cashin, before you went out there. It made it easy then to represent things that the Mission were saying. And, then also over that time that I developed a creditability through working with the other agencies, and so that I would repeat what the Mission said, and it wasn't a question of rubber stamping something that was being said by somebody who was unreliable to begin with. It was a creditable story and you had a good basis going in for saying, "Okay, look, these are the problems." And, that if you push here, maybe the demands get accepted, but if you push too hard, all you're doing is setting yourself up for a failure, because they won't be able to meet your terms.

Q: Anything else in that particular period? This was quite an introduction wasn't it to USAID?

JOHNSON: It was an extraordinary introduction, in that I had a series of Mission Directors that I worked with. Don Brown was Zaire; Dick Cashin was in Ghana. I was working with really topnotch people overseas and had a series of good bosses in Washington, Steve Christmas and David Shear. I probably learned more from Steve Christmas than anybody I've ever worked for. Steve sat me down and he said basically, "Hariadene, it's okay to tilt at windmills. It's something that you do; it's a good part of your personality and it's something that every government agency needs, but you have to pick your windmills, you can't tilt at them all."

Q: Good point, good point. He was a first rate person.

JOHNSON: That he was.

Q: Well, and then after that where did you go?

JOHNSON: I worked on Ghana from '67 until '72.

Q: That's quite a considerable period, isn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes. It was mostly working on Ghana, but I also had responsibilities for Liberia and basically, the people didn't feel that crooks ever got punished. That if once they were arrested, he'd buy off the policeman or he'd buy off the judge and that the only punishment that would be given would be what they gave right there on the spot.

Q: Instant justice?

JOHNSON: Right. So, I took it as a lack of faith in any institution. This was very much you did it personally, if you wanted to see it get done.

Q: I understand. Were there any other observations from that first visit?

JOHNSON: I fell in love with Africa. I'd taken a couple of courses on Africa in Graduate School, but if anything I'd probably concentrated more on Southeast Asia. So, that was my first real exposure to Africa.

Q: What made you fall in love with Africa? What was it about?

JOHNSON: A feeling of being alive, a feeling very much of the newness that the world was open to anything, anything and everything. A feeling, I don't know, to me it's what the U.S. must have been like during the frontier days. A sense that it was a new country and that they could establish it and shape it, and a sense of optimism that they had no doubts they could do it. I remember sitting at the hotel getting into all these long discussions with various British ex-patriots who would sit around and moan about the fact that Ghanaian Africa was not ready for self-government and that they really should have maintained the colonies a little longer. My final argument use to be that Chicago wasn't ready for self government either. They didn't appreciate that. But, basically it was the view of Europeans, well the British specifically, I guess, that (the early work I did with USAID was all in Anglophone countries).The British view was that, you know, that somehow the U.S. had done them wrong by pressuring the them to turn loose of the African colonies before they were really ready for self government. A strong feeling on my part that Chicago is not ready for self-government. Today, I would probably say that Washington, D.C. is ready for self-government, but you got to wait until somebody is ready. You learn how to self-govern by doing it and it's one of those things that you just plunge in. You make your mistakes and you learn from them and you move on.

Q: Did you work on other things while you were there? How long were you there?

JOHNSON: The initial trip was just a couple of weeks. Later, I was out there for a couple of months. The desk at that point covered also Liberia and Zaire and so I did stop overs in those two countries.

Q: How did you find situations there?

JOHNSON: The U.S. official policy for Zaire at that time- this was 1968-was that we would be finished and out of there by 1970. The assistance program was a short term, an emergency program and we could then leave. I thought that that wouldn't work and it was going to be a long, long time before the country outgrew the need for any kind of technical assistance, either institutionally or financially or infrastructure or anything. Probably out of that particular mini revolt that they had down in the south in Lubumbashi, it had been settled, but considering the size of that country you simply had no ethnic homogeneity to hold it together. They were probably going to have a series of Civil Wars, coups, etc. etc. etc.

Liberia is one of the few countries in Africa that in my very first visit I found depressing. It was a country in which the America-Liberians had such a tight hold on the country. The governing elite were in miniature the same as the Brits would say about Ghana. And, so there was really a very, very small elite maintaining a very small control and hiding behind the shadow of civilian elections. I found it a country, but at that time, what did I do in Liberia ... I can't even remember. As I think I recall capital projects - at that point capital assistance was handled by a different office, the Project Development Officer, the Capital Projects Officer. So, I passed messages back and forth on some road projects. In '69 or so, by which time the Washington organization was Ghana, Liberia, Zaire, Sierra Leone. Steve Christmas was the officer in charge of the whole conglomeration.

There was a project in Liberia. It was called the JFK Hospital where we had put in a modern hospital in Monrovia. The Indian Public Health Service, which had the technical assistance contract, had come up with data on the recurrent costs for operating the hospital, after we had finished the capital infrastructure. They'd come up with a budget of what it would cost the Liberian government to run it. It was like five times what anybody expected it to be, and probably ten times higher than what the Liberian government could come up with. And, so USAID had us send an evaluation team out to Liberia to really look at what were the alternatives to do something about the JFK Hospital. Was there any way we could redesign it, reorganize it, salvage it; it was turning into a major embarrassment. The man on my desk who had basically handled Liberia refused to go. He thought it was such a can of worms he didn't want to touch it. So, Steve asked me if I would go and I said, sure. Ed Hogan, who at that time was Director of the Africa Bureau Development Program Office was the team leader. He and I headed out to Monrovia to look at this hospital. I probably learned more during that trip about diplomacy than I did any other time in my life. It was three weeks of concentrated diplomacy of watching Ed Hogan try to manipulate and bring together the Liberian government, the Mission, the Embassy, and the Indian Health Service.

Q: What was your understanding of why it was built in the first place?

JOHNSON: I'm trying to remember. I think at that point in the late '60s and early '70s and it never entirely went away, but I would say it was probably stronger than as if the official government, if a foreign government officially requested X of the U.S. government, unless we had some reason not to, you know, that's what we'd do. [It was a commitment to President Tubman by President Kennedy during Tubman's visit to the U.S. ed] The different country programs were written up and submitted to Washington every year as a country program, and they were submitted to the Congress in country-by-country presentations. For Liberia, you really didn't have a consistent country program where the parts fitted together so that the accomplishment of all those different pieces would make some significant difference in the country. Bob Nooter who was Mission Director and I think, Steve Christmas was Program Officer at that time before he came into Washington. But, they did a country presentation where they did one through ten of the high priority things that should be done in that country, given the basic issues that had to be overcome. And, parallel to that they did one through ten of what the U.S. funds were actually going for, and nowhere did the two lists overlap.

Q: Do you remember what were on these lists and what should have been done or any of those?

JOHNSON: I remember that on the list of things that we were doing, there were a fair amount of health activities; there was a fair amount of road building. I don't really remember what else we were doing, some agricultural projects. The impression was that they were all fairly scattered. They're much like in the U.S. when you have a road project when the House passes a transportation bill. It consists of a number of roads, which makes sense if you look at West Virginia or Idaho or Florida. Basically, those types of projects were what we did in Liberia, based upon the relative political pull of different representatives through different counties. Essentially, we got into, but the list of what we should be doing was more in education. Fewer capital construction projects and more institutional development.

I remember the hospital. Essentially, we did the hospital, because President Tubman asked for a hospital. The hospital had, actually it had two wings and one wing had an elevator and it went up to Tubman's floor where he had his own three private hospital wards in case he got sick. The problem was the high recurrent cost budget which was related to the type of construction where it was done in two wings and they were very separate. You didn't have any efficiencies. That was because how Tubman wanted it. He wanted one wing just for him and for other presumable members of his family. The other reason that the thing was so incredibly expensive, was the Indian Public Health Service (IPHS) essentially did what they called the honest budget. The customary system at that time was for four nurses to be assigned to each ward. Two nurses were assigned to the ward were actually girlfriends of the Admissions Officer and they never showed up on the floor. But, they received their salary. So, we had two people doing the work of four people. So, being in Public Health Service in Liberia, which has gotten nowhere in trying to get Civil Service-type standards where you don't get paid unless you show up. IPHS decided, okay, they would budget for six people. The two that never showed up and the four who were supposed to be there and work on the floor. And, that sort of went throughout the whole system. They budgeted the amount that got ripped off from the Hospital Administrator then, plus the amount that they needed. Focusing attention on how totally inefficiently that place was run, they probably couldn't have done any better. I mean, they really did get everybody exercised about the problem.

Q: Were the Liberians in charge of the operation or were they just interested in how IPHService ran it?

JOHNSON: The Indian Public Health Service, well when we first built the hospital, the idea was that we would have a technical assistance team out there for four years that would help establish the use of this facility. They worked in the old hospital while the new one was being constructed and then they were supposed to turn the new one over to the government and then the government would then have people trained ready to run the new one. The Indian Public Health Service was doing the technical assistance and absolutely totally not getting anywhere. The only doctors who they felt had any sense of competence and dedication to duty were Liberian natives who had managed to get some type of medical training. And, the American Liberians didn't want them at the hospital. The American Liberian doctors were basically viewed by the Indian Public Health Service as incompetent, inefficient, corrupt and not worth the time of day. In the mean time, when they came up with this budget of how much it would cost to run the new hospital, the Liberian government's first line of attack was to ask us to come up with the money to pay for it and provide the recurring costs after we finished building it. We said no to that and so then they refused to accept the building. I think, at one point, we got as far as having, a member of the Kennedy family who was supposed to fly there and the date was all established and then they refused to participate. But, we built a hospital that could be neither run nor maintained and so therefore, they wouldn't take it and we could have it. They used to jerk the U.S. chain. They had the Ambassador trying to find a solution for them. I guess in terms of other political programs either Haiti, Grenada or such, this was small potatoes.

Q: Did you recommend any solutions in the report?

JOHNSON: I was totally on the side of the Indian Public Health Service. I felt we had a no choice, since we'd been unable to correct the situation we should go ahead and provide the extra money. And, if that meant budgeting for six nurses when only two showed up, then that's what we should do.

Q: And with the U.S. financing the budget?

JOHNSON: With the U.S. financing the budget. The U.S. let itself be manipulated into creating the problem. I mean, it wasn't our problem to begin with. If we'd had a free hand in designing the hospital, we would have designed a different hospital. I'm convinced based on everybody that I talk to, that we built this high tech monstrosity that nobody could run or maintain, because we gave into Tubman who wanted a demonstration project, so we should therefore go ahead and pay for it.

Q: Did it function? Was there any need for it?

JOHNSON: They needed a hospital. They were trying to set up at that time what essentially was rural public health system, which would provide primary care, referred to regional centers for secondary care with major complex cases referred to the hospital for advanced care. They were all part of a well organized country-wide system. In the mean time, we had spent this money building this fancy hospital in Monrovia and still hadn't gotten the rural health posts established, or constructed.Q: That was part of the original plan wasn't it?

JOHNSON: It was part of our original plan. It was not part of the Liberian original plan.

The evaluation basically came out that the Indian Public Health Service had built in an extortionate budget and you didn't need as many people as they said you needed; and you didn't need as many commodities as they said they needed. Basically, the Indian Public Health Service position was, that if you didn't order one hundred and fifty percent of what you needed, that you would wind up with only 50 percent going to the patients and the other 50 percent being on the black market somewhere. As far as I could see, basically they were right.

Q: But, that's not a policy, you could justify?

JOHNSON: I don't remember. I'd had less than a year and a half with the Federal government at this point and I didn't see any reason to go ahead and just write it off. If we couldn't make the Liberians change, we had no hope of getting rid of the corrupt hospital administrators or the doctors who were supposedly there, but never showed up for service, etc. etc., that we should go ahead and admit it and pay enough to get proper care at the hospital. We got back to Washington, and the Senior team member, Ed Hogan, essentially said that the hospital could be run for much less than what the Indian Public Health Service proposed and that we should extend some technical assistance here. Basically, as far as I was concerned it was filling in the edges. You weren't going to wind up with a project that you could be proud of.

Q: You were talking about the JFK hospital as an example of how projects evolve and get into trouble. Where did you come out in the end on the JFK hospital project? What was your group doing?

JOHNSON: An independent evaluation. I thought we ought to go ahead and, well, you really had two options. You could essentially take a hospital that was built and nail a two by four over the door and never open it, which I felt was probably unacceptable to all parties that were concerned. Or, you could take the hospital and say, okay, we now have a hospital in Liberia according to Liberian standards and at the same time achieve some level of health care. We'll take a budget that is one hundred and fifty percent of what you normally have and that we ought to go ahead and have the Liberians come up with, you know, the first year have 30 percent of the budget and we'd cover 70s percent. By the fifth year it would be 50/50; and the year ten we would turn over the whole operation. Some way, whereby we would go ahead and have a hospital that ran at a functioning level. That was basically unacceptable, just the thought of what the auditors and the Inspector General would say. And Liberian doctors who never showed up to work, or knowing that funding pharmaceuticals were 50 percent lost. There just wasn't a good practical decision.

I think that I mentioned earlier that when I first came to USAID, I got the feeling that I was a very small cog in a very large machine and really questioned whether or not what I did really make a difference. There's a book out which was actually a true story in Liberia of how USAID reacts to politics, which I read and was horrified at it. I think the main solution for them at that point was to offer scholarships to the U.S. Anyway, I was worried about being this very small cog in this large machine that wouldn't have any impact or alternatively, that I would get basically corrupted. Not in a sense of getting a kicked back on contracts or something like that, but that I'd stopped caring. You know, just that it is okay, that's the program, just go with the program.

Two things that made me change that opinion. One was this project in Liberia, because what we would do about the project was being decided. Phil Birnbaum, who was the Deputy Assistant Administrator (Africa Bureau) at that point, called Steve Christmas in and Steve took me along with him. Phil and Steve were talking about more or less practical ways that you could keep this thing from being a total embarrassment. Such as get the government to accept it and then after that it would be their problem as to how they ran it. So, in the middle of all this, Steve said, "Well, I just feel like we ought to hear just what Hariadene has to say." So, he opened up the conversation to let me put all of my reservations, complaints and everything else on the table. I felt so positive by working in an Agency where you could do that, that you could put your ideas on the table. It didn't mean that you always got them accepted, but it just made a hundred percent difference in me that I had a chance to present them and that it was accepted behavior. It was something where I had to worry about what this was going to do to my evaluation, etc. etc.

Q: How are your views greeted?

JOHNSON: Phil said, we can't do that. Basically, his point was that, it is a political project and a political country and his point of view was, how do we get out of it with the least damage done; the least damage done to overall U.S/Liberian relationships; the least damage done to USAID and USAID's budget. This was never going to be a perfect project. There was nothing that USAID could do that could make this into a functioning well run hospital. At this point, how can we get out of it with the least damage done, and then in the long run keep working in the health sector in Liberia and try to bring about some of the other health interventions that needed to be made in the long term.

Q: Just about the time we were going into these regional approaches in mostly Francophone Africa, the Sahel, as you said, imploded and you became part of the staff? When did you join that?

JOHNSON: I went to work on the Sahel program in '72 as an Assistant Director for Program, which was a new office that they were setting up in the Central West Africa Regional Office, where previously they had had a Desk Officer that corresponded to the regional mission in the Senegal; a Desk Officer that handled Cameroon; a Desk Officer that did Niger, and Upper Volta in Abidjan. Fermino Spencer was the Director and Owen Cylke was the Deputy Director. The assignment would come down that this is what we need and the Office Directors would pass it to their Desk Officers and the Desk Officers would send it back up. The Deputy Director gets to travel around a lot and serve as Acting Director whenever the Director traveled. But, Owen felt that because of the way the Sahel program worked, he couldn't send up separate reports from Senegal, Abidjan, Cameroon. They need to send up something so it covered the whole area. It was different work than other Deputy Directors did. It wasn't so much that it was different, it was more than he could handle. And, to actually handle it properly you needed a three person unit. You needed a Budget Officer, a Planning Officer, and somebody in charge of the place, and so that was me.

Q: This was after the Regional Office was ended?

JOHNSON: The Regional Office in Washington was basically terminated and replaced with something called Central West Africa Regional, which was managed by a series of USAID Affairs Offices in the field.

Q: It was a geographic division.

JOHNSON: It was a geographic unit; he did not have all of the delegations of authority that the previous Regional Director had. Because, some of the authorities went to the Field Missions, but the field posts were not fully empowered, so the delegations of authority that normally would be handled by Mission Directors were split between the field and Washington. So, there was a great involvement in programming decisions and in budget decisions made in Washington as opposed to the field offices.

Q: So, this was a unique geographic office?

JOHNSON: It was different from the other geographic offices and it needed a Program Officer in Washington to help pull together what was happening.

Q: Your assignment came to be the Program Officer?

JOHNSON: Right. They set up the position of Director for Program and Capaferre (ph) was the Budget Officer who kept everybody honest and Jess Snyder, who went on to be Mission Director was the Planning Officer. All of this was also happening at the same, almost in parallel courses, the Sahel office was employing. They had set up an emergency office in Central West Africa Regional. They found that they could not handle the emergency programs split among the three Desk Officers and so they set up a separate office that would just handle the emergency program, which was Hunter Farnham. Hunter had a staff of three, four, or five people, I think where he was trying to backstop everything that was going on in the emergency food aid, disaster relief effort, which because it was the first of the environmental disasters, it was very difficult for the Office of Disaster Relief, which normally would have handled all that kind of effort. They weren't set up to handle something like that. It didn't really fit their idea of their authorities, or what they could do, or what they couldn't do.

Q: The disaster that you perceived was happening in the Sahel at that time was different from typical disasters.

JOHNSON: It didn't have a starting date and a stopping date. It wasn't something that was geographically confined like a volcano or a hurricane. It was spread out over thousands of miles; it was an accumulation of agricultural practices and land management practices that had aggravated a very delicate, fragile ecological system, to the point where you had estimates that the desert was advancing by so many inches every year. But, essentially you had, the academic guys that I believed (and here again, it's a question of who you want to believe and who you talk to,) that you didn't have proof that there was a climatic change, which in their terminology was something that happens over hundreds of years.

Q: Were they having a drought?

JOHNSON: You did not have a drought. What you had was, a previously five to 10 years period of a heavy wet season, where cattle herders had obviously pushed further into the desert and pushed further north than they ever should have done. The unusual out-of-cycle heavy rains had stopped. So, what people perceived as being a drought or a climatic change was really much more a matter of their getting rainfalls along the lines of what they normally would have gotten over a 50 year period and you didn't get climatic shifts in less than hundreds of years.

Anyway, everybody was working on that all on one side while Hunter was trying to move emergency food to people who normally would have been able to raise sorghum or millet, and found out that there wouldn't be enough rainfall to germinate any harvest and so they were headed south towards the coast. He was actually pushing, I forget the numbers, (and at some point you really should interview Hunter, because he remembers all the numbers.) But, it was like previous food aid programs going into the Francophone Sahel. The Sahel states were Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad, and later got broaden to include others. To a great extent there was a Sahelian impact that spread across a band of Africa, so that you had the same thing was happening in the six Francophone colonies that was happening in Ethiopia and Sudan on the other side of the continent. Also, it hit Northern Ghana. The focus was on the six Sahel inland countries. Hunter was trying to push food aid into those countries in magnitudes and amounts and had never been done before. They were sending it in by truck convoy starting in Algiers and going down across the Sahara Desert to get into northern Mali. They were doing air drops in Chad where they had dependent spouses flying along with the U.S. Air Force, because although air tower controllers are supposed to be able to speak English, but just in case, they had some French speaking people in the planes so they could dump the grain where they were supposed to. They were going in by boat, by plane, everything except camel.

Q: It was a logistics nightmare.

JOHNSON: Major logistics nightmare of which large amounts backed up; railroad trains, that stopped running. You had everything again to the point where you wound up with the Government of Chad insisting that the trucks that brought the grain in from Douala and Cameroon and coming up through Nigeria after landing in Lagos and coming across country, had to unload at the Chad border and a Chad trucking company had to be used, which just so happened to be owned by his brother-in-law. They didn't have the trucks, so you wound up with getting everything funneled into this one bottle neck and that there weren't enough trucks to move the food. Again, we wound up caring more about getting food to the starving people, etc. than the government of Chad did, so that the leverage in terms of negotiations about who does what was very much on their side. But, Hunter essentially was running a major logistical support operation.

Q: Were you involved with that?

JOHNSON: No. My involvement at approximately the same time... Either the head of USAID or the State Department or somebody was convinced that Fermino Spencer couldn't handle it and that Fermino should have help. So, the first help they provided was Ed Hogan who was supposed to be looking at the longer term moving from this emergency program to short range relief and rehab program. Then they decided that Hogan couldn't handle it, so they got Ed Faye. Ed Faye was supposed to be looking at the long range plan. Then they decided that that group needed some more help, so they added Prince Lyman. Once again, it became an amalgamated mission.

Q: What was it that they handled? What was the issue?

JOHNSON: The issue was to do the thinking and the planning and the organization for everything beyond emergencies.

Q: What year are we talking about?

JOHNSON: '72. It all kind of happened in '72, '73.

Q: That was at the same time the drought was an emergency or what ever you call it.JOHNSON: You had Hunter running the emergency, you know, humanitarian. Separate apart from the emergency humanitarian, although Hunter was supposed to be reporting to Fermino. But, the USAID office was set up to do short term, medium term, long term planning working overall on how you could, drought proof the area; it is the wrong word, because you can't drought proof an area. But, how could you make the area better equipped to handle short term emergencies like Hunter was handling. What could you do as a short term program that would provide a bridge to begin moving people into development activities, rather than just being the recipient of emergency activities.

Q: It's interesting that this requirement was identified almost right at the outset of the emergency. That's interesting.

JOHNSON: No. I wasn't there at the very beginning, but I was there within the first year. I know my part was to work as Assistant Director for Program; they said I was to work on the short term, medium term, long term. It wound up with Ed Hogan, Ed Faye, Prince Lyman, and me, that was pretty much the planning group.

Q: Who did you report to?

JOHNSON: I reported to Owen Cylke

Q: I mean the whole group?

JOHNSON: Oh, the whole group, I was in charge of it. My rank or title or anything else I wasn't in charge. They were all more senior than I and they headed other kinds of things. But, I was the only one that was full time on that particular problem. At one point Don Brown tried to formally establish it, and I think there may actually be a cable somewhere in the archives of USAID.

Q: Don Brown was then the Deputy Assistant Administrator?

JOHNSON: Don was Deputy AA for the Africa Bureau. He was doing his best to try and keep peace between Fermino and Hogan and Ed Faye, all of whom were very strong personalities.

Q: Very, right. So what did you do? What did you come up with in working with this group and trying to deal with the short, medium, long term?

JOHNSON: A lot of hand holding of letting everybody talk about what they would do if they ran the universe and getting different sorts of perspectives from each of the different people and then trying to figure out what could be put together and who would do what.

Q: Did you have any contractors involved in doing studies for this?

JOHNSON: We did as it grew. As it was first set up, well again, I can't swear that this was all at the same time, but it felt like it was all at the same time. I don't remember the luxury of being able to finish this and then move to that and then to that. But, what we did was we, our Congressional Liaison was up on the Hill working with people and was making the arguments and that both Hunter and I and the people in disaster relief were feeling that disaster relief didn't work. That the environmental disaster that was cutting across boundaries and was long term in nature; it wasn't something that started and stopped within 90s days and that you needed legislative authority. if we were going to handle it. So, we got a special provision into the Legislation that was for Sahel relief and rehabilitation. Now there's X million dollars available without regard to other provision of the Act; you can do whatever you think needs to be done out there. And, I give Don Brown, DAA then a hell of a lot of credit for negotiating that through the Hill. He had, I think more creditability, because he had come from Zaire and so he knew the Francophone area, even if he hadn't actually been in the Sahel itself.

The original provision was for so much for relief and rehab that essentially went for..., some of it went to back up Hunter's emergency operation, but some of it went into what we call relief and rehab projects where we had three different, no. For that particular effort, we had Ed Hogan who led a team that went to Chad, Niger, Upper Volta, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal, basically working with U.N. projects and identifying things that the U.S. could pick up, but another donor had already designed or had nearly ready to go, or had planned to go for the next year, but could be accelerated up to this year. They came back with an R and R package of projects for the six Sahelian countries that could be done in a reasonably quick fashion and have some impact upon expanding the capacity of the area. It was a pretty broad criteria. You know, expanding the capacity of the area could be almost anything. Ed Hogan was doing that, then Owen Cylke was working on what kind of staff would you need overseas in these countries if you funded these programs that along with identifying what we think we'll fund.

Since we got this much money from Congress that we could move into the area as an emergency program, we wanted to move it fast; and the only way to move it fast was if you have people in the field: what kind of an organization; what kind of an legal organization should you set up in the field; and how would you staff it; and what authorities would you give them. The options were expanding from the existing posts in Senegal, Niger, Cameroon; expanding the REDSO operation out of Abidjan; putting people in country in each of the six countries and having them report to the regional headquarters. So, you'd have somebody in Mali and Mauritania, but they'd report to the regional office in Senegal who'd report to Washington. Or, have basically that you would have independent missions, one in Senegal; an equal one in Mali; an equal one in Mauritania. They'd all report separate apart from anybody else; the system of saying, okay, you're not going to get a full fledged mission set up overnight. So, what we'll do initially is, we'll put one portion out there. They'll be a relief and rehab officer and they will work strictly under that mandate, and they will report to Washington. Well, many of the Mission Directors in Abidjan and Senegal did not liked that. They really objected in different degrees it took to negotiate their dream getting along with the program to the point where Dr. Adams, who was in the Assistant Administrator for the Africa Bureau wound up going on a trip to the Sahel to, one, report back on the efficiency of the emergency program; was it reaching the people? Second, it was to knock some heads that we were expanding; we were putting them in different posts. I got to go along with Dr. Adams as his escort officer, which was really fun, because at that point, Dr. Adams was having cancer of the throat and had been having all kinds of chemotherapy and he wasn't supposed to be talking. So, I was supposed to do all of his talking for him on this trip. So, I got briefings from Don Brown and all of the other senior people: above the level of what I normally would have been allowed to participate in.

Q: So you went on this trip and when was that?

JOHNSON: It would have been sometime in '72, '73. I know we went first to Chad, and they had all these refugee camps which essentially were set up in this blazing sun, blazing desert heat. You had one little twig supporting some canvas. It may be four inches off the ground and people huddled under the canvas trying to get some shade. We went to refugee camps and the doctors that were with the refugee camps were just so busy; as he went down the line he would point at and say, "That child will be dead by night; that child will be dead by night; that woman may last two days; that child will be dead by night." As a first time, it sounds weird, but it's the first time I ever realized that there were things that you couldn't control. That if we had a C-130 that could land, you know, there's no airport that could take a C-130, but if we had an airport that could take a C-130, and if we flew all of these people directly to John Hopkins Medical School, you couldn't save them. That kind of an impact was just incredible. This is after I had been working with USAID five or six years and theoretically knew that the third world is not the same as the first world. This story just had an enormous impact on me and my recognition of the limits of what you can do and what you can't do. Then we went from there to Niger and met the Ambassador in Niger.

Q: What was the upshot of that trip?

JOHNSON: The upshot of the trip was that we set up individual missions. Separate and independent missions were set up in Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Upper Volta, Niger. We picked USAID Affairs Officers. We recruited them and talked to them about the plan to move them into USAID reps as soon as possible. And, it would depend on how soon we could get approval from State in terms of number of Americans in the country; how soon we could recruit, etc. etc. etc. But, from the first, we recruited with the idea that they were going to be Mission Directors; we got an extraordinary group of people, I think, because of that.

Q: What kind of a study did you have behind the process of moving out of the emergency into rehabilitation and longer term development? Was there a clear strategy in mind of what you were supposed to do or how to go about it?

JOHNSON: Initially, we started out with the emergency: and short term R and R, life support.

Q: What's that?

JOHNSON: Life support as opposed to saving lives. You could put in those institutional kinds of assistance that were needed such as a port manager who could clear a port. Somebody who would be eligible under the emergency. A port manager or a technical assistance project to improve port management across the board would be something that we would put under the short term relief and rehab. Again, basically we worked a lot with the U.N. on picking up U.N. projects that would help expand the capacity to endure the drought.

Q: Like what?

JOHNSON: In emergency phase there were two problems. You had across the Sahel cattle men between 45 and 50 trying to save their herds by moving their cattle south; you had those cattle herd penetrations going into areas that had been agricultural areas for 15 to 20 years. So, part of what we did was try and provide excess capacity, if you will, so that the livestock group could move south without at the same time destroying and upsetting settled agriculture.Q: What kind of capacity are you talking about?

JOHNSON: Primarily that involved putting up corrals and fencing in some of the agricultural areas; putting in watering holes; trying to get the Israeli government involved by sending someone to be the mediator, if you will, of recognizing that all these herds were headed south. You know, this problem is coming and neither USAID nor the French or anybody else can have people out in all 500 villages. But, this is something where we would fund a seminar, for example, for what would pass as an Extension Service in Mali and have people say, "Look, this is what's happening. You got nomadic herdsmen coming into settled areas, the kinds of frictions that we predicted that are going to happen and here's some of the things we could do. Anthropologists out of Abidjan played a big role in pulling together consultants who could lead those seminars in identifying or working with various hosts governments in convincing them that that kind of assistance was needed. This is across the board, I think, REDSO/Abidjan really provided, if you will, the excess capacity to help get us over the fact that we didn't have anybody in most of these countries, as well as having the particular skills like anthropologists.

Q: Was the MIT study undertaken, at this time?

JOHNSON: That was separate. I'm working my way through that. This is working through the relief and the rehab, then we had the medium term. The medium term program was basically what would be a normal program.

Q: A bilateral assistance plan.

Q: Why was MIT selected?

JOHNSON: I don't know. Princeton thought they had to do this proposal. I don't even know if they did it on a competitive basis or if it was a sole source selection. I think MIT had the expertise in doing modeling and that was the latest edge in the development game. It was sort of an acknowledgment of the fact that they didn't have the agricultural knowledge, you know, they brought in the University of Arizona. They just dug a hole that first meeting that it took them a good three to six months to dig out of. It was supposed to be a year long contract where they had the results and present them to Congress a year later.

Q: What happened to the contract?

JOHNSON: The basic contract, the basic report that they made was not accepted by anybody. It was not accepted by the African governments; it was not accepted by Congress. Princeton was a strong advocate, but I don't think he ever had the troops in back of him, you know, on accepting it. Basically, what the MIT modeling process came out with, was they did a demographic projection of so many people and the carrying capacity of land for the livestock and concluded that the six Sahelian States can't make it. The only way you can put it into a longer term development perspective is setting up an arrangement where the inland country states provide the manpower for the developed coastal states, so that Niger's future depended upon sending all of its men down to Nigeria to work in Nigeria. And, Mali and Mauritania the same thing, basically. And, basically none of the African countries would accept that.

Q: What was your view of that conclusion?

JOHNSON: I was so buried in organizational stuff I don't know that I really thought that much about it. I guess my main feeling was, it was a non-starter, because you didn't have the Africans supporting it. And, that was partially due to the fact that MIT had just gotten off onto the wrong foot with every senior minister that they then had to work with. Also, a feeling that, if in fact all of the development plans and programs and ideas that the various Sahelian countries had in mind, (most of which involved a large steel mills, irrigated agricultural development, which involved putting up dams and harnessing rivers and displacing thousands and thousands of people who currently made a living in the areas that would be flooded. But, all of that failed, none of it came to pass.) Then, what MIT was suggesting would happen anyway. People will migrate because that is where the jobs are. It was one of the risk aversion factors, that that had been a part of the risk sharing for ages, i.e., when the weather got bad up north, then the men and the cattle headed south.

Q: And in a way, the MIT conclusion, poorly put and all that was not far off in terms of the interaction of the coast and the inner countries?

JOHNSON: It is one theoretical outcome. It meant that when they did the population and the demographic and the livestock numbers, when they did all the projections that they made that was the only outcome that would work. I think that's what was unacceptable to the African governments, because they had a lot of other things in mind about irrigated agriculture and building projects providing jobs that we had in our own country.Q: But, even if it was right, it was politically.

JOHNSON: Even if it was right, it was presented in such a way that it alienated the people that it was supposed to be providing a long term answer to. It also alienated the chief African staffers on the Hill who had been very much in support of expanded funds for Africa. We wound up doing what became the Sahel Development Program, which was a ten year budget, a ten year life of effort, if you will, with funds being appropriated each of those ten years, made available for a long term development in Sahel. We set up essentially criteria that had to be met; it had to be long term, multi-country and I forget the rest. Anything that was a buzz word we would throw into the program and basically wound up with a protected funding source that was above and beyond what the Africa Bureau got.

Q: What was the heart of this strategy at that time? This was in lieu of the MIT approach, but what was the strategy?

JOHNSON: The best I recall, it didn't have a strategic core. What it had was a process, you know; you had a procedure that you were following.

Q: How did you determine what you would do or not do?

JOHNSON: The procedure would give you your answers as you learned. Your procedure would be that you world work with the other donors, so this wouldn't be just a U.S. effort. It would be something that you would bring everybody along with the Club du Sahel [the donors coordinating organization in Paris, ed] and the CILSS, which was the French acronym for an inter-governmental Sahelian group based in Upper Volta. But all of these different groups and countries were proposing what they wanted to do. Some like Senegal wanted to put in a dam and move towards irrigated agriculture. At least for 30 years they had had an organization called the OMVS, which was dedicated to doing studies and finding funding for the dam. It was to affect Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. And their long-range development plan was based on funding the OMVS projects. Dr. Adams used to talk about the OMVS office, a whole office building that they had built or some donor had built, which was filled with studies. Partially, it was because a lot of this stuff had been done by the French or in French and I guess we just never had it and had access to it; and part of it was our standards, our conditions were different. So it was a process that we told Congress that we didn't know if OMVS represented the answer. We knew that there were these problems that , if you had put in the dam you were going to have displaced lots of people, you were going to have flooding, you were going to have blah, blah, blah; and that these were all the problems that had to be solved before you went that direction. But we wanted it to work this time; we would do it right. We would work with the other donors and we would plan it out over time, etc. etc, etc. The idea was that this would be multi-donor coordination, consultation, inter-governmental cooperation; among the African governments, the CILSS would be the coordinating body and the Club du Sahel would be the coordinating body among the donors.

Q: What came out of the studies that went to the development groups? Wouldn't that come up with desirable projects?

JOHNSON: Not really. The process basically was to cover the normal three to five year development plan of what you do in those countries. Although, we assembled an incredible quality and quantity of people to go out and do the plans, it in essence became an exercise in hurry up, we've got to do this. So, that you really didn't have project level detail, nor did you have the year, the 18 months of talking that the Missions would normally engage in before they got together their programs. They'd be talking with the government and they'd be wondering who in the government is effective, who's not effective, what works, what doesn't work, what have we done in the past, do we want to build on and expand. So, we didn't have all of the normal country level discussions, although you had country level negotiations. You know, where we flew into town and we had one USAID guy who was the R and R Officer who had probably been there less than six months and we had the Embassy, who was delighted to see us, but didn't want any more people. We could fly in and leave the money and fly out. I think, at that point like for the R and R we had the special legislation we said, notwithstanding any other provision.

For the regular program that's three to five years before we would see it started. You had to be within the basic functional categories of food and nutrition, education, health, and population. One of our real problems was that in the R and R phase, because you wanted to move quickly, both in starting things and in completing things we wound up in every sector of activity in these countries. Part of the process for the three to five year plan was to pull everybody back together and say let's try and do two or three things that really will matter, that will make a difference. And, that you can reasonably project that you can make a change in three to five years. Towing icebergs down from the Antarctic for irrigation water is not something we wanted to talk about. We wanted to talk about three to five years, and it had to be essentially within the functional categories. So, the results that we came back with were not earthshaking or eye-opening. It was essentially stuff that had typically been in the main stream of USAID activities. The one thing that I recall that we did do, was Princeton Lyman made a really strong effort, argument in favor of doing integrated rural development (IRD)projects. At that point, USAID did not have a single IRD initiative and that this was something that we really should try, we could experiment with it, see how well, etc. etc. etc. So, we wound up with an IRD project in all six Sahelian countries. We wound up with water projects in, I think, every country.

Q: Are you talking about irrigation?

JOHNSON: Irrigation, as well as watering holes for livestock. I can't remember anything that sort of made one program more outstanding than other programs.

Q: Well, that's fine. Were there any useful results of the rehabilitation initiative or were you moving quickly to find some support for the longer term?

JOHNSON: Each of the R and R Officers had things that they felt worked and had made a difference. I don't know that we ever did an overall evaluation of that program.

Q: Of course, as you moved into the longer term, you had a matrix of what the program structure was, but it also led in, didn't it, to a major regional approach to projects, rather than country, or not?

JOHNSON: It was hybrid. It was a mixed type of approach. You had built-in from the very beginning a regional type of framework, in that, you had this regional approach, if you will, for the Central West Africa region with its USAID posts in each of the three areas. You had a built-in predisposition to work with regional organizations, dating back to the Korry report and a lot of those regional organizations we wound up starting in order to have somebody to work with. Some of those regional organizations worked very well. Others basically could be criticized as hiring trained people from the individual countries.

Q: Do you remember one that worked well?

JOHNSON: No, I really don't. The Club du Sahel, which was a donor creation, I think worked well. It was far more, partially because of its birth history, but also because of the people who staffed it in the early days. It was a very blunt organization, that it was blunt with host governments, as to what was working and what wouldn't work, and what should be tried that shouldn't be tried. It developed a lot of creditability with the Hill. Ann, I can't think of her name, a French woman was the first.

Q: Ann DeLattre?

JOHNSON: Yes, that was her. She developed a lot of creditability with the Hill and we use to make sure that she'd be in town before we'd go to the Hill [with budget requests ed] so that she could go around and talk to the Hill staff. She was pretty blunt, but she wasn't just a cheerleader, The Club du Sahel was great and it's working. She brought a time prospective to it; this is what you've achieved in two years and you've got 25 to go; that type of feeling. I think the CILSS with the coordination on the African side probably helped in the early days, but essentially broke down. I mean, we never had really meaningful negotiations where they had to do anything. They ended up acting as a fund raiser. They had a couple of projects that they sponsored on things that were across territorial lines, like the weather prediction project, and the early days of the famine early warning system, some telecommunication projects, but I don't think they were ever really seriously negotiating. If you wanted to negotiate policy, that wasn't the group to negotiate with, you ended up in bilateral negotiations. And, if you had major projects like the OMVS [dam and irrigation program ed], you did it through Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali and the OMVS organization.

Q: Was the dialogue in the Club du Sahel between the African representatives and the donors? I guess the Africans participated in the meetings, didn't they?

JOHNSON: The Club du Sahel met with the African countries, but my impression was always that they, then, met with the donor countries bilaterally. They didn't convene, come and let us all reason together. The Club du Sahel and the CILSS were much more carrying the messages back and forth between the two groups and basically saying to the African governments, "Look, this is what the donors need. If they don't provide you any assistance you go to do X, Y or Z or else they can't, you know. And, because the CILSS didn't have any money themselves, you could tell them the truth, you know, because they didn't have any money anyway. So, they couldn't fund your project or not fund your project. I think they turned out to be a very useful intermediator. CILSS, like I said, wound up raising funds for themselves and for projects that presumably benefited the whole region. But, mostly negotiations became bilateral negotiations.

You had a start at a fully integrated regional plan that MIT did. It took the coastal countries, then the interior countries and looked at the whole thing. But, the political reality was such there was actually nothing to keep that alive. The Sahelian countries had some purpose in keeping CILSS alive, in the sense that they saw it as another fund raiser. But, basically the six countries were out for their own funds, you know and to attract the donors and come up with the things that the donors felt interested in doing. There was no reason for the coastal countries who were completely immersed in their own problems to worry about what in the hell was happening in the Sahel.

Q: What was the glue that held donors (the Club du Sahel) and the CILSS together for this rather large approach: the Sahel Development Program?

JOHNSON: The emergency. The emergency food relief disaster effort. That's what held it together, because it was repeated not only in the Sahel with the drought in '72, but you had one in '74, and then you had one in '76. You had repetitive emergencies, because they were environmental emergencies. It wasn't something that you could start or stop or prevent from happening. I think in many ways that the fact that the donors saw the six Sahelian countries as a unit... I mean, we'd call meetings like we call, you know, everybody would be in town for a meeting with the IMF and World Bank so we'd have a side meeting with the six Sahelian guys. Whereas, we would not necessarily say Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Ghana, all three of you guys (from the Sahelian countries) come in and meet together, because you're a region. I think Africa went from an initial sort of Pan Africanism, we could all be cooperative and etc. to really strongly felt territorial borders. "I'm having a hard enough time dealing with what's inside my borders, I'm not going to worry about the rest of you."

Q: More introverted in their perspective?

JOHNSON: Yes. I think they became more and more introverted and I think now they are coming out of it, but they're coming out of it in a military way; the initial approach is military; whereas it would have been better, I think, if there had been some other grounds on which they'd met. But, in affect like all of the African countries sending in support in Zaire. The African countries that tried to arrange a peace movement in Liberia; the initial intervention is at a military level.

Q: Okay, what was the impact, the results of the Sahel Development Program and how you observed them, both at the time and then perhaps some time after them. What is your feeling about that?

JOHNSON: I think at the time there was such a pressure to move into a totally different type of development relationship with both bilateral management relationships, as well as with an increased American foreign policy move into areas which had been clearly Francophone; as well as an enormous amount of money that became available, because people became concerned about the humanitarian drought problems of wanting to move in and fix these countries.

Q: What do you mean enormous? What kind of range are we talking about?

JOHNSON: I would really want to go back and check the numbers, but in my memory you were talking about a pre-drought program of maybe 15 million dollars a year spread among six Francophone countries, plus various regional projects or regional organizations. You had three regional offices located among the six countries. You had very small offices, as our contact was limited at the interactive professional level. Clearly it was an area in which we did not have a background knowledge of basic facts. You had two problems. One is the amount of money that people wanted to move quickly and that Congress was willing to make money available. We felt that we had to verify, show that we could use it in order to lay the case for an increasing development relationship with the countries. You had an overwhelming need for developmental assistance in these countries whose economies had not grown since the Francophone period. They faced many natural resource base problems of being interior states with long transportation routes to the coast for importing and exporting, and a minimum amount of infrastructure development within the countries, both physical infrastructure and human infrastructure. It was just difficult figuring out in the middle of all this, you know, what impacts you were having.

Q: Partly we were talking about 15 million dollars, but then it grew quite substantially didn't it, after that?

JOHNSON: It's over a hundred and fifty million, close to 200, I think at the tops, including the humanitarian aid, as well as the development aid.

Q: For a year?

JOHNSON: Yeah. Per year, and it grew. The first year we had a regular development base of around 15 million dollars; the second year you had 50 million dollars of humanitarian assistance; the third year you had a hundred and fifty million dollars with some of it humanitarian assistance, some development assistance. It sort of graded out, I think around a hundred and fifty a year for the five years that I worked in the area.

Q: And, in addition, you had a donor club, which provided another substantial amount which probably brought it up close to a billion dollars, do you think?

JOHNSON: Easily. At the time the African Bureau in total was probably getting around two hundred million in development assistance and maybe another hundred million in foreign food aid.

Q: For these countries?

JOHNSON: No, for all of Africa. The food aid was split between some humanitarian and some PL 480 Title II, which was going in through PVO, Private Volunteer Organizations. And, even when we moved from the resource base up to the hundred, hundred and fifty million level, we were still the minor donor in the region. The French remained overwhelmingly the major donor; the World Bank came in as a major donor. Then, you had some increases from EEC under the EEC Program, which primarily went for physical capital types of programs and then you had an increase in the U.N. Programs, which were technical assistance from all over the place. I don't remember who all was in the Club du Sahel, but I think there were around ten donors. The U.S. would have been considered a middling donor. What we did when we first went in, we refused to accept the fact that there was a limited capacity to absorb aid. We worked on the assumption that it was a donor problem and that the donors could figure out ways to obligate and spend and hopefully reap the benefits from it, and that the capacity problem was really us. It was our way of doing business; the kinds of things we insisted that they have to show or do.

Q: You mean our demands on them created a capacity problem?

JOHNSON: Bigger demands upon the six Sahelian nations.

Q: Such as what?

JOHNSON: You had the classic stories of all the donors providing computers, but the computers were all different, so they had ten major donors and they had probably 20 different computer systems and that would turn out with three computer systems in one office. So, the computers would get put over in the corner and gather dust.

Q: Lack of standardization in the country.

JOHNSON: Yes. Was that the donor's fault or was that the host country's fault. You flip a coin. I considered it more of the donor's problem, in that we had problems in trying to merge a desire to show that U.S. assistance helped promote U.S. exports by buying America. And, all of the other donors had the same kinds of constraints. You wound up with projects like in Mauritania where we, and the UNDP, and I've forgotten the third donor, built a road. Essentially, each donor would build one-third of the road and the U.S. wound up building a third in the middle, which didn't connect to anything at either end, because neither of the other two donors came through with their promises assistance It was an attempt by the donors to do multi-donor projects, which was an attempt to overcome the proliferation problem with everybody doing something differently. So, everybody would go in together, but then funding sequences and money cycles and technical assistance planning in order to get the capital assistance were all different. So, you wound up with some real anomalies that became added to the USAID's lore. When I came out of the Sahel program after working three years in Washington and two in the field, I was very negative that what the donors were doing would make an impact. I felt that we, in many ways, had over-promised what we could do to Congress in terms of the time frame.

Q: What did we say the time frame was? Do you remember?

JOHNSON: Well, the Sahel Program started with the emergency and then moved into special funds available for R and R, and then moved into something called the Sahel Development Program, which at the time that it was developed that was like later in the sequence. It was probably, I think around '75, '76 maybe. But, we talked in terms of a ten-year time frame at that point. The total program was supposed to be a ten-year multi-donor effort in which in the jargon of today, you'd focus on the results. And, it was recognized that the results wouldn't happen in year one or two, but that it was a long-range ten year program in which it would be heavily loaded towards the end of the time period. What happened when we got to the end of the time period, also coincided with a major push by the African Bureau to get a change in the overall legislation and we declared the Sahel a success and came home-that type of thing. And, then we merged the Sahel Development Program into the Africa Development Program. You never really had a completion or a closure on the Sahel. I think people went back and they looked at individual projects; they certainly went back and looked at the emergency in terms of how the emergency system had worked and what lessons could be learned from it. I think there were attempts to go back and look at the whole period, but that those attempts to look at a whole period wound up without having the data. No one really had done the baseline data to begin with, so you couldn't really show mega changes overall and you wound up with a lot of vague information.

Q: You talked about the ten year period. Was that too long, too short?

JOHNSON: Too short. Too short for the results that we promised. I think a much more modest program probably still would have taken ten years. For what we attempted to do in terms of overall infrastructure development throughout the development, major policy changes by the governments We recognized, but we didn't put enough emphasis on how tightly woven the Francophone influence, the Francophone money system, and the existing relationship with Europe were built into the culture. I think we had a lot of difficulty in working in that culture. The French colonial experience and the English colonial experience were compared in terms of what each colonial system left behind. I think the balance of opinion was that the British left behind more trained people and more functioning governmental systems. But, the French left behind a cultural influence that was much deeper and much stronger than we ever gave credit to.

Q: How would it be manifest?

JOHNSON: I think the French were more realistic than we were in terms of expectations. We worked very hard with the donor community to agree to a partnership arrangement. You do this, French do this, we do this, the donors and the host governments will sort of all work together. The French would sign off on it, but I don't think in their hearts they really believed that any of it would happen.

Q: Why were they committed to the program? Why did they get involved?

JOHNSON: Paternalism, colonial paternalism.

Q: Why would they work with the other donors?

JOHNSON: More, I think I have an overall feeling, well two feelings. One was a global view that adults should work together. It was a feeling of responsibility that we, everything in logic says that it would be better if donors work together and we didn't pull in different directions. Secondly, I think they saw it as an excellent opportunity to get other donors to come in and pick up part of the aid load, and that they in affect either decrease their assistance or had proportionally lower increases. Although, the ways of calculating what's assistance and what's not assistance were so different you never could actually pin them down. The Japanese were absolutely incredible. They would come to the meeting and they would announce 20 million dollars worth of assistance. Two years later you would have a follow-up meeting. None of the Japanese assistance had started to flow, so they had the benefit of announcing once again that they would provide 20 million dollars of assistance. They got more PR out of doing less than any donor I ever saw.

Q: What are the criticisms or comments about the Sahel Development Program? It was sponsored by USAID and so on. Was there a lack of emphasis on building up institutional capacity; they were more concerned with doing things, rather than with building up the kind of institutional mechanisms that would enable them to do them. What was your feeling about that issue? Did you have a sense that the institutional issues were important at the time or should be addressed that had not been, or was that not a particular concern or was it a concern?

JOHNSON: I think that was at the time when the major concern was taking place in a atmosphere both congressionally and with the public institutions that we worked with, that USAID worried too much about institutions, that you could spend years and years and years developing an institution and never have an impact on the problem. Whereas, the PVO community had shown you could go in and immediately change the day-to-day quality of life for people without waiting for the institutions to catch up. I think a large part of that was wishful thinking and that what the PVO community did was really successful only as part of a package where USAID went in and got the government to change some of its policies and where you had institutions that were headed up by essentially non-corrupt competent personnel.

In too many cases, I think our flirtation, if you will, with integrated rural development projects, represented an attempt to go in and bypass governments. We set up isolated areas that had their own sources of funding; they had their own institutional personnel; they had their own policy frameworks. And they frequently worked. You could actually see an improvement for the better inside the integrated rural area. Donors left, it collapsed. It no longer had protected funding; it no longer had the guarantee of getting the best of the best of the institutional talent; and you didn't have the push behind it of having a donor's technical personnel there to try and move it and make it happen.

Q: The USAID people weren't aware of or sensitive to this institutional issue for making these things lasting and sustainable?

JOHNSON: There were so many personalities involved. I don't think you could say that in that community of people working on the problem; there were people that were warning about the issues that people worried about. Some people worried about it more than others. Princeton Lyman worried about the institutional support that might be there. Mike Horowitz, who was an anthropologist out of REDSO and was helping to design a lot of the programs, worried much more about direct impact on people and working with local people. You had a broad area, a lack of knowledge and contacts in that area, and a lot of money available to try different experimental approaches. So, I think at the time, you could go back and find almost any issue that you wanted to raise in retrospect, you could find somebody who had written a paper about that issue. In terms of figuring out the priorities of which issues you worry about most and in terms of the sequencing of which actions you undertook first or take parallel action on several fronts. And, that was experimental.

Last week you asked me whether or not I thought there had been a change or what the change had been. I more or less said, I never went back and looked. And, that's really not true. I guess I did think about it and it became relevant to other positions that I held later, because, if you look back at it, the one part of it that was probably the most troubled, turbulent, you know, were the emergency programs. The logistical effort to first of all figure out how much aid was needed; where were the food needed; how to get it there; and that if you look at the scope of the emergency program, when Hunter was first running it back in '71, '72, I think he said once that it was like less than ten percent of what they were able to move five or six years later. That is just a major turn around if you think about the actual day-to-day physical problem of getting the food to Africa; to the right port; out of the port and on a railroad; off the railroad onto a truck; just the variety of things that were tried. The first year we were pushing things in. We had a truck convoy. We shipped food to Algiers and put it on a truck and trucked it across the Sahara Desert in order to get to some of the northern sections of the six Sahelian countries.

There's one set of cables that I wished I had saved. We insisted that these two poor engineers from the Regional Office of Abidjan go check out what we'd heard from another donor was a possible truck route. This was over Thanksgiving. So, they took off up into the Northern regions of Nigeria and Niger, trying to find the road first of all. What they did was every night in camp they'd write a cable and then the cables came in later, of course when I got back home. But, they wrote a cable about the fact that they were trying to track the road by following camel droppings and it was difficult to tell which was sand and which was road. It ended with their celebration of opening cans of Spam on Thanksgiving Day. I think the level of effort that people put out willingly, incredibly tough circumstances, made a difference. But, it made a difference permanently and that there were short-term bottle necks that donors buying 18 trucks and shipping the Mac trucks out there, and setting up a maintenance unit so that the mechanics could be trained. It lasted five, six, seven years. And, from that level of short-term input you moved into other more developmental things and the institutional constraints that you're talking about, which I think is probably the most long range of anything that we tried. You may be able to envision a framework for the last 20 years, basically still being short term. I don't think you can tell how much difference it made to have the donors working together and making a major effort.

Q: You can tell?

JOHNSON: I don't think so. I don't think you can tell now. I think there were some solid achievements. I think we did increase the number of trained administrators; we put in the education that people would need as they returned to their countries. You have your remarkably high rates of participants returning to their countries. But major capital projects were carried out by people with little information on what was possible from the beginning for the agricultural sector.[revised ed]

Q: Why?

JOHNSON: The technical people that we sent out initially did not have a good background. Did not have the foundation of knowing what the countries normal system was. I mean, we were going in without the basic information Essentially, by the time we got the historical data, what the technical people really said was that, the populations because of an unusually high rainfall period from 1940s, 1950s, then in 1960s, had pushed farming much farther north than they should have pushed it. It wasn't that the desert was advancing so much, which was the first conclusion that the desert was advancing, you know, six inches a year or something. People had pushed into the desert, because of the high rainfall and had managed to eek out a living. But, in normal rainfall years it was, if anything, livestock territory. It wasn't farming territory. Also there was a lack of any type of an alternative job market for any of the population that had pushed north.

So, who's the villain; population growth had just expanded far beyond the ability of the land to support people and no alternative employment in exports or semi-manufacturing or light manufacturing had taken its place. Partially, that was because again of the extreme transportation costs, if they were talking about exporting to the international market; there was also the problem: if you wanted to export from Niger to Nigeria, they were both producing the same things. Nigeria really didn't need to go to Niger to buy their products, they could buy them locally, with the major exception of livestock. So, your livestock was really your primary commercial vehicle and yet you had a nomadic pastoral culture which didn't really raise livestock to sell. There had to be a major shift in their thinking to go in that direction. You had historic conflicts between the nomadic pastoral people and the agricultural people, which became complicated essentially by the northern region nomadic people tending to be either animistic, pagans, or Muslim. And, your population centers and farther south, were agricultural settlements and tended to be Christian. You wound up with some very deeply imbedded problems that made it difficult for the two groups to work together. Probably Chad is the best example where your southern political leadership came from a black cotton growing agricultural area and where your drought hit in the northern nomadic, more Arabic-type population area.

Q: What about the policy questions? Were people concerned about economic policies, price policies and things of that sort at that time?

JOHNSON: I would make a distinction. I think they were concerned about international policies; things that restricted the flow of goods for export or for import and were concerned about the foreign exchange types of constraints that the countries faced, which in many ways were tied into the Francophone countries; they had stayed in the CFA Franc zone where they had no independent monetary policy. The monetary policy solely depended upon what the French Government did, and yet the foreign exchange, the fact that the currency was fully convertible to a hard currency, gave them a lot more freedom on the import side and, I think, a lot of the policy effort was an attempt to work with the government, first to figure out just exactly what that meant in terms of being in the CFA zone or in not being in the CFA zone. Secondly, looking at the policies that surrounded very small economies and import-export types of regulations - pricing for crops and/or for internal sales policies as to what you had to pay.

This is an example from across the continent, but in Kenya the basic impact of donors providing foreign assistance in the form of food aid, resulted in the creation of food boards, which were primarily concerned with distribution and secondarily with employment that there were jobs. The price issue became a far lower priority, because it wasn't seen as a pricing mechanism or a marketing effort, it was a distribution effort. And, the idea was to pay the farmer low prices and sell for low prices and the government would pick up the discrepancy for internal transportation and distribution through government taxes on something. And, they ran out of things to tax.

Q: Are you familiar with Eliot Berg's work on prices in the Sahelian countries? Do you remember that or was that was after you left?

JOHNSON: No, I'm not familiar with that.

Q: That was after your time then.

JOHNSON: Again, you have to remember, my exposure to the Sahel was '71 through '76, and much of the more sophisticated policy effort, I think came after '76.

Q: Right. Well, any other points you want to make on the Sahel program?

JOHNSON: I was thinking, three times in my professional career with USAID, I got involved in moving large amounts of money in an area with a previous low threshold. First, with the Sahel during the early days of building it; secondly, it was in East Africa where we had major efforts in Sudan, Somalia, Uganda; third, was in the Newly Independent States of the Russian federation and the Eastern European independent countries. In all three cases, I think, the attempt, the pressure, in terms of public pressure of people being concerned about the situation, was that you could make money available and you could fix the problem through money. And, everybody, we, Congress, other donors, academics, all solved the problems for those three areas in terms of making large amounts of money available and moving quickly. I think in all three cases we operated under illusion that you could make a change real fast.

In '74, '76 I was in Cameroon and I worked on a project where at that time you submitted three documents. The first was a PID, a Project Identification Document; then a PRP, Project Review Proposal; and then a final PP, Project Paper. We submitted a PID. The Cameroonians asked the U.S. for help in a livestock health project. We submitted a PID to Washington for a livestock project, but it would be more than animal health. It would be a range management project. It was turned down by Washington. They said, "Redo it." Instead, we went to the PRP which was also turned down. We did a PP which was turned down, and we did another PP which was turned down. It started as the government and Cameroonians wanted an animal health project. They wanted us to give them some vaccines and help them do all the vaccinations We progressively turned it from animal health to range management, to agriculture and range management, to its final product, a project named was, North Cameroon Integrated Rural Development Agriculture and Livestock. The reason why I'm saying all that is because, it made me realize that the Liberian project sort of evolved like the Cameroon project. I think one of our major mistakes in Africa was that we wound up caring more than the host country did. We wound up having more of ourselves invested in a project approach. In order to make it acceptable to us, we would make it much more complicated and complex in that Monrovia wanted a modern hospital in the capitol city. We turned it into an integrated country health program with primary health care. What we wound up approving and what we said they should do, you know, it was logical, it is sensible, it would be the best overall national health plan, but they wouldn't let them run it. It came around we wound up with that it didn't make sense to animal health, you should do livestock management, or you shouldn't just do range management, you should do agriculture and you should do rural development. It just became more and more complicated as we tried.

Q: Why did it evolve like that? That's an interesting example. What were the forces that kept rejecting it and then adding more complexity and more components? What was driving that?

JOHNSON: The easy answer is Washington as opposed to a field perspective. But, I think it was also....

Q: Why was Washington running it?

JOHNSON: Washington, because you had so many groups. You had in microcosm what amounted to lobby groups. People whose entire life had been spent on livestock. And, they knew if you were going to solve a livestock problem this was what their experience in the U.S. plus their international experience said that you should do about it. The agriculturalists were right, that you shouldn't just do a livestock project, you should do agriculture plus livestock and then if you're going to do that, you've got to have integrated rural development, and you know, it all makes sense. It is based upon a lot of lessons learned of why a single intervention project didn't work. Because, a single intervention simply doesn't have enough weight or it doesn't have a mass to act as an catalyst for all the other changes that need to take place. So, by experience, by training, by knowledge, both the field office and Washington kept making it more complex. It ended up with us being more involved than the country. Having more involvement in making the project a success.

Q: And they were involved in this evolution?

JOHNSON: They participated in it. They were members.. we had five different donors in a multi- donor project. That was the other reason. I'd forgot about that. The original team consisted of some people from Utah, Brigham University, who were the livestock specialists; a water specialist from Ethiopia who was a refugee of the United States but, he was a very good water engineer; two guys from France; and a guy from Belgium, all headed up to North Cameroon and worked on this project. So, some of the complexity of the project related to the fact that different international groups wanted to put a higher priority on one type of approach or another. Part of that was the U.S. portion of the team who happened to be very well grounded scientifically, did not know Africa; did not know French; they had no real feel for how to compromise. So, we had problems from the Americans on the team.

Q: What was your role on this? We're getting ahead of ourselves, but that's okay.

JOHNSON: When this took place, I was in Cameroon as Deputy Director to John Koehring who was Mission Director.

There's a separate saga: periodically, in my 30 years with the Agency, I had tried to convert to the Foreign Service on two or three different occasions, and there was always a different reason why I couldn't convert. In that particular '74 to '76, thanks to David Shear and John Koehring, I was in Cameroon for two years on TDY. John essentially had me working as the Deputy Director across the board without distinction in Cameroon, and David Shear gave me assignments on different desks. Whenever he would have a vacancy, you know, on paper I was the Mauritanian desk officer, the Mali desk officer, all variety of jobs I'd never had. Essentially, initially when we did the PID, I wasn't that involved. The agricultural specialists worked on that. Then, when we turned the PID down, John decided rather than redo it - another PID, he would just go to the PRP stage, he sent me up North to North Cameroon with a private team. Lynn Berry was the team leader.

Q: He was the agricultural officer?

JOHNSON: He was the agricultural officer and my main mandate from John was to somehow keep the peace between Lynn and the guys from the University-Brigham University of Utah and the two Frenchmen and the others. So, there was a lot of hubbub. A lot of controversy. I went in to Washington with the PRP to defend it and got thoroughly trashed. Sent back to post with instructions to redo it totally. Talked it over with John and John felt that if we were going to redo it we ought to move to the PP stage, so we moved to the PP stage. So, I went in to Washington with the PP and tried to get it approved. In the face of this total appreciation of the structure of doing a PID and PRP without an agreement, the PP was waste of time. We took what we felt were the valued criticisms and incorporated them in the next stage. That's the Washington project paper, a total disaster. No one would support it.

Q: What were its major issues?

JOHNSON: Major issues were the lack of a policy component, that it represented too much of just, (there's a term used in USAID, a derogatory term) a commodity drop where you really didn't think about what the commodities were going to be used for, you know, it was just a commodity drop. For Washington this project was essentially a technical assistance drop. You had some technical assistance going to this group over here and some to this group over here, and some to this group over here, but there was no overall coherent policy as to what all of these different groups were supposed to work towards or accomplish. The multi-donor concept of it, they felt would wind up with in essence, you know, building a bridge from this shore to that shore, but there would be nothing on the other shore to greet it. There was just too much chance that too many things would go wrong. Like I said, trying to respond to all of the different criticisms, the project had become so complicated in order to have a livestock component.

Q: What was your feeling about the project? You had a personal involvement.

JOHNSON: My opinion about the project is on my tombstone. They're going to put, "this was the project that she designed, 'the North Cameroon Integrated Rural and Agricultural and Livestock project.'"

Q: Weren't there pressures also at that time about the New Directions Policy, i.e. focusing on the poor majority? Was that a factor?

JOHNSON: Didn't really hit that much. But, my feeling was, I remember I called John Koehring up, I was in Washington and I called Koehring up and told him that I thought we just ought to kill the project. That there was no way that the project as written could respond to the criticisms as made, because the criticisms were right. There's a limit to what you can do by redrafting a piece of paper. My example use to be that, the Great Lakes are up here on a map. You can take the map and you can put the Great Lakes down in Arizona and they look nice, but it doesn't change things. The whole picture is still up there, you just rewrote the map. At this point, we were in the position of just rewriting the map and it was just totally out of control, and that we just ought to go ahead and let the project go for that year, step back, rethink what we wanted to do in North Cameroon; John wasn't prepared to do that. And, Howard Helman wasn't prepared to do that. Howard was an USAID officer in Paris at the time and he'd been doing liaison with the French and the Belgians trying to keep that portion of the multi-donor effort on track. So, Howie felt that there was a chance to save the project. What we wound up doing was, Howie and the two Frenchmen and the Belgians and the Ethiopian (Water Engineer, ed) and me, all went out to Utah. We met at Utah for about three weeks. The first step was they had the review of the project paper by the assembled Utah faculty. We had a thorough two day professional review of the paper and then we sat down to rewrite the paper with Howard doing non-stop interpretation of what the Frenchmen would say. Then he'd tell the guys from Utah what the Frenchmen said, then he'd switch back to English and tell them what they said and at the same time shaping the project.

Q: They were in this meeting too?

JOHNSON: Yeah. We had everybody in this meeting. Myself, and the two Frenchmen, and the guy from Belgium kept running out to the fire escape, because it was a no smoking campus. You were not allowed to smoke in any building. You were supposed to go downstairs and out in the middle of the street. Since there was a snow storm for most of the three weeks we were out there, the university allowed us to go out to the fire escape and smoke.

Q: Were there any Cameroonians there?

JOHNSON: Nope, there were no Cameroonians there. At this point, the Cameroonians were on an animal health project.

Q: Where did you come out after that?

JOHNSON: Howard did an extraordinary job of pulling together the English and the Anglo-francophone sections, as well as pulling together all of the different desperate pieces, you know, of something that seemed to make sense. So I rewrote the project paper, but Howard was the one that was doing it. I was draftsman more than anything else. Then we took it back out to Cameroon. Howard came down from Paris and we had a couple of people from REDSO, I think,-the USAID regional office in Abidjan- who came and had a meeting with the Cameroonians. The first problem of meeting with the Cameroonians, was the Cameroonians were having a meeting with the Minister of Elevage (livestock), and we had a project review. So, the first part of the process was to get the Cameroonians to broaden out who our counterparts were and then I ended up going back up to North Cameroon, because North Cameroon was essentially a separate political entity almost. And, finally got a project paper that the Cameroonians approved and that Washington approved. As I understand it, from talking with people later, it was difficult to implement and the only part of it that really worked was the animal health project, because we did some training. You had more trained personnel up there in the north. It was a good thing in the long run.

Q: Were there a lot of components at one time or another and did they work?

JOHNSON: They worked as long as we had a technician out there and that we were funding the different things that they were doing. But, it had no lasting impact on North Cameroon as a political entity or as an organization. The way they made decisions is the way they ran things.

Q: As you said at the start, we wanted it more than they did and we weren't doing what they were interested in.

JOHNSON: Yeah, and I think the same thing was true for the JFK hospital. In order to justify to ourselves doing this hospital, we made it more complicated (with the health posts, ed) and then were surprised when the government of Liberia was interested only in the hospital They had the one piece that they wanted.

Q: What if you just did what they wanted, could we have had anything that was useful or effective. So, it was a dilemma wasn't it?

JOHNSON: But, if we'd just responded to what that government wanted, you would wind up with inappropriate activities. You'd also wind up cutting off, I think what USAID's greatest strength is, this basic concept of people working in one country and moving to another country and having both life experience, as well as more formal lessons learned of what works one place and what works some place else. Ken Sherper (USAID officer) use to argue that USAID never did a project twice, because every project was new, because it had never been done in this country, with these technical advisors, with these host government people. So, it was always new, no matter what you thought you knew about that type of project.

Q: You couldn't learn any lessons from before?

JOHNSON: He pushed it to the limit. The things you should be aware of, but you can't be, he would argue, or he felt he was arguing, I think against cookie cutter projects. You couldn't say, this project worked in X country, so therefore we can replicate it. You know, we found something that worked and so let's just do it again, again, and again. And that didn't work, because every country is different, every cast of characters from the host government to the local Mission are different. So, our greatest strength is in the fact that you do learn and that people learn as they go from one assignment to another and as you're exposed to different countries, but the history in that country is better than what worked and what didn't work elsewhere.

Q: That's good for an example of many things. Was there something else about your experience in your desk assignment?

JOHNSON: Zaire and Rwanda more than anywhere else. But, the major focus was really Ghana. That's sort of where I always ended spending most of my time.

Q: Let's come back to that point and learn more detail, but let's fill up the base here by talking about your other assignments that will cover these regions.

JOHNSON: I went to Cameroon for two years on an extended TDY, temporary assignment. I was at that point trying to convert to the Foreign Service and personnel was taking the position that they could not convert me as a Program Officer until all Program Officers were assigned and, that there was therefore, a need for an extra Program Officer. Thanks to David Shear, who basically supported the effort and Don Brown who supported it and Dr. Adams who supported it, they worked out a system whereby, I went on TDY to Cameroon as Deputy Director to John Koehring.

Q: As a Civil Servant?

JOHNSON: As a Civil Servant. In Washington on paper, they would move me around. I was Assistant Director for Program in the Sahel office and on paper for the next two years, I was Mauritania Desk Officer, I was Mali Desk Officer, I was Chad Desk Officer. Shear would handle the paper work so that if he had another vacancy in the office and he knew that the replacement wouldn't arrive for three to six months, on paper I'd be moved to that job. In the meantime, I went to Cameroon on TDY and I was initially for three months, extended to six months, extended to nine months and ended up being two full years out there. Art Fell who was Deputy Director in Cameroon, went on TDY to Senegal; I think Roger Pollen(ph) was in Senegal and went on TDY to REDSO Regional Office in Abidjan, and Roy Stacy went on temporary assignment from Abidjan to Washington and took my old job working for David Shear. Over the two years, everybody else involved in this process was Foreign Service. I was the only Civil Service person. Over the next two years they sort of gradually worked out the paper assignments to the Washington assignments for everyone except me. After two years, they finally said, "Look here, it's over with. You might as well come back, if you want to try again (to get into the Foreign Service) some other day."

Q: What was the situation in Cameroon? This was what year?

JOHNSON: '74, '76. Cameroon was a Regional Development Office with responsibility for five countries: Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and the Central Africa Republic. The Sahelian side of it in terms of Chad was broken off into an independent office, but increased funds were becoming available for the other countries, not in the same startling magnitude that you had for the Sahel. Previously the program had consisted of regional projects under very broad definitions of what a regional project is. We helped build the Cameroon Railroad from Douala, the port city, up to N'Gaoundï¿½rï¿½, to about two-thirds of the way north.

Q: This is the Trans Cam?

JOHNSON: This is the Trans Cam Railroad. On the argument that it was supposed to link to a railroad being built in Chad and it was going to have a regional impact beyond its national borders.

Q: The rationale was regional?

JOHNSON: The rationale was regional. Truce (ph) Hospital, which was the major teaching medical school in Cameroon, had scholarships for Chadians, Gaborone, African Republic, and became the first, it was the major, I think it was the first, but if not the first, it was the major training school in Trench (ph). And again, it was entirely built in Cameroon, but because of offering scholarships to the neighboring nations, it qualified as a regional project. Most of what we did fit under that kind of rationale for '74, '76 partially, the rationale of doing the development assistance program for each of the six Sahelian countries. We also did them (regional projects) for the non-Sahelian countries.

Q: You did what?

JOHNSON: We did a regional assistance program, a three to five year projected assistance program for Chad, but we also did one for Cameroon, and Gabon.

Q: These were bilateral programs?

JOHNSON: The decision was to turn them in to bilateral programs. I had been team leader for the DAP (Development Assistance Program) Team that went out to do the original study for the five countries, and then went on out as Deputy Director to Cameroon.

Q: What about the all five?

JOHNSON: No, we had five desks. We did five individual programs, assuming that they would have bilateral programs, but that we would try and do it in ways that multiplied the impact on more than one country. It was easier to show as part of an overall regional Sahel program. As a matter of fact, there were three teams that went out: one went to Senegal, Mali, Mauritania; one did Niger and Upper Volta; and our's did Cameroon, Chad, and Central African Republic. When the three teams came back to Washington, we developed an overall regional proposal for the six Sahel countries, which showed how the individual bilateral programs would inter-relate, as well as how we saw the multi-donor, Club du Sahel and the CILSS would operate helping to integrate what was done individually in each of the countries.

Q: What you were doing were, except for Chad, non-Sahelian development programs?

JOHNSON: We worked for non-Sahelian programs and essentially set up bilateral programs in each of them with again an idea just, I think because of the environment. It was coming out of finding regional commonalities, projects that you could do that would have some sort of regional underpinning.

Q: But, here you were still required to maintain the regional?

JOHNSON: No, I wasn't.

Q: Oh, I see, the U.S. team.

JOHNSON: Yeah, at that point, the Korry report attempt to have a limit of eight or ten bilateral nations was collapsing.

Q: Well, how far did you get in trying to preserve this regional cover or umbrella for these programs?

JOHNSON: It didn't work. Well, I know primarily, the difference is between the Sahel program and the countries that Cameroon covered. We didn't call regional meetings in those countries. We didn't call those countries together; there was no political base that held Gabon, Central African Republic and Cameroon together. Cameroon had a special sort of situation and that part of the country was Francophone, part of the country was Anglophone. They probably had weaker ties to Francophone community. Gabon and the Central Africa Republic had much stronger ties, but also had very unique leaderships that were extraordinarily difficult to work with, and Central Africa Republic had the least developed infrastructure of any country that I had ever worked with. They simply had a capitol city and an airport and that was it.

Q: Was there some regional casts to different programs?

JOHNSON: We had regional people; the Health Officer in Cameroon reported to the Mission Director in Cameroon. He was also the Health Officer for Chad and the one in Chad reported to the Mission Director in Chad. He was also the Health Officer in Gabon, etc. In that case, the Mission Director in Cameroon was still the boss, but they operated like a bilateral country. We worked on a bilateral basis with the Embassies in different countries.

Q: But, there was no USAID people in the countries, was there?

JOHNSON: Initially, there were no USAID people in the countries at all. Over the two year period we ended up with contractor personnel and PVO personnel, but no direct hire personnel.

Q: This approach is coming back to life in current USAID thinking, I think. How did you find it worked at that time?

JOHNSON: In all honesty, I'd have to say it varied. We had an extraordinary Health Officer, Al Henn, who managed to maintain a level of energy and a commitment to travel where he would personally be in each of the countries. A great cost to family life of having a wife and two small children, but he took the time and he spent the effort to go to Gabon and stay in Gabon long enough to where he maintained contacts. I think in the Controller, Steve Leapus was the Controller. Steve Leapus did a remarkable job of keeping the accounting straight and providing financial assistance and advice, both to the governments and to the contractors. Again, at high personal costs and a lot of time spent traveling. One of the problems that I don't think anyone really takes in to account. Regional offices involved just an enormous personal penalty in terms of family life and for the children of the person who travels. Plus, going up to the Central Africa Republic was not like visiting the Bahamas, but it got us out of Cameroon. There was an enormous isolation factor for the families that stayed in Yaounde. They got out every two years or every 18 months, whereas we were getting out every six weeks. The process of traveling to another country provided a mental break for us that people who were in country didn't get.

Q: What about the substantive side of the program, did that work?

JOHNSON: I don't know whether I'd call Gabon and the Central Africa Republic programs a fair test. On the substantive side, we wound up with, and again like I said, because I saw it in East Africa and I saw it in the newly independent states. I'm probably over-sensitized to what people did just an automatic fall back. You go in to a country where you don't have USAID personnel and you looked to the other donors first. You talk to the host government and you're really sort of unsure as to how much to trust individuals; which ministries have a reputation for being well run; which ministries are total disaster areas you should stay away from; which ministry will give you an honest answer if he says that, "Yes, we intend to follow the IMF report" you know, which is just buying time and he hopes six months down the road that he doesn't have to do it any more. So, what we did was we first of all turned to other donors who had been active, who had personnel in country, and asked them for their assessment of the local environment. That made, I think the U.S. more vulnerable and that we didn't have a chance to form our own assessments. We were constantly going on the basis of second and third hand types of information.

I guess the automatic answer I've gotten back from other people is what about the Embassy. You had a resident Embassy. Why couldn't you rely upon the local embassy. The local embassy would be two or three people. One of them was a Communicator who did the technical side of it. The Embassies simply weren't that well versed with the kinds of questions, the ideas we were interested in. The Embassies didn't normally meet with and have interaction with the ministries that we wanted to have interaction with, and in many cases, make across the board judgment for the State Department. They went for the short-term impact. They wanted something that was visible, and could careless about whether or not it was there six months later, five years later, what have you. I think if USAID was left alone we would probably do studies to our heart's content for 15 years. And, the Embassy, if left alone, would pass out a check. They got the impact by the announcement of the aid, more so than any impact of what followed after that. In fairness, I think Ambassadors who served in less developed countries became much more sophisticated. You could almost chart it, if it was their first assignment to a LDC, they had this extremely short time frame. Those Ambassadors, Political Officers, Economic Officers who had served in various LDC posts, became much easier to work with as colleagues and it became easier, I think to shape a common goal. What we ran into in the New Independent States was a whole series of Ambassadors down to third and fourth Econ Officers who'd never served in an LDC and had absolutely no previous contact with USAID as an organization, and there was an enormous learning curve. I think what happened in the Sahel was that overtime, (and here again I am bias,) I saw an increase in the professionalism and the competency in the Embassies. I'm not sure they'd appreciate that judgment, but I think that as they worked with USAID, they could begin to see some of the issues they had faced, it was possible to work out professional relationships.

Q: Were there any programs that stood out in your mind that worked in that context?

JOHNSON: The capital projects were the ones that host governments and the State Department wanted capital projects. It was something concrete, they could understand it, they could see what happened. USAID was interested, I think, in policy change, even that early they were talking about policy changes, IMF agreements.

Q: What about micro-economic policy?

JOHNSON: Micro-economic policy changes. In the '60s and '70s I don't recall that we were that much into the internal policies or the micro changes, other than as they affected particular institutions that we worked with. The type of policy classic, e.g. the vocational training school in Ghana that required that you pass the London guild and apprentice exam, and that you know how to build a fireplace before you could be certified as a masonry expert. Yes, we tried to change those kinds of policies and tried to free up, a lot of the local governments from policies that were established by the ex-colonial power. They simply hung around year, after year, after year, and no one had ever looked to see, okay, is this still needed, what does it do, what does it contribute. I think we worked on those at the institutional level and the government policy level. We didn't work in the commercial market place. We tended, at least in the early period to stay out of that, and mainly we were working on things that would expand the capacity of the government to provide a service on the assumption being that that was the first stage and sequencing what could be done for development.

Q: You had mentioned hands-on work? Was that effective?

JOHNSON: The agricultural sector was always our major effort. In a results oriented framework of today where you could look and say, increase a number of crops produced in a certain area, or increase in marketing surpluses, probably didn't change. Maybe two percent, three percent, you had some changes, but didn't have any major results. You had nothing in Africa that approached a break through in Asia. I think people basically, I know in '84, '85 when Ray Love came in as Deputy Administrator, Ray had served two years in Africa at the Regional Office in Kenya, but his 20 years before that were in the Asia. In many ways, Africa to him was a whole clean slate, it was something that was new. He didn't understand, for example, why Indonesia which was an oil rich country in Asia continued to receive foreign assistance; whereas Nigeria, an oil rich country in Africa was cut off based upon the fact that it had oil revenues and we stopped bilateral assistance. Overall for Africa the difference ranged from that level to some of the countries where he felt that something comparable could be done in Africa. My response was that, well in the case of Nigeria and Indonesia, one of the big differences was that the Nigerians didn't ask for the assistance. They really didn't fight to maintain U.S. assistance, because at that time they were mad at us. They thought they had enough money to go it alone and so that's only one to go. So, your host country attitude towards what a donor could do was very different from Asia and Africa, but the grain revolution. In the grain revolution which involved one crop, rice; one type of crop, irrigated rice; one method of production, the irrigation. It was sort of like it was a standardized production system that when they had a major break through they could then replicate throughout 80s to 90 percent of the country. Down in Africa you had 20 major food crops. They ranged from yams to cassava, to sorghum, to millet, to corn, to rice, dry land rice, irrigated rice. You couldn't have a major food break through in one crop, because they didn't have a dependence on one crop. You didn't have the similarity in production techniques, because everybody was adapting to their local environmental area. You didn't have the logistical means of reaching everybody to provide improved seed and fertilizer and to train them how to use these new technologies for a broad variety of people. You didn't have that in Africa. You would have had to go around individually to many centers for many crops.

So, in agriculture we never really had the break through that USAID trumpeted for Asia. I think what you had in Africa was breakthroughs in many ecosystems, I think is the word, where you would have a particular individual result that was applicable for a particular area, but you never happened to have something that you could then replicate broadly and have a major impact upon everybody. At one point, I think a lot of attention was given to storage systems, because there was the universal estimate that 20 to 30 percent of the crop would be lost in the storage system. To insect infiltration, water damage, whatever reason. So, the people felt if we couldn't get a 20 to 30 percent increase in production, we could have that kind of an impact if we could just save that 20 percent production that gets lost in the storage systems. And, the agriculturalists were very excited about that as a possible approach and break through. The anthropologists spent all their time shooting down the balloons. Again, you had 50 different storage systems; representing 50 different ways of going about doing business; representing 50 different mini-climates and that the type of storage system that you could use in northern Niger was not the same system you could use in southern Liberia. Again, if a change was going to come about, it was going to be piece-by-piece type of change. It wasn't going to be this broad sweeping revolutionary change that would have a significant traumatic difference.

Q: Interesting. Well, let's turn to Cameroon. Were there any special dimensions of the program in Cameroon that you were concerned with?

JOHNSON: The Integrated Agricultural Development Livestock Agriculture Project.

Q: Okay.

JOHNSON: Like I said previously, the USAID program in the Cameroon had been concerned with regional organizations or with projects, which would make a regional difference, tended to be in the major capitol in Yaounde. Although, there were some programs that were active over in east Cameroon on the Anglophone area, very small projects. But, the DAP, the Development Assistance Program for Cameroon that was approved, called for a move from the regional programs to bilateral programs. It identified as the major bilateral, major development challenge, if you will, faced by Cameroon over that three to five year period as one of finding ways to connect the economies of north Cameroon and south Cameroon as a mechanism for heading off what could turn in to a Civil War. The strains and tension, at that point, were so heightened, so a number of projects were started with the overall attempt to overcome the differences between northern Cameroon and southern Cameroon.

With that as background, I think our most successful project was probably agricultural education where the government of Cameroon was interested in replicating essentially the American experience with a four year college that was oriented towards US Land Grant University A and M type of experience, agriculture and mechanical. They saw a need for those skills; they saw a need for the universities to concentrate on that. It was coming at a time when the Cameroonians were trying to move away from the inherited Anglophone and Francophone emphasis upon lawyers and government bureaucrats and, more or less, being the liberal arts type of graduate. In working with the government and with other donors, we had a major effort to try and develop a four year agricultural school that would be located outside of Yaounde, still in the south, we just couldn't get far enough north. But, from the very beginning it would be an attempt to look at agricultural problems for the whole country and look at their livestock problems, as well as agricultural problems. That was probably more successful.

Q: Which university was involved? American university?

JOHNSON: Consortium of American universities, as I recall, SECID: the Southeast Consortium for International Development. It was primarily historically black colleges. They had some difficulties with the contractor team, as always, of finding Americans who had fluent French and could function in academic atmosphere in Cameroon. That was probably the most difficult part of the exercise. Administratively within USAID, it was a point in which they were trying to increase the use of minority college universities and SECID, which was the Southeast Consortium of Historical Black Universities and Colleges, managed to produce with their first six faculty professors. They were all white. None of them worked for any of the SECID universities; they were hired off the street. They had no internal cohesion or collaboration or back-stopping, simply because they didn't have the contacts at any of those SECID universities of being able to call up your buddy and say, hey, I've run in to this problem of grass and forage and what do you know and can you find me some literature. The first contractor team, I think was all pickup people. The second contractor team that had been placed as the tours of duty were up, you had a whole new team. Some of those did come from the universities and that worked much better. But, I would say that is another example where USAID's internal priorities took precedence over the development priorities in countries you were trying to work with. I think the Truce (sp?) Hospital made a major impact.

Q: Was the Eye School effective and established?

JOHNSON: The Eye School is effective and is still established. Cameroon has not yet had the Civil War. But, politics deteriorated after I left.

Q: Or the hospital?

JOHNSON: The hospital is still in existence.

Q: We created the hospital?

JOHNSON: Yes, we created CUSS. CUSS was the abbreviated name, the initials for the Cameroon University, something, I don't know.

Q: Public Health College?

JOHNSON: It still has some scholarships available to other Francophone countries.

Q: But it was from training in public health?

JOHNSON: It was training in public health and for medical doctors, an actual medical school. I think there may be one up in Senegal now, but it's still the major Francophone training program.

Q: What about the Integrated Livestock project? I guess that was in northern Cameroon, right?

JOHNSON: It was in northern Cameroon. The best thing I can say about the Integrated Agricultural project is that we avoided making some major mistakes that I think would have been environmental disasters. In trying to look at the north and what could be done in the north. What the southern government wanted was a major irrigated project which would have displaced several nomadic groups, probably would have had major health problems associated with the irrigation, which is what we ran in to again and again doing the irrigation projects. That the water would become very saline and very quickly. The salt would then kill the crops and the soil itself would be extra saline and salty. So, even if you tried to wipe out the water and just go back to dry land agriculture you'd damage the land, so that you couldn't do it. In many cases, damaged land to the extent that the herdsmen couldn't use it for livestock forage. We managed to avoid doing some of those so that we didn't, we followed the "Hippocratic" the medical oath, first do no harm. The Integrated Agricultural project worked as long as the donors put in money. After that it fell apart. Again, it worked because it was isolated and suspended from the system around it as long as the donor was there. When the donor left, then it became part of the system and it gradually fell back to its original state.

The other agricultural part of the project, the primary thoughts for that was the attempt to set up a planning council and help the governor of the north establish a donor assistance planning type of coordination capacity, simply because a number of donors were beginning to get active in northern Cameroon. That, I think, made a marginal improvement. It gave the governor some more trained people to work with. I don't think we made a major dent in the local politics or the types of interest that each party represented, simply because we didn't know enough. We, the donors didn't know enough to even work at that level. We were working at a higher level of a problem that was like three levels above some of the real issues.

Q: We didn't understand the culture or the environment, physical or human or whatever.

JOHNSON: Yes. Physical, political, ethnic heritage. I think at the level we worked we made a difference, but you then had to dig down two or three more levels for a lasting permanent improvement.

Q: How about livestock?

JOHNSON: Yes, we did the animal health portion that at the beginning they originally asked for. That worked; it worked well. They set up and gave some training; some veterinarians set up some posts, worked out rotation systems, did some education among the herders as to what diseases could be handled that way and what diseases they were better off using traditional methods.

Q: And what parts didn't work?

JOHNSON: Any real attempt to change. Donors were very much at that time concerned with carrying capacity of the land. I think I mentioned before, it was one of the early environmental kinds of concerns. We never managed to resolve our priority for carrying capacity of the land. With the individual herdsman, the priority was the more cattle the better. It was just as simple as that. For years and years and years, the more cattle the better it worked. The more cattle a man had, the more prosperous he was, the better he could handle emergency disasters, family health emergencies, sending kids to school, what have you. There was an attempt to say that you really have to cull your herds and you have to maintain smaller herds. In many ways, it was similar to some of the family planning arguments, that if you had eight to ten children you simply couldn't provide health care and education for all of them. And, the parents said yes, but those kids can go out in the field and work and I can get food. They essentially maintained a traditional approach that you had a limited capacity for cattle within your tribe, based upon your control of five wells and 50 acres around each well. They were very sensitive to the land each well provided. What they wanted donors to do was build more wells, at which point they could increase the number of cows. But, it didn't increase the land capacity and so you kept dealing with different expectations. I don't think we made a dent in their situation.

So, on the livestock program, one of the few times in my experience where we did look at the marketing issues. We were trying to encourage the Sahelian countries to market more at urban centers at the coast and that was simply that protein was given a high priority; it was a ready market for them. As a relief mechanism or a risk aversion mechanism, that was something that the nomadic tribes, the pastoral groups were very familiar with, which they undertook to do. If you had an emergency need for money you'd sell some cows. If the rains didn't come you'd walk the cows farther south. As a production ethnic, as you raise the cows, you put them in stalls and you force feed them, and you slaughter them, and you have cold trains....

The same was true for Cameroon, although it was all within one country and so in that sense it should have been easier for southern Cameroon to feed northern Cameroon. Northern Cameroon to feed southern Cameroon open centers in Douala and Yaounde. Unlike many other African countries, the capitol was in Yaounde, which was about half way up. Douala was the port city, commercial center, business; Yaounde was the university and the government. So, both of those represented places where meat was high priority. They flew in meat from France. Conceptually, it seemed that it ought to be easier to do in Cameroon, because it was all within one country. We never made major progress on that then and I don't think in the ten years since that there's been a major change.Q: When you were in Cameroon it was about the time, I believe of the New Directions Policy and push came out, wasn't it? That was in '74, '75, '76?

JOHNSON: New Directions was Nixon/Ford. So, really the New Directions influenced, I think the thrust of the Sahelian program. You were reaching into the poorest countries; you were reaching out trying to, again with the whole attempt to go to immediate action to change lives.

Q: What was your understanding of the New Directions push, compared to what was going before?

JOHNSON: Essentially, as the New Directions, as I understood the politics of it, was a compromise between Nixon and Humphrey (ed?) from the Senate. Whereby, Nixon got the support that he wanted for Vietnam in the military effort in exchange for letting some of the more liberal Congress orientated people beef up the development program and change the development legislation. In changing the development legislation, they wrote it as a modified Peace Corp approach. That individual contact, one on one change was where change really happened and that the U.S. official development program should take on more of the characteristics of the Peace Corp program; that we should move out of capitol cities; we should move into the rural areas; we should have programs that impact immediately upon people; have a very strong PVO approach. It represented a major wrench institutionally for the USAID Agency. The Agency, how do I say this about myself and my colleagues -we were all too intellectual to begin with.

Q: What?

JOHNSON: Everybody at USAID becomes too intellectual. We spent ages and ages debating the philosophy of the new approaches, and that had congressional staffers, you know,... I would try and explain to them why some part of the legislation was too difficult or made it more difficult than it need be for us to do something. And, they would look at me in total wide eye amazement and say, "Why do you take it so seriously, do what makes sense, use your common sense, don't fall for the legislation." I explained that maybe the legislative branch, the executive branch had a tendency to have lawyers that said the legislation was important. I think that part of the whole New Directions philosophy was the Congressmen who voted for it didn't really believe in it and they never took it seriously on the Hill.

Q: But, there was a debate between or at least there was this concept of the difference between the poor majority and the poorest of the poor. What was your understanding of the primary thrust of the conservatives?

JOHNSON: Well, at that time I was working with the PL480 programs, technical assistance programs, and capital assistance programs. The PL480 legislation itself, actually invited that phrase, that the food should reach the poorest of the poor. The USAID legislation never actually said those words, but in the food aid program, you're entitled to free distribution or your food for work programs favored poor. Your Title I programs, which were sales programs, almost by definition didn't reach the poorest of the poor, you know, because you didn't have any money to buy. The hours were spent trying to agonize over the official export vehicle that Title I provided which would go maybe to your cities and your elite, but would thereby free up food that might otherwise be compensated and be available to farmers. More subsequent honest or vigorous analysis, you know, really got into the issue of whether donated food, basically disrupts, interrupts, makes more difficult, depresses internal domestic food production, that it's harder for the indigenous farmer to find the market at a fair price for his products when they come in and are directly available at the port and it all goes in to some type of commercial production system. I think the whole food aid debate got much more familiar, I was more in to the food aid debate I guess, than the New Directions and the other areas.

Q: But, when you were in the Cameroon, did you see any evidence of the New Direction? Was it in the type of program you were carrying out?

JOHNSON: Well, the Sahel program was the push. The Sahel program was very much devised in terms of reaching the poor majority. The whole thrust in back of it growing out of the humanitarian relief effort. It simply pushed us in that direction.

Q: Were you in Cameroon at the time of the Mandara Mountains program?

JOHNSON: I thought we killed the Mandara program. No. No. I was there when they did some of the original initial studies and essentially killed it.

Q: It started, but it didn't last.

JOHNSON: Al Hoban was the anthropologist who came out and did some initial work on the Mandara Mountains. And, basically his report was so negative that we spent the rest of our time trying to talk the government out of doing what it wanted to do.

Q: What was the problem with that? What was the program? What were the initiatives behind that?

JOHNSON: The basic initiative was that you had a large section of land that was currently in this government's viewpoint not used, and you could therefore, put in irrigated agriculture, you could move in farmers, and you could open it up, there was a new frontier's type of argument. (The government wanted to move the indigenous people in the Mandara Mountains out to the low lands, ed) You could open up a whole new geographic area and add it to the productive string, you know, the capital, etc. etc. etc. Al Hoban who was the anthropologist, looked at the area and said, one, it's currently utilized right now, it's just utilized by other people; two, you've got some major physical problems in terms of trying to do irrigation in the area; and three, the area is so isolated from any transportation, logistical support environment, that you're kidding yourself if you think that agricultural production can then be used to come into the major cities. The major thing he did that I think influenced us was the argument that the area is currently used and laying out how it was used and who used it, and gave us some facts to talk to government officials about, who essentially proceeded with it. You know, it didn't phase them. (It's like the early U.S. again. On the initial maps of the U.S. the entire mid west, it's labeled the great American desert.) As far as the people in the capitol city, few of whom had ever been up north in Mandarin mountains; you know, it was unutilized land. The poor majority areas became more known in Washington, it affected the kinds of documents that were written and the kinds of analysis that you undertook. In the field, I think it was perceived or felt as a push to get action going to move away from institutions and capital cities. That you needed to be able to show results at the local level. I think part of that just got so tied in to the idea of moving in to bilateral programs and the starting up of bilateral programs in Central Africa Republic where the rural health project was the major initiative and the major effort. Vocational training was another major program. The nurses mid-wife training in Gabon. The selection of projects and the types of things that were undertaken became as much internalized, I think for people in the field as action projects, rather than institutional projects or policy projects.

Q: Well, after you left the Cameroon and went back to Washington, what assignment did you pick up that time?

JOHNSON: I went back to work in the Sahel program, for approximately two weeks and David Shear was the one who was trying to recruit me. His analysis was... I think accurate, it was at that point I was so unhappy about not being able to go into the Foreign Service in the field, that I wouldn't have liked anything in Washington. Basically, I felt after working five years on the Sahel, you know, I didn't want to work on it any more. I felt a great deal of it had simply over promised things to the people and that the walls were going to come crashing down and I didn't particularly see that, one, I couldn't help the walls from crashing down, and two, I didn't want to waste my creditability on trying to pretend that they weren't. That was such a negative perspective that I wasn't the right person for the job. So, Steve Klein and Princeton Lyman recruited me to come over into the new organization that was being developed called, Development Resources, DR, a capital projects, technical assistance, projects development oriented office.Q: What was new about it? Why was it new? What was it changing if from?

JOHNSON: Previously, there had been something called the Capital Development Office, which worked with capital projects. Roads, infrastructure, ports, electrical systems, what have you. Then, there were technical assistance personnel under various headings but, essentially all the agricultural, health education personnel,, what have you. And, an office of Public Safety too at one point, and the Desk Officers, which back-stopped individual country programs across the board. Be it, food aid, project aid, capital assistance, technical assistance etc. The feeling was that the New Directions, if you will, the philosophy of New Directions was pushing people more into doing projects and they were projectized activities that were going to be much bigger and more complicated than the technical assistance projects that had tended to be the case in Africa.

Also, at one point, there was an attempt to differentiate; two capital project offices were set up in the field in Abidjan and Nairobi. The Washington office was considered to be a project development office or a project design office and it didn't handle implementation. That Washington would do the project design and then implementation would be the responsibility of these two capital offices in the field. Over time, the two field offices became multi-dimensional, represented again, technical assistance, capital assistance, food aid specialists. And, the feeling was in Washington that the African Bureau had handicapped itself by having its project officers only look at design and that you needed a much stronger concentration on implementation actions. I think at that time there was perceived to be buildup in pipelines across Africa where projects were getting approved, but then running in to just enormous implementation issues. So, the idea behind the new office was that you have one office doing the resources which would look at technical assistance, project assistance, capital assistance, and food aid.

Q: What was your function?

JOHNSON: Initially, when I went there, we had a Director for the office and then you had two Deputy Directors, one who worked with Project Officers and one who worked with the Sector Specialists in the population, health, nutrition, agriculture. And, I was Deputy Director in charge of the agricultural, health, nutrition side of the operation. In my opinion, I was very ineffective. As far as the technicians were concerned, especially the agies, I was the wrong age, the wrong sex, and I was not Foreign Service. You put those three things and three strikes you're out. The internal processes within the office never worked really well and I felt very frustrated because I couldn't get a handle on helping anybody solve those problems and so I asked for an early out. They did, probably within a year.

Q: What time of period was this from? What months?

JOHNSON: '76 to '77, February to January. It came over two calendar years, but it was probably less than a year total.

In'76 when Carter was elected, the new people started arriving and my name was floated to the new political appointees and I went off to head up the Office of East Africa, which at that point, the Office of East Africa had been combined with the Office of Southern Africa and then it had been separated and then it had been recombined. Owen Cylke use to say that he was the only man in the history of USAID who got a special award for separating and combining offices. The difference was they were separating them once again and more in recognition, I think of just the span of control that we had too many activities going on.

Q: Growth of the programs in both areas?

JOHNSON: Growth of the programs. Also, up until then, the Korry report had a very strict formula for eight bilateral countries and later that was expanded to ten. You had a process of going up to PPC and the Administrator and OMB for approvals of the changes. The regional projects were broken up, but nobody ever really officially set a formula for how it was broken up until'77 when I took over the Office of East Africa and was there for five years. Towards the end of that time period, it became a matter of justifying why you didn't want a bilateral program somewhere. I remember Golar Butcher who was the African Bureau Assistant Administrator, hauling me up in her office and wanting to know why we didn't have an USAID program in the Seychelles and the Comoros.

Q: What area did you cover then? What were the countries under your responsibility?

JOHNSON: I'll give you the whole list: Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Seychelles, and the Comoros. It was a ten country area. It started out that it was essentially a bilateral program in Kenya and one in Tanzania that would start and stop. We kept running into political issues. The Foreign Affairs Minister of Tanzania had the poor judgment to dance in the isles of the United Nations on the day that they voted to recognize Red China instead of Taiwan China as China. We got a phone call the next day from Kissinger saying, cut off the aid to Tanzania. Tanzania, it was just on again, off again, on again, off again. At that time and now, I think most of our implementation issues and policy issues were the fact that we never really stayed long enough. Nobody in the government really thought we would stay around very long. They said, "Okay, relations are fairly good right now, but they probably are going to fall apart again later." That issue went up and down the whole time I was there. We had a regional East Africa program run from Arusha, which was the headquarters of East Africa Region. Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, had formed a regional organization headquartered in Arusha that represented an attempt by those three nations to coordinate, especially transportation, but also other area, so we had a regional program in Arusha. We were not in Uganda at that time when I started, because Idi Amin was still in power. And, during the five years that I was working in East Africa, you had Idi Amin get kicked out by Obote and then Obote get kicked by Museveni.

We did not have a program in Sudan and we started one up. It was a bilateral effort to start up a program in Sudan; the previous bilateral program had been halted due to the assimilation of the American Ambassador and several key staffers, and lack of cooperation from the government of Sudan in doing anything about it. The politics of the situation were such that when we politically came to foreign policy terms with the Sudanese, then they wanted to start up a USAID program. Again, it sounds like, you know, if you have an Embassy then you have a USAID program.

In Djibouti (which was one of the five parts of the greater Somalia empire) where we did not have a program officer, we started a program, The Somalis had under various colonial regimes felt that their nation, their country of Somalia had been dismembered into five parts. There was the Ethiopian Somaliland, which was the Danakil desert, which was fought over back and forth; there was Djibouti, which the French for years officially titled French Somaliland and then they changed its title when it became obvious that there were problems with that and gave Djibouti independence; Somali itself, under its borders represented an amalgamation of the Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland, and a part of Somali was given at independence to the Kenyans that the Somalis felt belonged with them as part of the Greater Somali. The national flag, it is a five pointed star, represented the five parts of Somaliland. We had ceased assistance in Somali and I'm not sure that I really remember why. I'm not sure why we got kicked out of Somali.

Q: The Russians took over.

JOHNSON: I don't know what was occurring.

Q: The Russian moved in but, during your time we started the program up again ?

JOHNSON: We started the program up in Sudan.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about Sudan.

JOHNSON: They actually had the initial preliminary teams and projects before I joined East Africa.

Q: Do you know why they suddenly decided to start up again?

JOHNSON: They (the State Department) felt that Sudan was more cooperative and working on our side. The situation: One, the country is split in three different political ethnic groups: north Sudan, south Sudan, and west Sudan. Most of the programs were back up again in Sudan and they dealt with trying to overcome the divisions.

Q: (The question of Ethiopian expropriation of US investment violating the Hickenlooper amendment and general lack of cooperation with the Mengistu government. ed)

JOHNSON: State/USAID worked together better, I think on Ethiopia better than almost any other time in my career. We had decided on a policy of complete and open information sharing, that whatever got decided it would be decided out in the open. So, he (State Desk Officer) would share the Ambassador's schedule with me and I would share Ed Hogan's (Mission Director) schedule with him and basically, as Ed Hogan would see the Ambassador do such and such and he'd make an appointment to go in right behind him and do such and such; and the Ambassador would see that Hogan would talk to so and so and so. It was the feeling all over town that in most incidences there was a compromise when Ed Hogan won. We had an agreement that we should make another effort to see if we couldn't work out some type of working relationship with the Ethiopian government. Unfortunately, there was also an agreement that the Ambassador was the one who should make that point. It was like having somebody come up at a dance and say, "You don't want to dance, do you?" And, the Ambassador went in and received a very chilly cold reception, and we gradually started closing projects down and we went into our marathon. The legislation said that we shouldn't stop projects in mid-life and it really grew out of capital projects where the idea was, you wouldn't leave a road not completed or a building half standing. We expanded the interpretation to be technical assistance, that if you agreed to fund four years for a participant to go to school, then you shouldn't cut his tuition in half. Ed pushed it farther than I think anybody would let him go, but he got a lot more leeway as we went through the close down phase out period. The same time we were going through the close down phase out for Ethiopia, we were going into building up the program in Somalia, where again we had an exchange of teams. And, we had a USAID team that went out to Somali and talked to the Somalis about a Somali program.

Q: But, State did close the USAID Mission in Ethiopia?

JOHNSON: They closed the Mission in Ethiopia.

Q: Was there anything left?

JOHNSON: The Ambassador pulled out all the Americans; pulled out all the contractors; stopped funding the PVO's (Private Voluntary Organization); some of whom stayed on their own with their own sources; made a major effort to find jobs for the Ethiopian local staff which were the local hires and placed them in Nairobi at REDSO; I had some down in Swaziland.

Q: Did they stop the relief rehabilitation work?

JOHNSON: Yes, we stopped everything. At that point the relief and rehab had primarily been completed, accept for a category of projects that had been started as regular development projects. If you can't talk to minister A, go talk to minister B. We had maintained working relationships with the relief and rehab minister who had actually a delegated authority from the Council of Ministers to sign emergency and relief programs without going through the whole process that the development projects had to. So, for about a six month period we tried to take our agricultural and health projects that were geographic that were designed to be the next step up to regular development effort and we tried to retag each of them and put them through the relief minister, because he could then sign them without going through the rest of the government. Actually, I think that precipitated the Ambassador coming in. He felt that was such a greedy act of maintaining assistance when we shouldn't be maintaining assistance; we shouldn't be providing regular assistance because of the expropriation issue. Publicly we shouldn't be providing it because the government was acting in ways contrary to what we wanted it to act and third, if they didn't want our assistance then we shouldn't push it. We wound up closing the program down and bringing everybody home. It took about 18 months, I think before everything was actually closed and finished.

Q: Let's go to Somali now. We cut out of Ethiopia and now we've started up in Somali.

JOHNSON: Actually, it wasn't that sequential; both had been happening at the same time. The Somali program was sort of started simultaneously almost with the Sudan program in '78, '79 and we begin to build up there, essentially.

Q: Was there a particular reason why we started up again? Was somebody pushing us?

JOHNSON: I just think it was hearsay more than anything else. The hearsay at the time was that there was a medical doctor who worked at the White House who had longstanding ties with some senior Somali people. He pushed the State Department; based upon his private contacts in Somali that the Somalians were fed up with the Russians and were trying to get the Russians out and would like to be on better terms with the U.S. So, essentially it was quote a "White House initiative", that sort of filtered through the National Security Council and the State Department. I think first, the Embassy expanded its contacts and started having more discussions and more contacts. Then, USAID was pushed and we sent a team out to Somali to have initial discussions with the government and the Somalis sent a team to Washington to have an initial discussion with us. I've never been so impressed in my life with the Somali team that came in to visit with us; extraordinarily intelligent, talented three man delegation. They probably spoke 15 languages between three people. They knew Italian, they knew Arabic, they knew English, they knew Russian, I mean just clearly at ease functioning in a European western world.

Q: Were they at the ministerial level?

JOHNSON: They were at the ministerial level. They were all fairly young. They were in their 30s. But, they gave an initial impression of people who had been thoroughly assimilated into the modern world. It was just a problem of bringing the rest of the population with them. I don't think anybody in Somali has been assimilated. They are the most tribal group I've ever run into. In fact, in my definition Ethiopians are extremely arrogant and that if you're not one of them just too bad, you know. Until I ran in to the Somalis. The Somalis are arrogant, more arrogant than the Ethiopians. They are easier to deal with, because their attitude is, well it's not your fault that you're not a Somalis; you don't count. But, they're polite and gracious and gentle about it. They had their first meeting in Washington with Golar Butcher; they had three projects that they wanted us to do based upon things that USAID had previously done in Somalis They wanted us to complete the city sewer systems and they wanted the Somali city water works also.

Q: And in Mogadishu?

JOHNSON: In Mogadishu. They wanted us to repair and expand the port at Kismaayo which the U.S. had originally built under the U.S. Army Core of engineers and which was crumbling, because the mix of sand and cement was vulnerable to salt. Anyway, it was falling apart at the seams and they wanted us to come back and fix Kismaayo. The third was that they wanted to put up an industrial processing plant in the vicinity of Mogadishu.

Golar laid out for them that New Directions legislation had passed since we had previously been associated with Somali and now the effort was to reach the broad number of people, rather than to do city industrial types of projects. So, Somali said, oh they understood and thanked us very much and went away and came back three days later and they had three new projects they wanted us to do. They wanted us to do a project for the health of the poor majority, which involved fixing the city water works. They wanted us to provide income to small farmers who grew peanuts by providing an industrial processing plant that could take the peanuts and make oil out of them. And, they wanted us to help the small agricultural farmers who were dependent upon the port They completely understood the legislation. I think they probably got a briefing from Congress in the meantime the two days they were gone, because they came back and they had the same three projects wrapped around the New Directions legislation.

Q: So, what did you do?

JOHNSON: We thanked them very much for their interest and we said that we would wait until our team came back from Somalia. It was really simultaneously that we had a team out there and they had a team in here. Our team in Somali was looking at livestock projects. I think we got Public Administration projects, but I'm not really sure. We had an agriculture project with the University and a Research Station. And, again as in Sudan, we had been in Somali before and kept the port at Mogadishu from crumbling. It was hard to find lasting evidence of anything that USAID had done, except for the people. You had people show up who had been trained at the University of Wyoming in livestock and they were working at the agriculture ministry throughout the university. You had people from the University of California. Again and again throughout the government, you had people who had been trained in the United States and it was the most lasting impact of whatever we tried to do out there in the '50s, I guess. Again, you had to start things quickly. There were enough remnants of the USAID programs to where we tried to go back and sort of expand, build on, see what capacity was still was there and then build on that capacity. So, you wound up in health projects, agricultural projects, eventually wound up at Kismaayo port, kicking and screaming and dragging our heels the whole way.

Q: And the Mogadishu water system?

JOHNSON: We never did get back to the Mogadishu water system and we never did the oil processing plant. The two rivers in Somali, the Shabelle River and, I can't remember the other one (the Juba ed). The biggest area of contention over projects done and not done was that the Somali's wanted a dam over the Shabelle which would regulate floods and theoretical open up a whole section of the country for irrigation. There were a number of studies that were inconclusive.Q: Did the projects like the health one work?

JOHNSON: We weren't there long enough to tell. We wound up with the Somalia situation deteriorating and we were out of there in eight years, I think. Two funny stories. Art Buchwald did one of his humorous essays on what was happening in Ethiopia and Somalia, which involved the U.S. pulling out of Ethiopia and going to Somalia, and the Russians pulling out of Somali and going to Ethiopia. At the same time the two countries were engaged in war against each other. The Ethiopians entire Air Force consisted of U.S. planes, which the Russians couldn't provide spare parts for. So, the Russians went to North Vietnam and bought North Vietnam's spare parts that had been left behind when the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam and provided them to the Ethiopians. In the meantime, we were sitting in Somalia and we had exactly the same problem and they had all the Russian equipment and we couldn't provide anything that helped, so we went to the Egyptians and the Egyptians provided Russian equipment that the Russians had left when they pulled out of Egypt.

I remember reading that column and saying, what's funny about this. This is from just reading a newspaper, because the two countries were so intertwined with each other with a history of being on the other side of the Cold War fight, that it was impossible to walk through that complex without tripping over some law that said, you weren't supposed to be doing what you were doing. That ranged from, there's a section of legislation which says that you cannot give assistance to two countries if the two countries are engaged in aggression against one another. The State Department told me not to worry. The U.S. never signed a convention of 1832, which defined a Russian. So, if push came to shove and anybody wanted to protest, not to protest.

But, I think the other funny story about the Somalians was, they wound up with a Presidential visit, where the President of Somalia came to the White House and had official meetings with Carter and had one in the afternoon where USAID people were supposed to go over to Blair House and have this long talk with him. There were about 15 people from USAID who went and it was headed up by Maurie Williams, the Deputy Administrator. There was a sort of a horseshoe shaped arrangement with all the Americans sitting one side and Somalis sitting on the other. The question of the Shabelle River dam and why the U.S. wouldn't fund it. So, Maurie Williams tried to give an explanation. He'd been working on all these briefing papers for two weeks about why we shouldn't do it. So, he tried to give an explanation and the President of Somali just wouldn't accept it. So, the end result of it was that Maurie Williams passed it to the guy who was sitting next to him, he passed it to the guy who was sitting next to him, and it ended up with me who was the most junior person in the room at the end of the row and he said, "Miss Johnson, would you like to reply?

Q: And what did you say?

JOHNSON: At that point I looked at Maurie Williams who previously had been trying to offer a compromise of saying well, let's not say we can't do it. Let's just say that the timing is wrong for us to do it and that sometime in the future maybe we'll do it. I had argued in my really strong briefing papers and all the rest of it that this was a misleading signal that was sending us down the wrong path, etc. etc. and Maurie stuck to that. Instead I said, well I don't think the time is right, right now. Fairly quickly after that everybody got up and left. So, all the Americans filed by the Somali side of this horseshoe shaking hands and saying good-bye and, so I ended up at the last of the line as the most junior person there. So, there I was shaking hands with the President while everybody else, every other person had passed by and left me with Somalis who totally surrounded me. They had become convinced that I was the key person. It took me 20 minutes to get out of the Blair House.

Q: They thought you had saved the day.

JOHNSON: The Somalis had correctly identified me as the bottleneck and, if they could convince me, it would be ok.

Q: I see. So, they didn't buy the, not now, later argument?

JOHNSON: Yes. I had it all. They wanted it now.

Q: Where did you come off with them then at that point?

JOHNSON: I mumbled everything I could think of under the sun that I had put in to the briefing paper. That the World Bank had done two evaluations, two preliminary project assessments, you know, had come to the conclusion that the proposed dam would not accomplish what they wanted to in terms of agriculture. I quoted every anthropologist that I could come up with, that putting up a dam and controlling water does not increase the amount of water that is available. It seasonally regulates what is available, but you don't get more water. Their problem was that the Shabelle River didn't get enough water. I forget what other argument I made; every argument in the kitchen sink that I could come up with.

Q: Did we ever do anything with it?

JOHNSON: We ended up doing another World Bank study where the U.S. and the World Bank would together do a feasibility study of what made sense. That drug it out for another two years. I think we did some more feasibility studies for the dam and then wound up, as you know, with the situations and relations deteriorating. The availability of funds was becoming much more of a constraint, so it ended.

Q: Back in Somalia?

JOHNSON: Somalia again; I can't claim that we didn't know Ethiopia. We had had 20 years of experience in Ethiopia and I think in Ethiopia the added deterioration and eventually the pulling out of the USAID people just recognized the political reality that we'd supported Haile Selassie for too long and the new Council of Ministers saw us as being bad people, and that the Soviets would provide the goods. But, in Somalia again, we went in and we had too much money to spend fast, we didn't know enough about the country. We wound up antagonizing the State Department because we wanted to do feasibility studies. The quickest thing we could do was to build on what we had done before, whether good, bad or indifferent or if it still made sense, it was within the realm of what we could do, like the agricultural research center. Although, we did the Mogadishu water works. We wound up in Somalia. It's not because they're sophisticated, but they're really settled and they're use to the politics that go on between 16 warring clans and the affiliations and the sub-affiliations and the negotiating. It was like throwing us, (you know, the baby in the bed) into this horrendously sophisticated society where we thought it was the other way around. We thought we were sophisticated and that they were the pastoral nomadic tribe. I think they took us to the cleaners, personally. We went back, but we never really understood the internal politics of what was going on in that country.

Q: As I recall, at the Africa Bureau in State compared it to other African countries; Somalia was one country where there was one language, one culture, and tribal society, and therefore we didn't have this risk of internal conflicts. Is that a fair statement as to what you understood?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was part of my briefing papers. Part of this story was floating around Washington. It was essentially that you did have an ethnically, homogenous group that saw itself as a nation. It was a clan, you know, with clans within a nation, but they did see themselves as a nation. The Somali language not only existed, but previously, about ten years before, they had made a major decision to turn it in to a written language and preserve their heritage and their culture. You just seemed to have so many things going for it that the problems that you would anticipate going into Sudan where the country was just territorially split in so many different ways, the Somalis looked like they really had their act together.

We also had a fairly sophisticated policy dialogue going on with the Somali government in terms of getting them to change a lot of the policies that they'd adapted during the Russian period. I remember very early in the process, the IMF and the IBRD had teams out in Somalia along with our initial teams for reestablishing relationships. I was along on TDY and I remember having coffee with a guy from the IMF. And, I was full of excitement and energy about what we were pushing on, the different policy issues and he just looked at me. I think he was Italian. He just looked at me with a sort of totally weary look. He said, "Don't you understand?" He said, "It doesn't matter what policy the Somalis adopt. They don't have any institutional capacity to carry any of them out." I said, "Whoa."

Q: What was the observation from IMF.

JOHNSON: Yes, and it's partly because the IMF brought it up that we did do more institutional development. We had more teams going out looking at the institutional capacity and the strengthening it . I did get involved in a public administration project. I was sort of looking at that side of the equation which because of the whole New Directions for us we hadn't really been involved.

Q: Right, right. Interesting. But, then at that time people were not aware, did not sense the potential for the country breaking apart and the clan warfare; it was not anticipated by anybody.

JOHNSON: We didn't hit any of that. My theory was that it was there but that we simply weren't sophisticated enough to know what was going on. And, that when we went back in the '78, '79 time period, we went in with other donors so that essentially there were enough donor resources flowing to all the different groups that they could be bought off. With an ever increasing pie, you get a larger piece of the pie and so the tensions that were under the surface simply didn't surface.

Q: Well, that's a good discussion on Somalia; what were we trying to do in Djibouti?

JOHNSON: I was trying to stay out of Djibouti. It was one of the many fights that I lost.

Q: Why?

JOHNSON: I didn't see that we had any hope for that country. It was just so completely limited in natural resources. It had two roaring clans, the Afars and the Issas, one of which was primarily in Somaliland and one of which was primarily in Ethiopia and so they sort of mirrored in microcosm what was going on in the Ogaden the desert. The French were in there heavy; Djibouti being a sea port, surrounded by lava, sand, and not much else, and that the city survived on the fact that the French were still there and they used it as a watering facility for the French Navy going up and down the Red Sea. I honestly did not see any sense for us to be there; we should just as well leave it to the French. It was a leftover colony.

Q: Well, then, why did you come up with a program?

JOHNSON: In retrospect, I think it was primarily because we were moving in to this period of New Directions having to defend why you don't have a program. If the country is independent, then the U.S. should be there and USAID should be there.

Q: And if it's a poor country?

JOHNSON: And, if it's a poor country, then we ought to help. There's no real political reason not to go in. But, going in and make the French happy. We had other problems with the French in other sections of Africa and by showing them that we were a donor that was willing to helping shoulder the responsibility for what happened in Djibouti, it made relations a little bit easier in other countries where we were trying to get the French to come in to Liberia and help.

Q: That kind of quid pro quo going on? Come to Liberia and we'll work on the Djibouti, this sort of thing?

JOHNSON: It was explicitly in conversations within the U.S. government where it was in the frame work for Africa. So, the guys that I talked to in the State Department Africa Bureau, their economic policy planning staff or whatever, came to me. At one point they wanted us to start a program in Angola as a ex-colony, because working in Angola would allow us to make contacts with the Portuguese and learn how the Portuguese did assistance and what the colonial experience was from the Portuguese point of view, so that later when we went into Mozambique we would have experience. Mozambique and Angola are totally different universes. The concept of setting up a foundation in Portugal, I never really did understand that one, but that was part of this whole thing. We would set up a foundation in Portugal that would help the Portuguese deal with the problems of their ex colonies. But, there was a lot of this geopolitical type of discussion over in State.

Q: And that was a factor in Djibouti?

JOHNSON: That was a factor in Djibouti that they saw. They didn't see it as Djibouti, they saw it as part of the continuing dialogue with the French and across the board politics of how we cooperated with other people.

Q: Was that also manifested in the U.S. representation there (in Djibouti) and them having an Embassy?

JOHNSON: I think the Embassy itself predated me. It was a really small Embassy. It was like two or three people; I think initially it was a Counselor General and then they upgraded it to an Embassy.

Q: What kind of program could we carry out in a situation like that?

JOHNSON: We started sending teams out to look at what the government wanted; what did other donors wanted; what could we do. None of the teams, I think really came back with imaginative approaches. Admittedly, it had an extremely limited natural resource base and there wasn't much we could do. But, I was still fairly disappointed that we somehow couldn't hit upon that combination of academics and anthropologists who come up with something that would make a lasting impact. We had some people who looked at doing something with hot soils, the essentially the volcanic active areas. Volcanic area is a tip of the Riff Valley and they had hot soils, you know, steam coming off of hot soils. We had guys who went out and looked at whether you could harness the steam for energy and do anything with that.

Q: Geothermal.

JOHNSON: Geothermal types of projects. We had agriculturalists go out and look at whether or not there was some way to introduce barrier dune grass, off the barrier oceans, which seems to survive despite the high salt and the ocean pounding at it. Could that be introduced, you know, and come up with any type of forage for animals. But, that one struck out. We did a big scholarship program. We brought people back to the States to get educated.

I remember, the one that I thought had the most likely long term contribution... (I guess this is part of telling about the things I failed at, as well as the things where I succeeded.) Djibouti is a natural harbor which is one of the reasons why the French liked it. It's the best harbor up and down the Red Sea Coast. But, it winds up with the two sides of the country or the city being separated by this huge lagoon. The ferry boat that went back and forth from one side to the other sank or collapsed or something, and the government of Djibouti wanted us to provide a ferry boat. The guys out in Djibouti came up with the idea that what they really needed was a World War II landing ship transport where you can just go right up on the land and you flip out the back door and the people can walk off the boat.

Q: An LST.

JOHNSON: Right, LST. We got involved in the most esoteric program to get a ferry boat for their government, which I was totally against doing. I kept saying, it's illegal, we can't fund it, there's no way to do it, it won't work even if we put it out there, they can't maintain it. But a very energetic Desk Officer and a very energetic USAID Affairs Officer in Djibouti, between the two of them, called up Admiral "Snift" who had a cousin named Admiral "Joe" out in Hawaii. He knew they were surplusing a couple of extra LST's that hadn't been used since World War II, and his cousin Tom knew a master mechanic who worked over here and could put them back into shape. We wound up with the Navy giving us this ship, transporting it across the ocean.

Q: From the Pacific?

JOHNSON: From the Pacific to Djibouti and we paid for the technical assistance for training a maintenance crew that could keep it going, and would you believe got a ferry boat. I had a bet going with the Desk Officer and the USAID Affairs Officer that they'd never be able to put all of the pieces together, because it was such a crazy idea. The Desk Officer had bits and pieces of funding coming in from all sorts of weird places. So, I had a bet going with them that if they could ever show me a photograph of that ferry boat working, I'd take them both out to dinner. The ferry boat lasted for two months. They had a huge hurricane which damaged the port, damaged the ferry boat, they needed parts that were no longer made. They did rig something that worked for awhile, but then they warehoused it and put it up. They should have put it up in the museum. But, it was the most popular thing we ever did in Djibouti.

Q: As I recall it was called the "Bac du Paix" and later the Germans built them a ferry boat.

JOHNSON: Right. Actually, as I recall, I think ours was supposed to be an interim solution anyway.

Q: Interesting, interesting project.

JOHNSON: It was a project that didn't fit any of USAID's requirements or regulations. In the old sense, it was a commodity drop and that it didn't fit in to any grand scheme of transportation, or urban employment, or anything else. But, it also probably fit in to the kind of thing I was talking about that Hunter did with the early emergency Humanitarian Program. You know, you buy the 18 trucks, you put the trucks in there, and then when t he grain comes on the train you get trucks to load it into. It was an immediate stop-gap kind of thing; made as much sense as anything else we had come up with really.

Q: So, what else did you do in Djibouti?

JOHNSON: Not much. I can't recall anything else. Nobody ever did any energy projects.

Q: On the Geothermal Project?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: Okay. Anything else on Djibouti at this point? How about the government? Did you have any sense of what kind of a government it was, the people you worked with?

JOHNSON: Essentially, it was the French. The French still ran that country. They were shadow advisors in a sense that they were people there to the manage the country.

Q: I see. Did we have a mission out there?

JOHNSON: We had an USAID Affairs Office. I think it was a two person office. They struggled almightily to find sensible things to do. And, they were fairly creative; watching the cable traffic and seeing what bits and pieces, things they could volunteer for. From Science and Technology Bureau, and Office of International Training, and Africa Regional projects. There was probably an assortment or a collage of projects. They certainly didn't get any encouragement from me.

When I started as the Director for the Office of East Africa, our major program was in Kenya. To a secondary degree, the East Africa community operated out of Arusha as a regional program, which had membership of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. We were not in Uganda at all, because of Idi Amin and our relations with Tanzania was just a roller coaster.

They would go up, go down, go up, go down, because the political issues; it's wrong to even call it political contractions. It's just that Tanzania was so vocal about the positions that the non-align countries took, that it frequently became the lightning rod. The U.S. was unhappy about the non-align nations and the Tanzanians became a lightning rod, simply because they were the ones who vocalized it or staked out the position. Tanzania and Kenya were also favorites of the academic community to do comparative research, because they took such different tracks for development and nationhood after independence from the British.

So, there were a lot of academic types of studies talking about what choices each country made and how those choices turned out. The one I remember most vividly is in Tanzania, the country made the decision that if you were a civil servant, that was a full time job and you could not do anything else and thereby tried to avoid conflict of interest. In Kenya, they decided that you could be a civil servant and you could also be an entrepreneur, you could be on the Board of various marketing groups. They saw no conflicts of interests between being the head of the Agency that wrote the regulations for marketing of corn and being the head of the Board that ran the marketing of corn, and also owning several storage places where you store corn. The most valid point that I always thought that they made was that when you looked at it, you had private sector strength in Kenya. Whereas, in Tanzania most of your educated Tanzanians went into the Civil Service and never became part of a private enterprise community. So, you just had a more dynamic private sector in Kenya which then carried with it all the problems of conflict of interests, corruption, misuse of influence, and nepotism. Tanzania was more idealistic and tried to keep the two separate, but then it also had the problem of you didn't have any people who saw a future in the private sector, that the future was to go to work for the government.

Q: Were they free of corruption?

JOHNSON: I don't know. As far as an outsider could tell. I think we never really knew how much; I think they were free of monetary corruption. I don't think they were free of the family ties, find a job for your nephew who finds a job for your daughter, sort of interlocking directive of people. I think that was a problem in Tanzania. I think on the whole, Tanzania's service and industries worked. After 10 years of working in West Africa and Central West Africa, I went to work on Tanzania and I went out on my first TDY to meet the USAID mission, talk to the government, get a feel for it. I was staying with some friends and the power went out. They called up Tanzania Electrical Company who sent out some people, they fixed the power and we went on our way, like two hours. It was like being in Northern Virginia and calling PEPCO. That really surprised me. I had absolutely no concept that anywhere in Africa did that happen. I was so use to the power going out in West Africa and, well first of all, nobody had a telephone, so you really couldn't call in that you had a problem; and secondly, even if you called in it would be, well we'll get it to you as soon as we can, which could be two or three days. So, I was impressed on my first trip out there that a lot of the Tanzanian institutions worked.

Q: This would be in what year?

JOHNSON: This would be in '77, '78, somewhere in there. Kenyatta was still in charge in Kenya. Idi Amin was in charge in Uganda, and Julius Nyerere was in charge in Tanzania.

There's another subject that academic papers were being written on at the time: in the countries where the group that was in control at independence had stayed in control and had developed some continuity of government that regardless where you had placed them on an absolute scale of one to ten, the ones with continuity always scored better than the ones that had had multi-governing elites. Coming from West Africa, Ghana where they had a change every other year for awhile there, I was impressed by the continuity and stability that you had in East Africa. And, that you had not only in terms of the government, but in terms of the USAID missions where you had had an USAID mission there for years that was well trained, with well developed local staff, had good contacts throughout the government and seemed to have a better dialogue going on projects and problem projects. Especially in Tanzania, I got the feeling that the Tanzanians were very much an equal partner in trying to figure out how to make the projects work. We were working with mainly agricultural projects with the combination of farming, extension services, and trying to get better soil practices and more efficient use of the land. Also, working with livestock projects in trying to move the Masai into a marketing system as opposed to the nomadic herding. It didn't succeed by the way. That was another livestock project that didn't quite work out.

But, you had much more of a commonality of interests between the Embassy and the USAID office and the donors and the Tanzanians in agreeing what problem you were trying to solve. Everybody had a different idea of how you solve it, but they did have agreement on the problems they solved. Tanzania was also a favorite of the Scandinavian countries who felt that Tanzania was one of the few African countries which was sort of a mirror image of some of the idealism of the Scandinavian countries in how they set their economies, how they handled people, and so the Scandinavian donors were very active there.

Nyerere had initially set off the country on a very strong community villagization track where instead of the profit being a motive that motivated individuals, the community as a whole was the motivation. And, then undertook ten years after his original Arusha Declaration, undertook an analysis of what had worked and what hadn't worked.. That's one of the remarkable development documents, I think in the world, in which there is a frankness of being able to analysis the situation and being honest about, here's where I thought we were going in the original Arusha Declaration. Here's what worked and didn't work and here's how I think we ought to change. I don't think Nyerere ever got as much credit in the donor community as he deserved in terms of being somebody who would work on identifying a common problem and work on the solution.

I remember one of the things when I was in a meeting with him, I think it was Golar Butcher had come out and had a meeting with him and I sort of tagged along. He got into this discussion of the fact that capitalism and socialism had absolutely nothing to do with whether or not you made a profit. Under both systems your enterprises should make a profit. That, the difference came in how you chose to spend the profit and that in a capitalist system the profit went to individuals, in the socialists system the profit would go to improve health, education, general services. But, in any case you had to make a profit to begin with, because you couldn't get anywhere and so he really did try, I think to make the different institutions work.

Q: But, there are those who concluded that he had run the economy into the ground and all the institutions became inoperable. Then there came the realization that the villagization policy had turned into a forced resettlement process and therefore, the original motivation and concept was not valid.

JOHNSON: Except, that he himself recognized that and the Arusha review revisited the Declaration, you know, well the process. Unlike West Africa where people were settled in villages. East Africa was much more a matter of individual farm holdings. Nyerere wrote at independence, he would do two things.

One of the first things he wrote at independence was to declare that land could not be held by individuals, so there was no land ownership. People couldn't own their land, because he was afraid that they would sell it off to Europeans or could not be trusted. The reason in back of that, the stated reason was, that he was concerned that if people owned their land they would sell it and it would thus, thereby primarily sell it to expatriates, non-Tanzanians, but would even sell it to rich Tanzanians, thereby in creating a class of rich Tanzanians versus low. Much of what we did in terms of policy studies was trying to get across the point that without some security and ownership you severely damaged your chances of getting farmers to take care of the property. To do all of the things that an equity ownership would lead you to do in making investments in the property, paying attention to the environmental impact of what you did, the range of things that went with land tenure.

What he also did was decide that people should live in villages. In some cases that became forced relocation, but if people were clustered in villages, it was easier to set up services, education services, health services, whatever, economic services, buying and selling. These would all be little nodes of development, which didn't work out. The villagization process probably had more support in the center of Tanzania, if you will, which is a very semi-arid land, moving out to higher rainfalls in the south and mountains in the north, or moving up to the mountains of the west. So, the people who were served on the periphery of Tanzania had a higher economic standard of life. They had better crops, their cows did better, etc. etc. They saw the least possible reason for moving into these concentrated settlement areas. People in the middle area, which was semi-arid land and was the most poverty stricken part of Tanzania, saw some virtue of moving into the villagization.

But, in the area we visited, which was nearly ten years after the criticism, Nyerere felt that the villagization had not been a normal part of life, which is how he originally had characterized it. That this was a true African style of living as opposed to an imported western style of living, and he basically said I was wrong. That, we had multi-styles of economic growth in family arrangements, and that trying to move everybody into one system hadn't worked and wouldn't work. The donors, who also came to that conclusion, never gave Nyerere credit for being that open to criticism of what essentially was his idea. And, that in terms of his own leadership, he really and truly did believe that things should work first, and then you'd decide that they wouldn't afterwards. Politically, however, the Tanzanians tended to be among the non-aligned nations, which was seen by the conservative U.S. as being supportive of Russia during the Cold War period. Tanzania, along with Yugoslavia; Tito became a very vocal spokesman for those who felt that the U.S. was doing things wrong. In many cases, I think it drove the political group in the States up the wall, because the so-called non aligned nations seldom, if ever, criticized Russia or what Russia was doing and was always criticizing the U.S. Nyerere's opinion was, that the Russians wouldn't listen to him. Why should I bother telling them what they're doing wrong, that the U.S. basically does listen, it's worthwhile, you know, criticizing.

Vern Johnson was the Mission Director out there for awhile and he was very concerned, but in agriculture, you simply weren't going to get any major breakthroughs in agriculture until you solved the energy problem. As long as people were limited to producing what they could plant, harvest, with human energy, you faced an absolute limit on how far you can go in the agriculture area. That's why he was interested in livestock projects, as well as agriculture. With using the livestock, it's a way of providing power and energy, you know, of getting plows introduced. The problem in Tanzania was that the preferred genetic breed of cattle was long-legged, thin shouldered cattle, which survived very well in a Tsetse fly infested, semi aired drought zone and you tried to turn those cattle into plow animals, but they simply lacked the stamina and the strength, plus they were using them in an agriculture zone, which usually meant you were using them in a tsetse fly zone. The two went together.

So, we had a lot of projects. We were looking at animal health, of trying to do animal breeding of seeing whether you could come up with cattle that could serve as farm animals, as opposed to the longer legged survivalist type. If you will, you can contrast it in the States with the Texas long horned cow, which basically walked their way to market and the Hereford cow, which were a beef cattle that walked from the feeding lot to the train to the butcher shop. Two totally different animals with different purposes, if you will. So in Tanzania they were doing some livestock breeding kinds of activities, working with a couple of American PVO's. The idea was that the Americans would donate a calf and help a farmer learn how to raise the calf, provided that the farmer then gave away the first calf that followed after it.

Q: Was it the heifer project?

JOHNSON: Yes, the Heifer project. Which again, I think as a capitalization scheme, it made eminent sense; as a practical scheme, it didn't work that well, because of the diseases. We could not get American cows strains acclimated with the kinds of disease resistance that they had without having a full time vet on call, you know, living right next to the heifer.

We also did some Tanzania Tsetse fly control projects. One of the more exotic projects was an attempt to irradiate flies so that they became sterile, working with ex-ray and uranium and various other assorted high tech kinds of approaches, which essentially the Tanzanians never really understood what we were doing. They would have much preferred that we took that money that we were spending on this high tech approach and help them with vaccinating cows and setting up dips so that you could dip the cows and that kind of thing. Although, we periodically did the program memorandum or the Development Assistance Program or whatever planning document was called, we tried to integrate the Tsetse fly project into the country program. It was really and truly a high tech project that just happened to be in Tanzania and, if it ever worked, Tanzania would benefit from it.

Q: Did it ever work?

JOHNSON: I don't think so. I never heard anything more about it after I worked for the East Africa, other than it was frequently used as an example of high tech projects that should not be undertaken. Nyles Brady (USAID Assistant Administrator for Science and Technology Bureau) liked it. He set up a series of projects, which essentially were carrying out research and it really didn't matter which country you were doing it in. There was no built in reason why it should be done there. In Kenya, for example, they were doing a goat project and the Kenyans wanted to do research on high altitude goats, because that's where they had most of their goats and that's where they wanted assistance. Brady kept trying to explain to them that the high altitude goat project was in Peru and that what they got was the low altitude goat project. Again, something that was probably needed, but it really shouldn't have been part of the country program, it just happened to be in country.

But, the host government really saw it as money being spent in their country. It was part of their USAID package and it should go to their priorities. Trying to explain to any of the people, in West Africa or East Africa, that, if a project is killed, that doesn't mean you get to use the same money for something else. They thought it was just not understandable the way the U.S. allocated funds and the way Congress allocated funds to USAID and USAID allocated funds within that. It was just a totally non-transparent process. Of course, they were concerned about the black box, that everything went in to and came out of and given their own backgrounds, I mean the Kenyans thought that it was probably a matter of who was getting paid off. The Tanzanians were paranoid about it they were sure it was all illogical.

Q: What other program did we have in Tanzania? Health and population?

JOHNSON: Had a primary health care project trying to set up a range of rural health posts, primary health care activities. The population program, I don't think was very active, other than as a component of the family planning project. There were agricultural education, as well as the Agricultural Extension projects.

Q: I think there were seed farms at that time. Do you remember that?

JOHNSON: I don't really remember the seed farms in Tanzania as much as I remember later in the Sahelian countries that we had set up seed farms. Now Brady again, head of USAID Science and Technology, was just absolutely totally upset, because he didn't feel that we'd had a breakthrough on the research side of seeds that really were worth replicating and multiplying and getting out to people and that more effort should have been put on research in terms of improved seeds, rather than the institutional growth of the seed farms and the seed multiplication unit. Again, it's a classic argument. You set up the delivery system so that if and when you ever have the breakthrough you've got a delivery system that can handle it, or do you put all of your money on a research project which may or may not pay off in terms of impacting on peoples lives.

The institutions built in the agricultural sector or in the health sector where people wanted to do the small pox eradication campaign, in which the donors made a concerted effort and managed to move in, vaccinate everyone and eradicate small pox and then they moved out. There was no real institutional infrastructure left behind them. They left their cars behind; they used their cars for five years out in the boondocks, and put the saddle back in the government and walked away. The government was like, what do I do with this car, it won't go anywhere. But, you had an impact. You saved peoples lives and to this day the small pox eradication campaign is the first example that comes to peoples minds when they want to write about USAID's successes.

In terms of immediate benefit, the next thing to be tackled would be measles. Measles needed a wholly different type of delivery system and a cold chain that kept the vaccine at a certain temperature and had all kinds of requirements. So, that you really didn't have a carry over benefit from the small pox campaign to the measles. If you'd picked polio you might have had more of an impact, because of the similarities and how you tackled it. Polio vaccine, I think is also a cold vaccine, isn't it? I don't know. Anyway, as far as I could tell, the small pox campaign in it itself did not create an institutional base that would be empowered or in better shape to work on the other communicable diseases. Under the New Directions philosophy, you had a lot of congressional criticism over efforts that were made to do institutional development, health, education, training of mid-wives, training of nurses, training of doctors.

Q: They were opposed to all of that?

JOHNSON: They were opposed to it.

Q: Why?

JOHNSON: One was working with ministries of health to improve the ministry of health's capacity to actually be a ministry. They felt those could go on for 20 to 30s years. They were black holes. When asked what they wanted to do, USAID said that we want to improve the ministry of health. Well, where's yours baseline data; where are you starting from; how would you know when you succeeded; are you going to keep on improving for the next 20 years without having any change in the health of the nation. So, they pushed to get out into the field with things that could make an immediate impact on peoples lives. And, a large part of that was in back of the rural health post push that a lot of countries undertook. Also, the recognition that when you went to those countries that had managed to get a statistical unit in their health ministries, the health ministry would wind up doing some type of statistical demographic survey as to what were the major problems, who suffered, where should certain services be located. The real health posts really were needed to handle broken legs, broken arms, you know, very non-technological types of things, but which took training and education on part of the staff. So, we had a major program in rural health. Again, it was something, it worked, as far as I was concerned, because it was something that the government also wanted. It was very much in keeping with a philosophy of trying to get services out to the rural areas. You had some very strong Tanzanians and Americans who worked on it.

Q: Was that the time when we had the interest in regional rural development initiatives in Tanzania?

JOHNSON: Tanzania took the lead on that. Contrast it with Sudan, where in Sudan the Sudanese almost threw up their hands at the plethora of donor options and choices and working arrangements, and asked each donor to take the lead in a sector. One would take the lead in health; one would take it in transportation; one would take it in irrigated agriculture. On the other hand, the Tanzanians threw up their hands at having so many donors there and having so many kinds of things going on and the difficulty they saw in trying to coordinate it. So, they asked the donors to basically adopt a geographic section of the country to take on rural development in, and they sort of identified the provinces and the types of areas that they wanted us in.

While I was working on Tanzania and the Mission Directors who were out there, I also would say 90 percent of the staff, felt that that was a mistake. They didn't want to concentrate only on integrated rural development in one section. They felt that their impact had been useful at a national level in working with the Minister of Agriculture and the agricultural institutions and the universities and training schools, that the Ag research needed to be done and the Ag. research project was what senior visitor came to Tanzania to see; they were taken out to the Ag. research unit. By '78, '79, all of the Americans had been pulled out and you had an all Tanzanian staff running the Ag. research unit and running it very well indeed. Periodically, we'd put some local currency proceeds into it. But, officially all donor support had stopped and it had kept going. It had government support; it had the resource base to continue to hire staff, pay staff, carry out its research. Most of the people in the mission felt very strongly that that was the kind of thing we should be doing was, helping to create national institutions which could then survive the donors leaving and carry on for the nation. Trying to do the geographic territory by territory development, might simplify coordination for the Tanzanians, but that it wasn't a very effective development approach.

Q: But what happened, what did we do?

JOHNSON: We tried to do both, as usual. At one point in there, catching Tanzania on the rising aid budget, we started up some area rural development projects in the certain provinces. They had major environmental aspect, as I recall. One of the reasons that the mission had gotten very interested in that particular approach, was you had a geographic area which was suffering from a lot of the problems that the Sahel suffered. The USAID Mission thought that if it could concentrate in that same area or zone, that they could solve problems there building on what was being learned in the Sahelian countries. At the same time, it was an area that was not apt to benefit from a national program, because it was the most poverty stricken area in Tanzania and the national program had a different set of agricultural program priorities.

Q: Which area was this?

JOHNSON: That I don't remember.

Q: I think the Arusha region was one region. I know that the central area was also of interest to the USAID Mission..

JOHNSON: Yes, it was the central semi-arid zone area, but I really don't remember the names. The Arusha area was an area that was the outreach aspect for several of the national programs in agriculture and health. And, it benefited from the period when the East Africa regional community was an effective institutional link between the three countries. And, as the three countries more and more went their own way, you had less effective, less capability in the East Africa regional community and eventually we closed it down. In my own opinion they tried to keep it ten years too long.

Q: This is the Arusha region?

JOHNSON: The Arusha, East Africa regional community, which was headquartered in Arusha.

Q: But, wouldn't it be a regional project, or just for Arusha too, wouldn't it, or did that come later?

JOHNSON: I don't remember much about it. I know we were active in Arusha, because a lot of the regional projects were up there and we had contacts up there.

Q: But, this one was focused on the region, but it must have come after your time.JOHNSON: The regional area development. It would have made sense, because the Tanzanians were very much moving in the direction of asking donors to focus on projects by region.

Q: But, our program continued all the time that you were working on Tanzania. Wasn't that where there were disruptions that came from political issues?

JOHNSON: I started working on East Africa when the Carter people came in and Golar Butcher was head of the Africa Bureau; she was very supportive of East Africa and Tanzania. You had some people in the State Department who periodically would get upset, but Golar and the National Security Council basically offered Tanzania protection for the four years Carter was in office. Budget and staffing started being cut when Reagan came in. Again, because Tanzania was seen as a lightning rod. I mean it was the prime example of the type of country which we shouldn't help, because it did not promote entrepreneurs and capitalism.

Q: Of course, it was a front line state and therefore, one the administration disapproved of.

JOHNSON: Again, for the State people it was important that they were one of the front line nations that helped support, helped organize and maintain pressure on the Republic of South Africa. They also offered sanctuaries to the Mozambique rebels who were fighting the Portuguese. Again, during the Carter four year period that was seen as a positive and when Reagan came in, it was one more check mark on the negative side.

Q: You were there during the Reagan?

JOHNSON: Yes, I was there for two years under Reagan.

Q: How did the program fare in the change of administrations?

JOHNSON: Sudan and Somalia went up in terms of budget and staff and general priority given to their issues. They were seen as being active in the whole Middle East contexts, more so than in the African contexts. Somalia was also seen as a place where we could, should show that American aid helps, whereas the Russian aid hadn't helped. Tanzania basically started getting cut and it was just whittled away. New projects that were submitted were never approved. One particular rural health project was, Tanzania had started with an integrated agricultural development process, which involved putting the local development group in charge of a considerable amount of money that they could then decide how they wanted to spend it, with the projects being on the level of a self-help kinds of project, 15, 20 thousand dollars. It was run by Development Alternatives. It was seen very much as experimental, both in terms of USAID rules and regulations, as well as experimental and how much authority it gave to the host country, rather than the donor deciding what would and wouldn't be done. The host government would decide and the activities would be small scale, which in terms of USAID, paperwork, accounting procedures is a nightmare, simply because its hard to keep track of every single nickel when you have 30s different pots that nickels are rolling into. It had proven to be extremely popular with the government of Tanzania. They liked the fact that it gave them spending authority over all kinds of little activities that could be done. There was an evaluation of the project. It was an audit really more than an evaluation. It said that you had some real problems with the way the money was being accounted for, where USAID wasn't following its own rules. It's background to the fact that the Mission came in with a major new health initiative and it hit Washington six months after Reagan took over. The health initiative had some substantial components that were set up along lines of the agriculture project, where the government would be in charge of deciding where the health money would go, what kinds of things it would pay for. Again, a 15, 20 thousand dollar cap so that we didn't get into building large hospitals like we did in Liberia. We made a presentation to the technical committees and everyone liked it. In the presentations, Frank Ruddy, who was the new Assistant Administrator for Africa under Reagan, turned it down flat.

Q: What was his objection?

JOHNSON: Frank Ruddy's objection primarily was Tanzania. His objection raised during the meeting was that he had been told that this was a very untested and experimental process and that he had doubts to whether or not we should carry it out. I remember the meeting, vividly. You had about 20 minutes of basic misunderstanding where the health technical people kept trying to say, this isn't an experimental process. What Frank was talking about was the small scale, capital, incremental, small funded, self-help sort of level, plus the audit that existed on the agricultural project, that raise issues. He felt it shouldn't be duplicated as a methodology under the health project. We sort of went from the discussion of the merits of the health project, to the merits of that particular kind of funding arrangement, and that all the things that the audit had turned up happened to be criticisms of USAID. They weren't criticizing the Tanzanian government, which had more than done its part in terms of trying to keep track of the money and where it was going. But, the project was killed. Other new projects that came in faced the same kinds of road blocks. So the program was fairly healthy for two or three years, just as a continuation of the things that were already started, but then gradually began to phase down and phase out.

Q: What about the program in Kenya?

JOHNSON: The program in Kenya was a strong program from the very beginning at independence. Kenya had been the center of agricultural marketing for the whole East Africa and had a lot of ex-patriots who stayed and became Kenyan citizens. You had a higher level of transportation infrastructure; you had a higher level of basic education. You had again, all of the things that people felt were needed as a basic foundation that would allow the Kenyans to really hit development and make major strides, But it didn't happen, partly because of local Kenyan politics where you got into so much nepotism and corruption. Partly due to the handicaps on USAID, due to the New Directions legislation that before a foundation or a development program really got built, we were suppose to disburse and be out in the rural communities. And, because we didn't have the infrastructure to where that mattered and because we had layered on top of that a host government - Kenyatta's - which was very much in favor of private enterprise. When it came to the agriculture sector, which we primarily went into, because that's the way the legislation read and we had the most money in agriculture. Kenyatta was not willing to undertake free marketing, so the farmers had to sell at the government price or to the government marketing board. Since the government marketing board seldom offered an incentive price, they either black marketed or just grew enough for subsistence.

Again, we did a lot in Kenya. We worked with a two year vocational school and that became a four year college. That was very much of an agriculture and mechanics arts college.

Q: Is this Edgerton College?

JOHNSON: Edgerton College, which is having lasting institutional impact and still exists. It still turns out that mid-level manpower that Kenya needed. But, it was not a popular project. Everybody tried to kill it every time it came up for funding.

Q: Why was that?

JOHNSON: It just seemed fuddy, duddy. There wasn't anything there that the donor had to do. It was something that was in the capacity of Kenya government to carry out without a donor and so why should a donor do it. Donors should pick off those things that are beyond the capacity of the government to do. It should be high tech things, introduction of the new technology, adapting American technology to a new situation. I think it went back to the early days of the USAID where there was a mentality that a donor should pay only for the foreign exchange costs and the host government would pick up all local costs. If a very worthwhile project like Edgerton, okay, we could build the buildings in a sense of brick and mortar approach. But, they were low tech buildings that could be maintained by the Kenyans. The teachers came out of the Kenyan system, everything was working fine and so, what are we doing here.

Q: Did we have technical staff there? Did we send people for training and all that?

JOHNSON: We had technical staff there with the new facilities, scholarships and fellowships. We encouraged Kenyans to go into that kind of agricultural set up, as opposed to going into working for the oil marketing board, or the textile marketing board and becoming rich. It was not a popular project.

Q: Well, you implied that they really didn't need all of that, so that it could have been done by the Kenyans?

JOHNSON: Well, we always defeated the argument. We always kept it alive. We kept it going through one more generation or one more phase two. It was interesting, because it was a project that worked. It was a project that met a very strong need and the Kenyan government liked it and the Kenyan government did what they could to support it. But, it wasn't seen as innovative; it wasn't seen as unique. The U.S, as a major donor, should go for the cutting edge kind of program. But, like I said, we always managed to defend it, we finished phase two. In terms of projects, it had a lasting impact. I would put Edgerton College out there.

Q: What other projects did you observe in Kenya?

JOHNSON: We had a major rural roads project, road infrastructure where the emphasis of the project was on training Kenyans on how to build and maintain rural roads, rather than us just buying bulldozers and going in and putting a road in, which I think worked fairly well. I think maintenance of the roads suffered as the Kenyan government budget got in to trouble, maintenance on the roads was one of the first things that could be cut. But, I think in many ways we succeeded in doing what we sat out to do and did leave behind the capacity which the Kenyan government hadn't had before to put in rural roads that were appropriate to whatever the local engineering situation was.

We had a major family planning program in Kenya, because at that point, Kenya had the highest population growth rate of any where in Africa. I don't remember if it was in the world or not, but it was like the ideal family size was eight to ten. In order to have eight to ten children who survived, they'd go for 15 or 16 and they also had multi-marriages, so they could have one father with three, four or fives wives. You had a very strong cultural biases on having children as proof of your manhood and it added to the family strength and was a good thing as perceived by all your neighbors and peers. One point during the drought, the U.S. put in yellow corn, while the preferred corn in Kenya is white corn. We shipped yellow corn out as part of the emergency feeding program. The Kenyans, well I want to say that the Kenyans started it, but somebody started a rumor that the reason the corn was yellow was because we had infected it with drugs that would cause sterility and so, this was part of our hidden family planning program, that anyone who ate the yellow corn would therefore be sterile and not able to have more children. I think it was the guys, Kenyans who were growing white corn, personally, but it's the kind of rumor that once it got started you could never tell who started it or how far it had gone. But, we did a lot of family planning education activities in conjunction with health activities of trying to approach the problem that with better health families they could come to perceive the merits of having fewer children. Kenya also became, fighting ground is too strong to put it, but it was the area in which the different merits of how you approached family planning were argued very intensely and strongly, because Kenya happened to have such a high birth rate was seen as a problem, and so everyone was in with a solution. The main effort that we made there was in conjunction with health activities. That with improved health would come a recognition of smaller families and spacing of children as opposed to ceasing to have children. The education people who felt that they had statistical proof that the higher the education of the mother, the fewer children she had. That family planning should be approached in the context of education for women and getting more and more girls in to the school system. Essentially, it was four to six years of school that had had an impact, a statistically significant impact, but went up the more years in school they had. But, the basic education, four to six years did have a statistically significant impact.

You also had the people who felt that the best thing we could do for the Kenyans would be to subsidize the sale of condoms and other forms of contraceptives, because you had an unmet need. You had more Kenyans who wanted help in family planning than could be met because of local laws and/or availability of supply. And, that as long as the demand exceeded supply, we were best off just to put our money into just providing the commodities.

Kenya was a microcosm for the three approaches, for the arguments that were going on about population, demographics, family planning, you know, throughout the Agency and throughout the developing countries. We wound up with doing a little bit of each in Kenya. The idea was to try and maintain some sort of statistical data base. I don't know that that ever happened. I think that there was so many variables involved that they never had the data. Kenya's population growth rate has come down. The program made a major significant impact on the number of children desired and the number of children people had. Statistically, whether or not you could trace that to one of those three approaches, I don't know. I never saw convincing statistics. I think the education people managed to do a better job of selling their statistics in terms of also fitting into other initiatives that the Agency wanted to support for women in development, for human rights meaning equal education for everyone. So, we wound up with a very active program in Kenya in many different sectors.

Q: What was the U.S. political relationship? Didn't we have an Economic Support program (ESF) at that time?

JOHNSON: We had an economic support program.

Q: Why were we doing that?

JOHNSON: Primarily because of the Navy's use of Mombasa for port visits for various ships that came through.

Q: How much was it?

JOHNSON: It wasn't a very big program. Again, Kenya always managed to get big support in a sense of being a favorite of the donors. It was easier to work there; your infrastructure was better; there were a lot of reasons why people thought that development should happen in Kenya, because they didn't have problems that some of the other countries had; but they never managed to get their act together. Essentially, the Kenyan political process did not give priority to development, I guess is the best way to say it. The government had no qualms whatsoever about flim-flaming donors, making commitments to donors that they never intended to live up to or providing inaccurate data to donors in terms of what's the problem. Oh, well that's not a problem, because it's really minor. In fact, if they'd disclosed all the data, it was major. There was a World Bank Consultative Group (multi-donor group) that was probably one of the toughest groups of all the IBRD/CGs that I witnessed. The one in Kenya.

Q: You attended the meeting?

JOHNSON: Yes, I attended the meeting,

Q: What were the issues?

JOHNSON: The issues were primarily macro-economic. They would have a number of sector specific issues. There were a number of areas in which the World Bank was trying to raise funds among the donors. But, the World Bank also felt that unless the government of Kenya managed to solve some of their macro-economic problems, the donor funding for individual projects was simply going to waste. And, they took an extremely tough position with the Kenyan government on their incurring short and long term debt and on the games they played with the exchange rate, and the corruption that interfered with a lot of other policies that were supposed to be happening that weren't happening. I give a lot of credit to the IBRD. They managed raised enough funds. They were seen by the Kenyans as critical to the country's creditability. Among the donors, the Bank did work to try and raise money for things that the Kenyans felt were important. Enough to establish its own credentials while being critical of the Kenyan government. So, they were constantly walking this tight rope between: are you on the donor side or on the host government side, and what does it mean to be on somebody's side or not on somebody's side.

Q: Did that have any impact on policy?

JOHNSON: Short term. You always felt that it did. You always felt that there was just enough progress to warrant hanging in there, that they're going to turn the corner, they're going to do it, And I think that was probably, well this was '77 through '81, '82. (Then I ceased working on Kenya; on those two East Africa countries and moved to Africa Development Planning Office.)

Q: What were the major issues in Kenya at that time?

JOHNSON: The impact of population on natural resources; The government was to provide the education, the jobs that would be required if you carried out population projections, agriculture, both working with the Edgerton College in terms of training for Agricultural Extension Agents, working with administrative education in trying to get the Extension Agents to have a story to tell so he (Kenyatta) actually had something he could offer to the people. The rural roads project.

Q: What did we use the economic support funds for?

JOHNSON: We tried to get the government of Kenya to put the brakes on its own monetary policy in order to come up with a structured enough budget that it would reassure donors to then go to a debt rescheduling, which would allow the Kenyans to get out of the position of owing so much money in short and long term debt that they simply didn't have any foreign exchanges to go for anything that was needed. And, the Kenyans tendency to use what foreign exchange they did have for more or less the luxury market things.

Q: What did we spend it (economic support funds) on?

JOHNSON: We spent it mainly on transportation equipment to back up the rural roads program. I don't really recall that the mission was that active in terms of the macro-economic problem. This was a period when the New Directions was insisting that we should leave all of that to the IMF and the IBRD that the U.S. didn't need to worry about that, that we could worry about replicating things that were having impacts upon peoples lives.

Q: Is there more on that period in your career that you'd like to touch on at this point?

JOHNSON: I think we got it.

In the middle of this time period was when the Tanzanian army started moving against Uganda, the Idi Amin being thrown out and Obote taking over. Their automatic assumption was that we would start up an aid program. It was just inconceivable to them that we wouldn't start one. The question is, whether we would go in with an attempt to reestablish Uganda institutions, which was what most donors, most academics, most people familiar with the scene felt that was the first step. Uganda had had some of the best functioning institutions in Africa and that what we needed to do was go back and put the ministries back together, put the schools back together, etc. etc. And, those who felt that under the New Directions philosophy we should by-pass all of that and go directly to programs that would improve the daily life of people. You had really strong restrictions from the State Department; they didn't want Americans wandering around the country. They didn't want a big USAID office, in fact, they didn't want an USAID office at all. They didn't understand why the Regional Office in Nairobi couldn't handle Uganda by flying up periodically. The USAID initially sent in one person and sent in a second person, a third person and it was like pulling teeth to get each one approved to go in. Part of the trouble in terms of putting American people in was that it was an extremely high crime area. (Craig Buck was our Acting USAID Affairs Officer.) We've got people out there who became a Mission Director. Craig lost three to four cars where people would just set up a road block and then when somebody stopped they would steal a car. And, our State instructions were don't argue with them. They think guns and bullets, you don't. If they want the car, get out of the car and let them have it. He lost three cars, you know, a brand new, land rover; a Toyota that we were shipping in. So, finally he went down to Nairobi to pick up his fourth car and he parked it in the parking lot in Nairobi and then it was stolen from the parking lot in Nairobi.

Q: All the cars?

First, technical assistance in terms of the people we provided; secondly, staffing on the Ugandan side. I mean there's an assumption that the educated Ugandan class had been wiped out, and to a remarkable degree they hadn't been. They'd gone into hiding, but as the situation stabilized they started coming out from the boondocks where they'd been on Uncle Joe's third wife's farm. And, to some extent they had been refugees throughout the world and they returned home. We had more of an educated class to work with than we thought in our original planning documents.

The most effective program, I think during the early days was a project worked out by the people at REDSO, where we had imported steel. We had a Commodity Import Program, ESF. It was tied in to polices about what the government did in terms of establishing a foreign exchange policy and re-instituting monetary control. Primarily, REDSO was worried about the tendency for everything to be stolen. Anything that came in, in terms of small portable objects, developed legs and walked off. But, if we brought in this huge quantity of steel, we could be reasonably assured that the steel would get from Nairobi to Uganda to the processing plant. At the processing plant it was turned in to agricultural implements, small hand tools, which unfortunately also included machetes, which were one of the chief weapons of the law and order fight.

Pat Fleuret who was at REDSO at that time, went up to Uganda, worked with a series of farmers coops that had managed to survive Idi Amin. They hadn't done very much, but the structure was still there. And, if you said, is there a coop in town, they'd say, yeah, yeah, Sam's in charge of it. So, we worked with the coop structure on a distribution system that the coops would receive the implements directly at the factory. That meant that there was less than a chance of the implements going into a merchandising chain where they'd be pulled off for other uses. That worked real well. We did it for about three or four years. Now when I think of it again, I give full credit to the REDSO people for devising it. It was very responsive to the situation and it helped us do what the New Directions were pushing in terms of getting out to people. So, it worked really well. Actually, before we leave East Africa as a whole, I guess I'd like to comment on REDSO. It's a Regional Office in Nairobi, made up of a combination of private sector officers, anthropologists, engineers, and other specialists.

Q: Sector specialists?

JOHNSON: Some Sector Specialists, they had a Senior Agie; they had a Senior Environmentalist, Anthropologists, no problems. No mission had anthropologists. So, they'd ask for the anthropologists to come, you didn't step on anybody's feet, you didn't have to worry about him giving any one recommendation headed east, while the local guy gave one and headed west. Agies, if we had a program at all, we'd have an agie in the country. It was a more diplomatically, difficult to call in the Senior Agie to serve as backup and support for your agriculture program, because the local guy didn't like anybody looking over his shoulder, etc. etc. etc. As a whole, the REDSO Staff were extremely good, and from my point of view, as Director of East Africa, there wasn't absolutely no substitute for excess staff capacity which could be called on to lend a hand in Sudan. We couldn't get our people into Sudan and they filled in the gap. When in Somali, they filled in until we could get people there. In Uganda they stayed with us. Even while the situation was so bad and the State Department didn't want to allow Americans into the country, they would allow the REDSO people to travel in and out. They had full time jobs. They had to justify their existence in terms of budget, OE and staffing, on the basis of existing programs and what they did. But, they always managed to have an excess capacity that we could pull on as we started up programs, just one after the other.

The USAID Personnel System was so slow in responding and the State Department was such an incredible bottleneck; to this day I don't think they really understand why you need USAID people to run an aid program. They honestly believe that you don't need anybody or that you can do it with Embassy people. Later in my life, when I worked on Eastern Europe and Russia, it was the most difficult. At least in Africa and Asia, you could work with Ambassadors and they - Embassy or Econ Officers - would gradually learn what USAID people do by being in a country with USAID. So, by the time two or three rotations passed, they were much easier to work with. As the people who'd never worked with USAID before and when they had had no experience with aid, they honestly saw no need to have anybody there. And, that's what you faced in Sudan, because they had no aid program ongoing, so the Embassy didn't understand why we needed to start one. Not a program but we needed to start a program. They didn't understand why we needed to start USAID staff or have USAID people in country in order to do it. Same was true in Somali and Uganda.

Q: Good, okay. That's a good wrap up on that part of it. You left there in what year?

JOHNSON: It was '82 I think. Basically, I was having fun. I always thought it was a job of a lifetime that you couldn't ask for a more interesting cast of characters to work with and had no intentions whatsoever of leaving it. So, I did try to go in to the Foreign Service and once again got turned down.. But, basically I liked East Africa.

Q: The program grew a lot during that time you were there?

JOHNSON: The program grew exceedingly. Not only in terms of added countries, but the country levels went up. We had a East Africa contingency fund in Ethiopia where we carried 23 million dollars for Ethiopian projects that the government would never sign and we never started them, so I would reprogram it to my other countries. Why Africa DP ever let me do it, I don't know, but I use to call it my contingency fund. I kept telling him look, if Ethiopia, Somali will come across and Uganda will come across, we will have a need for it. We were running fairly complicated programs in ESF (Supporting Assistance), which was working on some macro economic problems, although generally, Congress was trying to get us to stay away from that and to work with the IMF, let the IMF or IBRD were handle it. Capital projects, technical assistance projects, relief and rehab projects. Congress set up short term relief and rehab funding category, which said, not withstanding any other provision of law, you can use as a means of trying to work on the Somali/ Ethiopia, Ogaden Desert dispute that was going on. We were making the argument, again that we made in Sahel, that it was not a case of political refugees; it was not a case of natural disaster that started and stopped like a tidal wave or a volcano. The one we had was an environmental disaster, complicated by Civil War, what amounted to Civil War, although it was between two countries, and that none of the funding categories that then existed, really let us do what we wanted to do, and so Congress came across with a special legislation that let us work on that part of Africa. We probably still saw it in too short of a time frame, given later events.

Q: This came after you left though? On the Horn of Africa program?

JOHNSON: No. We had a Horn of Africa program that died and then they, that's what I was saying, that we probably stopped it too soon in light of the fact that in '93, '94, they started up a Horn of Africa program again.

Q: What was the objective of the initial Horn of Africa program?

JOHNSON: Initially, the Africa Relief Program really related to the Ugandan warfare and the fact of what was going on in cross border problems with the Somalians fighting the Ethiopians and the refugees coming out of the Ugandan. Some of the refugees went to Kenya, some went to Sudan, some went to Djibouti. It was just a mishmash of where you had very poor facilities.

Q: Otherwise refugee programming?

JOHNSON: It was refugee programming, but it was not official; previously refugee programming was handled by the State Department and they ran official refugee programs. They didn't do, I mean you had UNHCR (?) that had a camp and that ran a camp. We argued that what you needed in the whole Horn of Africa was ways to actually relocate people and start them off in an agricultural self-sufficient substance basis. You didn't need the typical State Department VISA, political refugee team of effort, nor UNDP type of UN Humanitarian Relief where you kept everybody encamped. So, they set up a separate fund that let us do a lot of agricultural resettlement activities.

Q: In various countries?

JOHNSON: In various countries across borders.

Q: What scale are we talking about?

JOHNSON: I think we're talking about 50s million dollars.

Q: How many refugees?

JOHNSON: Then it went up to one hundred million dollars. I don't remember the number of refugees.

Q: But the number was in all?

JOHNSON: I don't know, we never had a good count, tell you the truth. The problem was, that everything was so mixed together. What we were trying to do was to relocate the refugees into agricultural areas, making sure that refugees got permission to resettle on the land, which was fairly easy, given the fact that now the governments were talking to each other. They were fairly relaxed about letting agriculture settlement areas be established. We provided seeds so that they could plant; small scale implements to have something to plant with; worked on a couple of crop production activities, so they could managed to get beyond subsistence where a marketing system would make sense. But, we were just working to make them self-sufficient.

Q: What was the year for this activity?

JOHNSON: '78 to '80s. You know, at best it was 20-20 hindsight, which actually was 20-24 foresight, Princeton Lyman argued that we ought to set up a Horn of African development plan. He tried to promote a ten year billion dollar effort for a development plan, which would pull the Ethiopians and the Somalis and the Kenyans in together. He never really got a hearing, so I don't know, about giving it another try now. In retrospect if you had started earlier, you might have avoided some of the greater Horn of Africa problems with the initiatives that people are working on today. And again, you may not. But, so much of the politics in that area were things we didn't pay enough attention to. We went back into Sudan. We pulled out all of the old aid projects papers from the Annex in St. Louis; we had them shipped in; we contacted all of the old USAID officers that we could find that use to work in the Sudan and had them go out to on TDY and help get things started. In Somali we did the same with the old aid program. We also pulled in the Peace Corp volunteers who turned out to be extremely active coherent group that wanted to get involved, wanted to help Somalia, and so we used them a lot. In Uganda, we used the USAID employees, volunteers, and Ugandans who flooded the country, and pulled them in. In spite of that, I don't think we knew enough about the countries. We just simply didn't have the depth of knowledge which could have been used in selecting or tweaking, you know, let's not worry about this problem right now, because we really ought to worry about this other problem, because these issues are going to hit ten years down the road and we really need to be ready for them. We didn't deal in this skill; we didn't even think in those terms, except for isolated people like Princeton Lyman, you really did try.

Q: Were there any other donors interested at that time?

JOHNSON: No. Princeton tried to get the Bank interested in it to be the coordinator and could work with the Ethiopians where the U.S. might not have been able. At that point, the Bank and Ethiopians weren't getting along either. Again, at the technocratic level people were getting into Ethiopia and the government people that talked the same language, but when they got to the political level, it was just a total wall.

Q: Okay. Very good. Let's move on to your role in DP after you left East Africa; what time was that?

JOHNSON: Probably about '82, I think was when I moved. Reagan was elected in '80s. When was the Reagan election, '80s. Carter was '76 through '80s and then Reagan was elected and came in '81. In '81 and '82 I was in East Africa. Frank Ruddy had taken over as head of the Africa Bureau. He wanted to reorganize the bureau and he came up with the idea of having three Deputy Administrators. One, who would be the Senior Deputy and who would handle the central staff offices, like DP, Development Resources (DR), and the Executive Management Services; then a Deputy for East Africa; and a Deputy for West Africa. I yelled my head off that that was a bad system and it wasn't going to work, and I didn't like, etc. etc. etc. and got absolutely nowhere, other than Ruddy (people felt strongly about Frank Ruddy and he eventually ended up being fired by McPherson.) But, mostly he was extremely decent toward me. We connected, one day I followed his car into the State Department basement parking lot and it was this old family station wagon and had this huge bumper sticker, saying "nuke the whales." Whereas, everybody else's bumper sticker said, "save the whales." I have to say he had a sense of humor and I could work with anybody who had a sense of humor.

Q: He was also a fellow Texan?

JOHNSON: Yes, he was also a fellow Texan. One of our very first conversations that we had was, he called me in to his front office and said that he had been at the White House during the Nixon years. He had been Coordinator of Public Information or something. He worked with USIA and Voice of America and things like that. He had not gotten involved in Watergate, but he had seen how easily people did get sucked into that whole system, both of what happened originally and the cover up afterwards. And, that he felt very strongly that career people should not be asked to participate in political shenanigans. He wanted me to know that if I ever felt that something like that was happening, to come talk to him immediately about it and that it wouldn't in no way effect my standing with him and he would make sure that I didn't get sucked into something that I shouldn't get sucked into. I never quite figured out what he had in mind in terms of shenanigans, because I always felt that I worked for an honest organization. I mean, as a cultural thing. There were occasions where something would happen, but you felt like you worked in an honest organization and people were straight forward. But, I remember Frank being very worried about the fact that he didn't want to see career people get caught up in political shenanigans. He was most conservative. Of all the bosses I've ever worked for he was the most conservative. During the two years that I was in East Africa when he was in charge, we had an mounting drought problem. We already had pulled out of Ethiopia in our bilateral relations under Golar Butcher, but we had a mounting emergency in Ethiopia and feeding program and Frank found a reason to keep turning them down. Every time the PI 480 people would send something over entitled emergency feeding, he'd turn them down.

Q: Why?

JOHNSON: Because, he asked questions that people couldn't give him a hundred percent assurance. Would the food reach the people who truly needed it, or would it go to the military. Would the military rip it off as it came in the port. Yeah, sometimes it did. There was a constant day to day fight to make sure that the food got to starving needy people. We couldn't guarantee it and we basically pushed. If we couldn't guarantee it getting through, then we shouldn't provide it. An underlying view was that Ethiopia brought it on itself, it's own failed agricultural policies and it should suffer from the policies that are failing. There was an extraordinary reaction from the private volunteer organization community.

Q: Ethiopia was in the communist camp?

JOHNSON: Oh at that point, yeah, totally. Their policies had failed and it was very much in the Soviet camp in terms of Cold War clients. So the Soviets should supply its clients aid. Major letter writing grass roots organizational effort by American and Private Volunteer Organizations, led to the to the turn around and we ended up with a fairly large disaster relief program going both into Ethiopia proper and going into the Sudan and across the border in to Uganda .

Q: What other evidence was there of the conservative policy, at that time, with the Reagan Administration?

JOHNSON: Reagan was very much of an ideologue you know, testing should we or should we not do something. The first litmus test would be ideological. Either it's a country that the U.S. had a partnership with. Be it a military partnership, be it a sound voting partner in the U.N., good relations with the American business community. What was the reason why we were helping the country. I think I mentioned during Carter years when Golar Butcher was in charge of the Bureau, you made a case as to why you shouldn't assist the country; we served Sudan, Somali, Uganda, Djibouti. We also started up programs in Seychelles, Comoros, and Reunion, Mauritius, for the four Indian Ocean Islands. It was: "prove why you are not there." Make a case that the government is so corrupt that you can't work with it, there's no hope, but you can't cut an avenue around the government and work through a PVO, what have you.

When Frank came in, it was much more of make a case as to why we are there. He was much harder on: we should be helping fewer countries and we should help those countries that help the U.S., be it they help the U.S. through commercial activities and U.S. business types, or they help the U.S. in military agreements, military support, what have you. The Tanzania budget started going down all of a sudden. Seychelles and Comoros, I think wound up with a one million dollar ESF Assistance Program, primarily because Princeton Lyman was over in the State Department at that point and he managed to shave off a million here and a million there for the islands. Sudan became a far greater candidate for military assistance than for economic development assistance. Ethiopia, other than the emergency food programs, we simply didn't work there. I think, Frank did an ideological test, first, as to whether we should be there in terms of what policies the host government was following. He did a U.S. friends and allies type of test as to our overall political relationship; and he did a third test as to what the government was doing to help itself and then what should the U.S. do or could do. The consequence: he was much tougher on asking about project effectiveness, yeah. Can you guarantee that this project will work? No, no guarantees. We wound up doing a lot more through PVOs and Non-Governmental Organizations in order to avoid going through government channels which he felt was a mistake and we shouldn't do that.

Q: What was your view about all of that since you were in Africa Development Planning Office (DP) where a lot of that had to be built into program decisions?

JOHNSON: I asked, after Frank made the decision that he wanted to have three Deputies and split East Africa and West Africa, to consider me for the DP job, because I really didn't want to work under that kind of bifurcated arrangement. He said, sure and he moved me up to DP. Africa DP had two or three economists at that time with John Wilhelm being the chief economist. John was very much a classical economist. If you get the economic policies right, everything else will fall in place, and we couldn't been happier than writing speeches and position papers for Ruddy. Elliott Berg has just come out with his major study for the World Bank, showing that the African countries had simply declined since independence, even in terms of their primary commodity crops. They'd gotten less value out of them than ten years before and he was making a major push for private sector capitalism, entrepreneurship in Africa. And, Wilhelm very much agreed with that and we was more than happy to write position papers and briefing papers and any kind of staff economic work. But, the worst countries, the U.S. should pull out of with that as our litmus test for countries. When Frank would go to New York or to a Consultative Group for a speech, he'd write very hard hitting, you know, the private sector is the answer.

In the meantime, the Sector Chiefs down in Development Resources for agriculture, health, nutrition, population, were writing sector base speeches. Whenever Frank had to go to an agricultural meeting, the agies would write him a speech, which was all on government services and extension services and education. He had two different policies being carried out in the Bureau. If you looked at the speeches written by Wilhelm, from an economist point of view, and the speeches written out of DR, from a technical sector specialist, reflecting what programs we were doing. So, I felt that my first job in DP was to try and get some coherence so that you had a policy that everybody in the African Bureau knew who you were following and where the money went, the money decisions reflected the policy decisions. This was the first two years I was in DP.

Q: You were head of DP weren't you?

JOHNSON: I was head of Africa DP. I was an Office Director. During that same two year term period, McPherson who was the new Administrator for USAID, wanted each of the Regional Bureaus to write a strategy for the whole Bureau. We had two initial attempts, or two initial drafts, one produced by the sector people, which went that way, and one produced by Wilhelm, which went that way, and so I flunked the first test of delegation of authority as a new Office Director. So, I spent a considerable amount of personal time writing a strategic plan for Africa. Instead of saying this is what we will do, I turned it around and said, here are the ten questions that will have to be answered or addressed in the next ten years in Africa. Here are the ten trends of things that happened that host governments and donors need to be able to have a handle on. And, do that without trying to pre-judge which of those ten would be more important in any given country.

Q: What are the ten?

JOHNSON: Population and environment were two of the big ones. Political disputes over borders, which had been an issue since independence, although everyone agreed that the colonial border lines were totally arbitrary and bore no radical resemblance either to African history or ethnic groupings or infrastructure or anything else. Basically, the African countries headed by the Julius Nyerere, said don't touch them. Whatever they are, leave them as they are, because to try and begin that process of working around borders, they saw it as turning the entire continent into military warfare. And, that was beginning to come on the horizon again, that that whole question of political borders, military incursions, civil wars, it was clearest in East Africa, in the Horn of Africa. Rwanda and Burundi hadn't exploded yet. Mozambique was still trying to become independent and you had a guerilla warfare going on there. You had all the problems in Southern Africa. You had Angola, Namibia, and that was one area that would significantly shape the direction Africa went. My answer to that was work with the regional organizations. That if the countries involved had formed regional organizations, a regional organization that USAID formed; if the countries would come together and say, let's work together on this range of problems, then we should support that, because it represented the best chance of heading off the military guerilla war. Unfortunately, there were very few of those kinds of regional organizations. Most of the regional organizations were poorly set up and I was very negative about them. I thought they did some good, but in the short run they siphoned off talent that could be better put to use in the host countries. The regional organizations paid higher salaries; you get to travel more; you got to be in and out of Europe more; it's a more prestigious job.

Q: What are some of your other points here of your ten?

JOHNSON: I'd have to go back and look. I can't remember the top three.

Q: Well, maybe you can add them later. It's very important.

JOHNSON: I don't even have a copy of the paper I don't think. anyone turned one into CDIE. I'll try CDIE and see.

Q: Well, if you can find one that would be good. You can attach it as an annex, because it's a basic document.

JOHNSON: Yes. It was approved.

Q: How did you deal with the public private sector and those issues that were so important?

JOHNSON: Basically went all gung-ho private sector. Saw no reason to raise my head for the government.... The question is institutional growth that unless you found employment in the private sector that you were facing economic implosion. Governments had employed as many people as they could; they couldn't meet the government payroll; they couldn't raise revenues; there wasn't anything to tax to raise the revenues to pay the payroll; and they simply were dysfunctional. I didn't have any illogical or physiological hang-ups that pin it all on this one and let's work on the private sector for awhile. I thought Elliott Berg's paper was just an enormously effective paper of taking and marshaling the data to support an argument. Africans hated it, almost every African that I talked to. It condemned Africa to being a source of primary commodities that they would continue to be the raw materials business and the developed world would pull the raw materials out of Africa for developed nations.

Q: Was that Berg's line? Is that what you are saying?

JOHNSON: No, it's not Berg's line at all. What he was saying was that in terms of producing raw materials, they had lost benefits even that. That their government receipts or their export earnings or whatever test you wanted to apply, they were making less off of that sector than they had at independence. And, that yes in the long run for development purposes it would make sense to have more production done in country. But, right now, today what you don't want to do is lose what you've already got. And, somehow the African countries felt that by putting the emphasis on trying to maintain their raw materials, he was condemning them to always be a raw materials provider. That's not what he had in mind and that's not what was happening. You're familiar with the example in Ghana where the Kaiser, the USAID (and the World Bank, ed) put in a dam across the Volta River. The dam generated electrical power that the Kaiser Aluminum Company used for an aluminum processing plant, because it is a vast consumer of electrical power. And, they shipped bauxite from Jamaica to the plant to be processed and reexported. The Ghanians had bauxite deposits about 80s miles up country that Kaiser Aluminum kept saying, it's too expensive to get there; there's dubious quality after we get there; there's no railroads; there's no transport, and so they imported from Jamaica. The Ghanaians never did understand why they were sitting there with an aluminum processing plant that processed bauxite and they had bauxite and they wouldn't use Ghanaian bauxite.

The Berg report essentially focused on maximizing what you could get out of the raw materials. To too many Africans, I think it seemed like that it was advocating a dead end. That the African countries will also be a raw material source. Larry Saiers (USAID Africa Bureau Deputy Assistant AA , ed.), who was an absolutely tremendously effective economist. He knew how to put economic arguments in plain English. I came in and was Deputy in Africa DP and Larry was just super-successful in getting people to understand the differences between Asia and Africa and why Asia had industrialized so fast and Africa hadn't. The only example I really remember, I can't recreate his argument, you'll have to interview him. But, the low labor rates in the Asian countries allowed manufacturing companies to go in and be able to build on a fairly discipline workforce that was willing to work for very, very low wages. In Africa, as the countries became independent and they kicked the expatriate colonialists out, Africans felt that they should get the wage the expatriates had gotten. So, if the normal going salary for a taxi driver was a thousand dollars a year with an expatriate driving the taxi, you know, the African thought that he ought to get a thousand dollars a year. Meanwhile, in Asia you had the taxi cab drivers for twenty five cents. They said, they moved up too far too fast, in terms of what they provided. And, manufacturing companies would look at Africa and look at Asia and the Caribbean, and go to the Asia and the Caribbean. And, the Africans felt constantly just betrayed. They took it very personally, but no one would come and make an industrial investment and deal with the Africans. It was the fact that your economic factors, your land, labor, cost of capital, everything was just totally dysfunctional. That didn't find too many willing ears. But, I was in Africa DP from '82 through '87, five years. I think that was the one major shift over that time period as more African countries turned around and started seeing that sections of the Berg report made a lot of sense. They started developing host country policies, and you had a wave of capitalism, if you will. It was more that the governments realized that the path they were on wasn't going anywhere, and so therefore, "let's try something else" than any real conviction; they felt that the answer was do what they tell us. A combination of circumstances was that most of the donors, Margaret Thatcher for Britain, I forget who in France; Reagan for the U.S. would appreciate private sector capitalism as a more appropriate answer.

Q: What happened to our program in that process, the USAID program?

JOHNSON: The USAID program was very much boxed into the functional accounts where Congress made funds available for agriculture, health, education, other sectors in diminishing amounts. More was available for agriculture than for other sectors. The underlying premises of legislation was the New Direction legislation. You had funny accounts that really weren't appropriate. You had legislation that assumed you had the institutional strength to move directly to the outlying poor and to sustained development. And, you had the entrepreneurship private enterprise method of development. All three were working themselves out during that five year time period. It was an extraordinary to be working on it, because it really turned out, I don't know if you want blow-by-blow end result, but the end result was there's no one way. There is no one solution that works for every country and that it re-enforced the strength of the way the USAID Mission Directors in the field mission programmed funds, because it emphasized that each country's got to be a little bit different based upon a lot of historical factors, political variables, you know, what have you. What you had was a continuation of many of the institutional support projects; some of which just got called other things.

Q: Such as?

JOHNSON: Edgerton College, Phase I and Phase II and its faculty of agriculture. Sector projects, although they worked with agricultural department, they would be called extension outreach. It would involve getting the faculty of agriculture's planning department involved in what you could do.

A lot of the titles of the projects were no longer illustrative of where the money went for and how the project would be implemented. I think they passed muster, if you will, with all of the authorizing officers and legal officers, what have you, because the papers would direct themselves to the intent of the project. It would be to develop the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture to do rain forecasting, so that emergency programs and storage programs can reflect lowering the risks of dangers or provide alternate ways of meeting dangers in years when there's a short fall in the rain. It is partially a change in the way people approach the problem. It was partially a change in the lingo in terms of vocabulary used to describe the problem. And, it was a reflection of 80s percent of the USAID's staff, the most critical client group, if you will, of things that don't work. Of people who got really frustrated at trying to work with corrupt governments where they knew what they're doing is going to get ripped off; of people who have run out of patience with governments that promise, and promise, and promise and never do anything.

The fact that McPherson came in and moved the program around, a lot of people who felt very strongly that USAID had simply not been strong enough; had not been tough enough; had not set its expectations and its requirements high enough in the developing countries. It gave them a fertile place to bloom and spread their ideas. So, McPherson really did not face internally a large opposition in terms of where he wanted to take the program. I think, initially when you see his initial public statements, he saw it mainly as a technical assistance agency. The senior people in the Agency made a major push so that within about six months to a year after he was there, he was talking about the policy component and having a policy impact of what was going on, and that the technical assistance was broadened out. Still, I think he had a bias against large scale capital projects. The Agency, also at that point lost the funds to be a major player. The projects had become so expensive that you didn't really have a lot of support in the Agency for staying involved in that area. Although, some of the capital project officers felt that we were missing the boat, that we should go in as a minor partner with the World Bank or with the other donors and that we could play a very useful role.

Q: Was there any fundamental shift in the types of programs that got approved and those that didn't? What, in fact, was the difference between the two administrations other than the rhetoric?

JOHNSON: The rhetoric was always strongest during the first year or so. It was a gradual. John Bolton was one of the strongest ideologues came in as General Counsel. He quickly found out that within the USAID's system the General Counsel doesn't really do a lot of policy pioneering, so he switched over and became of head PPC, which was our Policy Planning Coordination Bureau. I'd say by the time he left, he was a very effective Development Specialist. He still had a strong ideological approach, but he calmed down and he would look at the projects and whether or not they made sense in a given country. He stopped trying to do a cookie cutter type of approach.

Q: Were you involved in defending the Africa region budget to PPC ? Or for country programs?

JOHNSON: To some extent. The way USAID development planning worked was over time the Administrator gradually delegated more and more authority to the head of each regional bureau for project approvals. And, then over time, even more authority to the Mission Directors. DP would sit in as essentially the staff arm or the critical arm to attack a project, more so than defending or presenting a project. Very few projects went up to the Administrator, as I recall.

Q: What were you attacking? On what grounds did you attack a project? What were you looking for or trying to avoid?JOHNSON: Initially, I was trying to just bring some coherency to the whole process that the questions are asked in one country of one project would be the same similar questions asked across the board. The initial difference was that you had more projects coming which had a private sector component usually working through a PVO, a private voluntary organizations or non- government organizations. The integrated rural development approach had pretty much died of its own collapse. So, you didn't have that many big integrated projects coming in.

You still had a lot of institutional development projects coming in, which I think made eminently good sense and supported. One of the things that Tanzania had done, which worked out very well, was they were doing a major health project with the government. During the first two years, USAID covered all local costs; third year, the government picked up 20 percent; the next year another percentage; at the end of the five year project they would be funding 50s percent of it and then if we extended the project two years, which we usually did, by the end of the project they would be paying all of the costs. So, I tried to take that and build it in to other projects, so what I brought to DP was a very broad knowledge of how things worked in West Africa versus how they worked in East Africa; what some of the start up problems you would face when you went into a country to begin with.

I guess institutionally, organizationally I fought very, very hard to have the annual budget submission as the basic planning and programming document that we used. The DAPs (country Development Assistance Program documents) were good. They were interesting and provided overall policy guides, but it was our annual budget submission which looked at three years. And, put the three years of Operating Expenses (OE) and staffing against the three year projected projects. It made absolutely no sense for countries to think that they could start up five new projects in one year when they had two people and one of the people was going on home leave.

In that sense, I guess in the early years I tried to concentrate more on the practicality of what could reasonably be done with OE availabilities and staffing and project budgeting. And, then over time, that strategy worked out for the overall Africa Bureau, and the Bureau set up a system basically of triage that you have countries in which the U.S. could make a major development effort that looked like the country was taking proper steps; that we could mobilize the staff resources to work in that country. You had small countries where you might be able to do PVO activities or NGO activities or regional activities of some sort - the ones with very small missions, three to five person missions. But, basically, they were not growth candidates.

And, then you had the basket cases in the food shortage category of countries; they were there because the country's own performance was so poor and because political relations between the U.S. and that country were so poor, like Angola at that point. You simply didn't have the basis for doing a regular development program You might do a major intervention, you know, a one shot deal of some type, or you might begin a program that could overtime be graduated up unto category A of being a reasonable development candidate.

We tried to rig the system essentially. Countries that were in the middle group, we wouldn't let them over notify Congress in the sense that at the end of a fiscal year funds would become available; because what you'd planned to use them for you couldn't. So, every country wanted to be standing ready and willing to take extra funds so they would over notify Congress then they could take money at the last minute. In small countries the Mission could usually get it obligated, because they could walk papers through the government. We wouldn't let them over notify. It became very unpopular, because we didn't want more money going into those countries. If money became available, this is where we would put it. Essentially, most of the effort was trying to work out which countries belong to which category, working with the economist staff, which at that point we had beefed up considerably.

We had five or six economists who were working in an economics unit. Then we had two or three economists and anthropologists, a food aide specialist and a program officer who worked in a multi-disciplinary unit that tried to work on the sector plans and the long range plans. And, we had a budget unit that tracked the budget and tried to make sure that obligations got made and expenditures did not exceed obligations. I think, over time we began to see for the five year period that I was there; you began to see some an establishment of priorities among country programs where the factor of good performance by the host government was evident. We were way wrong sometimes. Countries that we thought were giving us good performance, weren't. Countries where we anticipated good performance fell apart into the Civil War. We tried to factor that in, to begin to put in performance of host countries.

We maintained an interest in institutional development, but we did move far more closely to immediate impact projects, where you had to be able to show what the institutional strength would be used for. What we were planning on doing with, for example, an analytical planning unit once you established it, and you staffed it, and you had made it more effective, what were you going to use it for. Also, then to be building in (well to be honest about it, I guess some of my vices) regional offices, the regional programs, and regional institutions; in what kinds of conditions did they work and what kind of conditions they didn't work.

I was very much a supporter of the REDSO offices, simply because the East Africa office had just been a life saver when I was working in East Africa. It is not set up to do what we used it for, but it was a life saver. The regional institutions, yes, if the governments themselves were setting them up. I gave up on regional institutions where we tried to convince governments to create regional institutions. You could see from the beginning that they were going to be donor creations, not a African country creation. You asked what changed developmentally in terms of programs or projects. I'm not sure that anything innately changed. I mean, things changed at the margin. You did see greater involvement of PVO organizations; you had a much higher budget going for Africa. One of the anomalies of the early Reagan years, was when you set up the firewall between the military programs and the domestic programs. USAID got classified with military assistance program, because that's how the Republicans saw us, the best friends money can buy. But, as a result of being classified over on that side of the budget, we had the best budget in the 30s years I worked with USAID. We had higher budgets every year; relatively little rank hassling from Congress about what the budgets go for and where. We had higher budgets; we had more countries involved; we had a broader array, I think of tools, in terms of working on development by bringing in the private sector, by bringing in the PVO's, and the major break through, which turned out not to be so major, was where we had the African Development Fund, which would be special funds just for Africa.

Q: A structure adjustment type of process?

JOHNSON: An IMF crisis type of process, which was useful, but what Larry Saiers did building on what Phil Birnbaum (AA for Africa) had done, was to convince Congress to create an Africa Development Fund that would separate off Africa money from the rest of the Agency. The Agency took the foolish position that we don't want an Africa fund, because the Africa Bureau would get more money if it was just in with the rest of us. And, we said, uh huh, right. And, sub-rosely and surreptitiously we continued to work with those Congressional people who wanted to have a special fund. While I was in DP it was a million dollars for Africa. A third of that was Economic Supporting Funds; a third of it was Development Funds; and a third of it was food aid. When they set up the Africa Development Fund, they set up, I think it was eight hundred million dollars in development funds and it later became a billion, I think, I'm not really sure. But, anyway they almost doubled the amount of development aid assistance. Part of that was an assumption that Economic Supporting Funds would no longer be used in Africa, that we'd have a more developmentally oriented approach. That didn't happen, because the war was still going on and we still had clients states and we still provided ESF funds to clients states.

And, we still used the Phil Birnbaum Special Fund for Africa as a way to support the emergency crises, IMF-type of situations. But, part of the argument for getting the African fund set up was not just for the money, as it was to free the Bureau from having to provide funds in the strict place (functional accounts) categories. And, that the reality of African development needs, meant that you couldn't put 80s percent into agriculture and get anywhere. You also needed to work in other areas. It was a very logical argument, very effective argument, never really made it. We got the Africa Fund so that it wasn't earmarked, but created whole new concept of soft earmarks where we had to report back to Congress that, okay, we no longer had X amounts legislatively satisfied for population. We had to report back to Congress on what we were doing on population. A good thing in environmental issues, other things like that. The real intent in the underlying structure was to free the Africa Bureau and reflect the priority of development, as opposed to the geo-political interests.

And, it did that to some extent, but to an even greater extent it got Congress involved in what we did in Africa. Much more micro management that never really ever totally changed. After the Africa Development Fund was established, we still had most of the programs in agriculture; second to agriculture was health and population. You didn't have a major shift in the sectors. You did have a shift in that we were much more involved with host governments in doing policy formulation, economic policy growth and policy formulation. Sector grants which functioned as Supporting Assistance Funds (ESF) were non-project types of assistance. I don't think anybody suspected that in a sense that the money was much more closely tied to the policy directions and general support that then logically you could trace; that it eventually works its way down to the farmer and the small farmer, the small person. But, it did not result in the real poverty outreach that people expected. Didn't really result in different sectors, becoming more or less central to the program.

Q: What about the private sector, not the PVO area, but the enterprise sector? That was a very important priority at that time. Was there any initiative in that area in the African Bureau that you were working with?

JOHNSON: Very little. The African Bureau had worked quite a bit in the private sector in the '60s. One of the first jobs I had in Central West Africa was working on the private sector, guarantee private sector loans, the OPIC, Office of Private Investment Corporation, what they did, and something called Cooley loans, which was using local currency generated by other P.L. 480 programs to give loans to indigenous businessmen.PL480 commodity program. Most of those, the OPIC types of things tended to be a flash in the pan. The private sector guys who went looking into Africa in terms of investing something got quickly negative, because of inability to work with local governments who really saw them as real colonialists coming back to grab off assets. The Cooley loans, most of them turned out to be unprofitable and we wound up owning textile plants and shoe factories and anything else. We went back in Sudan and as a matter of fact, one of the first things we had to do was pull them out all the local currency loans that had been made, that for some reason that I never understood, were all shifted to the Asia Bureau. The Asia Bureau had all the records and so we pulled up to find out what assets we still owned in Sudan and if we still had any nationalization issues or expropriation issues. So, by the time, ten years later when I was working in Africa DP, the view was highly skeptical, a lot of the private sector concerns So, I tended to ask a lot of questions. Mr. Ruddy loved it when I asked questions of socialist governments or other governments. So, I had full support in terms of doing that.

Q: What do you think we could do or did anything work?

JOHNSON: I cannot right off hand think of anything that worked. In one of my first meetings with Frank Ruddy (AA for Africa in USAID), I had just come back from Uganda and I was trying to explain to him that the Ugandans wanted us to put in a sugar mill; they were having to import all of their sugar up through Nairobi and the Kenyan Railroad; they had a lot of cane syrup and they could make sugar as they had in the past. And, that a sugar processing plant would be absolutely sure to go in Uganda and beyond that you could become a regional marketing facility and sell to Rwanda and Burundi and Eastern Zaire. One of the problems with doing that was that there was a World Bank team in Burundi working on a sugar processing plant so that they would no longer have to import through Tanzania; they would have a regional facility that could sell to Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zaire. For most of the investments that people talked about making or the host governments wanted them to make (let's put it that way) essentially, their financial feasibility depended upon setting up a series of legal protections and giving them a protection that nobody else had access to. And, since we were pushing for open markets, open societies, most of those investments were not appropriate for us to get involved in. Off hand, I can't think of any we did in Africa that were large.

Q: Were you creating an environment for investment? Was there anything of that type of program?

JOHNSON: Most of the policy work that was being done with Birnbaum's Africa Development Fund, or Africa's special fund and then later the Africa Development Fund. Most of those were based upon creating a climate or creating an environment in which indigenous private enterprise could prosper. Although, there were some components that would relate to foreign investment, such as the stability of the currency, control of exports, imports, that kind of thing. Most of the emphasis was upon getting rid of rules and regulations and monopolies that prohibited small enterprises from being developed indigenously and internally. And, world wide, there were a lot better places for investment, in Asia and Latin America than they were in Africa. So, you didn't have a lot of people pounding at our door. For most of those who did they wanted special protection and special rights. And, we said, do we want to encourage the government to do that. You have to be competitive or it's not an appropriate investment.

One of the other things I remember that Ruddy did that institutionally broke total holes in the wall was, he had a two day seminar with banking institutions who called in their banking officers from Nairobi, Johannesburg and Ibadan and talked about how they functioned, how they saw private sector and a private enterprise, and what they could lend for and what they couldn't lend for. And that most of these guys who really were Senior Vice Presidents of the banking society could not approve a loan of more than a hundred thousand without sending it all the way back to their headquarters bank for a full review. This was when our Mission Directors were doing twenty million. So, it's really surprising at the limit of confidence they had and at the level of investment they were looking to. It opened up a whole new source of information on Africa that we never tapped, because those guys knew Africa and knew it in a way that we had no idea. That was, I think was beneficial and good that broaden participation and broadened our view of what it took to make it all happen.

Q: Maybe we should touch on the New Directions policy, when it was fading away. Do you have any special views about the purpose and the structure and what worked and not worked in that concept?

JOHNSON: My perception of New Directions was it was crafted by a very small group on the Hill and essentially it represented compromised legislation. And, that if they all gave Nixon what he wanted on Vietnam, you know, but do what the Hill wanted in terms of development. It wouldn't be that important anyway. At that point, it had got gunned down and down and down. A big chunk of the USAID budget was going to Vietnam and the Far East. And, so the legislation wound up being written by a very small group of people on the Hill who really, in my opinion didn't really understand how the USAID program worked and tried to tie it to far too narrow definition of what you needed to do for development. Even if you redefined it so that the U.S. was not interested in development that the host government had to do development and the big multi level donors had to do development. We were interested in improving the quality of life of the people who were the rural, rural poor, rural majority. I think that definition of what the USAID's role should be was working there. I think USAID wound up being less helpful than it could be and many countries where we did those programs were very select narrow in time frame. I think that over time, it was almost like the integrated rural development activities in Sahel. You had five years extension, seven years before the donors pulled out, you know, there's nothing left. It hadn't made any difference.

Q: The time frame was too short?

JOHNSON: The time frame was too short, but it was also, countries didn't have, I mean people understood that if you don't have the physical infrastructure of roads that you're not going to get very far. That development is... I guess for Somalia they use to talk about... that it is imagining that you were trying to provide assistance to a country that went from Maine to Florida and as far west as Chicago and you had roads that would take you as far as Annapolis and Richmond. How in God's green name do you get resources out even in an emergency feeding program without a physical infrastructure. Gradually, over time, partially by the failure of a whole lot of the integrated rural development projects, people understood that you also need a human capacity infrastructure. That doesn't mean that everybody has a Ph.D. It doesn't mean that you trained lawyers and doctors in place of engineers, but that you need skilled people if the country's going to run. The legislation was simply too narrow, because it assumed you did leap frog and have growth in one area that would be sustainable. Also, it was early, but I think they were beginning to get some of the sustainable development arguments towards the end of that period in DP.

Q: Their concern was sustainability?

JOHNSON: Yeah..., of what happens when donors pull out. It was pretty funny though; it was coming in as one of the arguments. In the initial years people made, I think a really good faith effort and ultimately wasted hours and hours in debating philosophy and New Directions to say, okay, what is the need for a project; what does this mean for countries. By the end of the time period, people sort of paid lip service to it, but went ahead and developed the program they felt the country needed. You had some ridiculous cases where in the Congressional Presentation we were suppose to identify who the beneficiaries were. And, there was a very narrow definition of New Directions. You had projects costing millions and millions of dollars that benefited the 20 families who live in section A. Or creating a statistical analysis unit in the Ministry of Agriculture with the beneficiaries being the 2.2 million small farmers who benefit from the fact that they can forecast weather. So, the link between what we did and the beneficiary became more attenuated and spread out and definitionly full of loop holes that you could drive a Mac truck through. At that point, I don't think anybody in Congress cared in terms of standing up and jumping up and down. They didn't have enough success stories either from us or from other donors to where they could say, you should do more of this. Oddly enough, the PVO community had come over from being a strong critic of what we were trying to do, to being a supporter of what we were trying to do and saying, yeah, USAID needs to work at the policy level in the capitol, because you get the policies right, you get the resources right before our small projects will have a chance of working. And, you need to have USAID training midwives if our rural health policy is ever to have an impact. The PVO community became much more, I think a supporter of USAID, but still felt that in too many cases USAID went for the large project over the small project that they weren't attuned to on the Hill.

Q: What about the three Deputy system (three DAAs) in the Bureau? That was a major organizational change from what it had been before. How did you find that since you were in the middle of it all?

JOHNSON: Yeah, I was in the middle of it all. Each of the geographic area deputies really felt the need to have their own Development Planning Office (DP). So, they basically created a full time workload for DP and weren't willing to say, well we have to do this Liberia paper next week, we'll do Kenya the week after that. You had just a constant staffing pressure in my office so that I had to wind up brokering between the two deputies and satisfying neither. You had an inability to broker resources where the Ethiopia program became the East Africa contingency fund and I got to program whatever I wanted to do, rather than it go back to the Bureau. Both of the geographic deputies wanted to do that. That their initial OYB's at the start of the year gave them their quota of money and if you had to switch around you switched around within your area. They didn't want to lose money to the other geographic deputy. On the other hand, when it came to a crisis and they needed more money, they wanted to take money from the other deputy. We had classic situations where, I can't remember, I think it was the DAA on one side, and Glenn Patterson was Deputy on the other side, and Glenn left town and headed for Paris to a Consultative Group meeting on Mauritius where he had been told in his briefing papers by all appropriate people that he would offer Mauritius X million dollars and feel free. Phil was leaving town and going to a debt rescheduling in London and he was going to a round table meeting in Geneva. So, he left town; the PL480 that was supposed to be promised to Mauritius that Glenn was giving away in Paris. We wound up with people trying to double count using the same resource twice.

Q: Wasn't the principal Deputy supposed to be dealing with these kind of things?

JOHNSON: Ray Love (Deputy Administrator African Bureau) was supposed to be dealing with that sort of thing and in theory I was supposed to be dealing with that sort of thing as head of DP and working with both sides. I always felt that I blew the whistle that hey, we've got duplication or competition here that somebody needs to set the priority for the whole Bureau and that Ray would do that. Ray didn't see that as part of his job supervising the two Deputies. It's a little bit like John Withers (Director, Office of Development Resources) being able to articulately describe what was wrong with an office and forget to mention that he was the Office Director and therefore had some responsibility for straightening it out. Ray didn't see his job as supervising the Deputies and so when I would say, hey Ray, I need some backup, I need some support, he would tell me things, good things, in terms of negotiating points that I could then go and negotiate with the two deputies. But, it was still me negotiating with two guys. It didn't work out very well. PL480 was probably the most difficult to try and work out, because of the resource that's programmed outside the Bureau. The budget levels tended to be contentious, but we worked those out, mainly because Frank got involved in those when he was there.

Q: Why do you think they created a three Deputy arrangement?

JOHNSON: The feeling was that the Bureau had grown too fast; too far; too many countries; that the span of control for one Deputy was simply too great.

Q: Do you think it worked?

JOHNSON: No. I don't think it worked at all.

Q: What did other people think about it?

JOHNSON: In terms of the comparisons that go on between the Africa Bureau, the Asia Bureau, the LA Bureau, Middle East, what other configuration do you have. You still wind up with the Africa Bureau's papers being the latest to get in; that they had apparently the most difficulty in meeting deadlines; had apparently the most difficulty in recruiting staff, competent to fill positions, because we weren't regarded as being a competitive recruiter. So, that whole management overhead range didn't change that as far as I could see. Both of the Deputy AA's saw their job as getting more resources for their area, which was not an unusual need, but it was just the opposite of where I guess my head was at the time.

I was arguing that it wasn't a question of more resources, that you could pour money into Sudan, I mean it's black hole. You could pour as much money in the sand as you wanted to, but you weren't going to get anything out of it. Essentially, we showed six countries where we had a reasonably chance of having development. The politically hot countries that attracted a lot of money were the most risky in terms of development results. As a substantive argument under all that, you had a gradual shift of resources from Central West Africa to Southern Africa and from Central Southeast Africa to North Africa. We had more money going into the Sudan and the Somali and into the Zambia and Zimbabwe and less going into the Sahel, that middle belt which essentially were the poor countries. We had some major policy clashes over East African countries with the new Deputy Administrator of East Africa and Somalia. He rolled back and pulled the plug on Somalia. The package of projects that the mission had come in with represented starting up seven new projects in the space of 18 months. And, we had a major, major fight over the ABS budget submission in which Glenn Patterson tried to keep everybody calmed down and under control, but that he treated it as an illustrious ABS. Where I was in the hard head radical fashion pushing for getting Somalis to zero in the budget process, or if you do anything you do it through the economic supporting funds. They simply didn't have a development case. Glenn and then Lois Richards (new DAA and replaced Phil and to my surprise, I worked very well with Lois.

Q: Who was that?

JOHNSON: Lois Richards, who I thought would micro manage and she didn't at all. About that time that I decided that my effectiveness in Africa DP had come to an end. I was in too many fights and was losing too many fights. Mark Edelman was the new Assistant Administrator for Africa and Mark really wanted to pick his own DP Director. He was hung up on the fact that I was Civil Service and they wanted somebody from the Foreign Service in there.

So, I decided to make one last push at getting into the Foreign Service. I would take a year off and go down to the University of North Carolina or Duke University Medical Center, which ran a weight loss program and it was tied into basically physiology, medical, exercise and nutrition and see if I could get myself in well enough shape so I could go in to Foreign Service. So, they agreed and gave me leave without pay to go off and do it and I went down to North Carolina and found out that I was right on schedule. It was perfect timing for my mid-career crisis, on the way I want to do it and when I want to go. It turned out to be an extraordinary beneficial time period for me, just in terms of thinking where I stood and what I wanted to do. I loss some weight, but not enough. So, came back to USAID and USAID didn't know what to do with me.

This was 1987. Came back to the Agency; well first of all, I was a GS15 program officer and had been a GS15 at that point almost 10 years. Most of the jobs that I qualified for were filled with Foreign Service Officers. Most of the Foreign Service Officers were Senior Foreign Service Officers, so they had to down grade the job in order for me to qualify for it. When I came back from North Carolina I took the position that that was very flattering, but how about upgrading me rather than upgrading the job. They said, ummmm. So, I wound up doing a whole series of temporary TDY's. Went out to Khartoum for six or eight months. Went from Khartoum to the South Pacific, a regional organization. The Regional Development Organization for the South Pacific was located in Fiji and there handled eight or nine other countries.

I went back to Sudan and I worked on that job, which to this day the job description is classified, Because during the two months I was out there, they had a major flood where Khartoum got, I guess it was 24 inches in 12 hours and the whole place was flooded. I never did the job I was supposed to do anyway, which the job was bring food into Tigris and Eritrea in order to stop the refugees coming into Eastern Sudan. The government of Sudan supported it, but the Mission Director in Sudan felt that he should not handle it, because he was working with the government on some new programs, so I was detailed to the Embassy. Then, because of the flood you couldn't get any travel, roads washed out, no food moved, anything. So, I wound up doing three months of counselor work with political refugees. It was very interesting, but it was side track.

Q: Did you ever get involved in delivering food to the refugees?

JOHNSON: No.

Q: It never happened?

JOHNSON: Well, it happened after I left, but during the period I was there it didn't. I left there in July of '88 and went to the South Pacific.

Q: South Pacific, that's quite a transition.

JOHNSON: Washington still couldn't figure out what to do with me, so I continued on my series of TDY's and went to the South Pacific to the Regional South Pacific Office, which had a Regional Development Office in Fiji with no bilateral aid to Fiji. But, Fiji was the islands that had the connections like Barbados did. Fiji had the airplane connections to get in and out of all the 11 islands that were receiving aid from the U.S. I went out to South Pacific for two months to do a strategic planning document with themes. There were certain themes that would be carried on throughout the islands, but each island would have its own bilateral laid program. And, the one theme of course, was population and health. Another theme was environment; another theme was the private sector initiative in fishing and some agricultural exporting ideas. I wound up doing a strategic plan and the budget submission, which called for increasing the level to the South Pacific from about five to six million a year to 20 to 30 million a year. That was accepted in Washington.

Q: What about your role in the South Pacific?

JOHNSON: I was going to say, the South Pacific came through at that point with the offer for a TDY and I took it. It was a very small office in terms of budget and people. They had gotten approval from the Asian Bureau to use personal service contracts for staffing in lieu of direct hire. So, they had OE funding contractors and a green light from the Bureau.

At that point, I'd worked with start up countries and regional programs enough to where if they wanted someone with my background to take a look at, you know, what would be a justification for increasing the program levels. If you increased them, how would you staff yourself to carry them out and manage them and what would you do, substantially. And, the justification of why we should do more in the South Pacific was already agreed to. The AA for the Asia Bureau was a former Peace Corp volunteer from one of the islands and the Assistant Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa was a former Peace Corps volunteer from one of the islands, and George H.W. Bush had been off in the South Pacific. We were coming up on the 50th anniversary of World War II and the fact that thousands of Americans lost their lives fighting over these islands. Essentially, they had been ignored by us for the next 50s years. So, I came back with a strategic plan for the area which argued that the Regional Office should run each country as a separate development objective.

Q: Each country?

JOHNSON: Each country, which I had a hard time selling, because you had countries with a total populations of 2,000 people. You know, it was..., why do we want to have a USAID program? Why can't we just have regional projects and then they could get some of the regional benefits. I was backed up by John Woods who was a Mission Director. The argument was, the Regional Office can back stop the programs, but if you really want to have an impact on the countries, you have to interact with their developing planning office, their Ministries of Health. You can't just have a regional contractor who wanders in and out of all the countries. In the real small islands it probably did make sense to only do a training program, but you set a training program before them, rather than having a regional training program that just drops scholarships here and there. And, in terms of management, that they should keep the Regional Office in Fiji, which was the old problem that you know about from Abidjan. Fiji was well enough off to where they really didn't have a development program there. But, because it was the nexus of all the airplanes and the traffic, if we have the USAID Office there, then the Embassy would get upset that they had all these USAID people wandering around and no USAID program in Fiji. Eventually the State Department put ESF money in to Fiji and wound up having a small ESF program there that worked primarily, as I recall, on a democracy project helping provide Xerox machines, a parliamentary house and other thing like that.

The program was strongly environmental. That became the major thrust to what we did on each of the islands where we started a program, which got into private sector marketing, private sector agricultural development and marketing, because you had a fairly active private sector import-export group that did export copper and (?) So, you had something of a nucleus there to work with.

I started up a program in New Guinea which as far as I could figure out was like 20 years behind Africa. And, got pushed into doing some developmental activities there, rather than doing institutional development, which is what I thought we ought to do, but they wanted more presence, so they wanted USAID to do more things. We wound up working on a big fishing project there that was pretty successful. We were in fishing as our agriculture sector. It was a nice little program and lasted about three years. No, it lasted longer than that, because this was in '88 and Brian Atwood (USAID Administrator) saw the South Pacific as one of the programs to be consolidated when he grouped the programs; the people out there kept saying, but they shouldn't, this isn't fair. These programs and the governments work. The host countries are doing what they ought to do. At that time, we were cutting programs out in countries where the host government wasn't carrying its share of the burden and etc. etc. etc. The implication was that if you cut a country out that it was a wrong doer. And, the islands didn't do much, but they weren't very big.

Q: Why were we interested in the islands at that time?

JOHNSON: It was a combination of reasons. The major thrust was that then, the Assistant Administrator for the Asia Bureau had been a Peace Core volunteer out in the islands and one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State for Africa had been a Peace Core volunteer on the islands. The 50th anniversary of World War II was coming up and it was the Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands, Tarawa. All the names that are familiar from World War II movies, if anything else and the American shed blood for. A feeling that nothing had happened since World War II, and that a number of the islands were essentially French colonies. We had American Samoa, which was essentially a colony. The assistance to American Samoa and to the northern islands, the Marianas, I forget who else was up there, were all handled by the U.S. Department of Interior, which sent out a local rep and tried to run aid programs and absolutely did not want any advice from USAID on its experience in running aid programs. In most peoples opinion they were running a disaster and so the idea was that USAID would become more involved in the Southern Pacific; would show by example how you could help the islands that maybe the Department of Interior would pick up on, and that the islands were, as small as they were, they still were represented in the United Nations. Therefore, the U.S. should remain on good terms with those islands and most of them were supportive of the U.S. So, you had a combination of reasons. I think, the case for increasing the aid levels was made before I did a paper. The paper just served as the written paper trail, if you will.

Q: This was Economic Supporting Assistance fund?

JOHNSON: The Economic Supporting Assistance fund (ESF) and approximately at the same time, they did approve a million dollars for ESF funds for Fiji, because the Ambassador was so upset that there were no bilateral aid to Fiji and he had his seven person USAID Office there.

Also, extremely interesting, the U.S. had negotiated a fishing treaty, which involved Japan, all the islands, and the American fishing fleet, as to what kind of fish could be taken, and what time of year the tonnage and everything. Then, at some point and I'm not really sure of the time period here, but I think it was in 1985 or '86, one of the islands had seized an American fishing boat for fishing illegally in their waters. It was like the mouse that roared kind of thing. They had gone out at night and seized the boat while everybody was in town at a tavern and then here was the U.S. threatening to send carriers and airplanes to get the fishing boat back. Partially because there were feelings for that and for other fishing kinds of conflicts and collisions, the U.S. negotiated a fishing treaty, whereby the American Tuna Association, the American Fisheries Association, or something, the equivalent America marketing group put up ten million dollars to be available for fisheries, fishing development or fishy problems, fishy related problems on the islands. And, USAID became the administrator of that ten million dollars. It totally bypassed the USAID structure and the congressional structure in Washington. It came through the State Department and the private sector directly to the governments, which as part of the agreement they'd written with the governments, the government had to co-program with USAID on the use of the money. So, there was this chunk of money which also in some cases involved the local currency that the USAID Office out there programmed and most of it was for fishing, fishing development.Q: So, it was tied to fishing?

JOHNSON: It was very loosely tied. The USAID Mission did the tying more than the actual agreement, because the agreement had enough loop holes to drive the proverbial truck through.

Q: What did they do with all that money; the fish money and the 25 million dollars?

JOHNSON: Like I said, you had rural health, primary health and family planning activities. You had an HIV/AID's Program; you had an environmental program. Again, on each island there would be a different type of environmental program, so they did vary. But, the environment was a major theme of the whole program. In fishing development we put in piers, outfitted boats to have long nets instead of short nets. One of the Women in Development Program... the women do the fishing in the coves where you walk out into the water and the water is never higher than your waist. Men do the long haul fishing where they'll go out in the boats and stay for two or three weeks and then come back. So, we worked with the women to come up with ways where they could do the cove fishing and create better conditions for them so they didn't wind up with so many related problems and diseases from wading in the water up to their waist. There were educational programs on how to not fish out certain coves, because the tendency was to fish until the cove was completely non-responsive and then move to another cove. So, we worked on some environmental programs with the women. We worked with a lot of PVO's who were out there ....

Q: Local or international?

JOHNSON: International, but primarily U.S. related to Peace Core Volunteers who had been in the islands and then had come home and had set up some sort of continuing relationship, the Friends of the South Pacific. The Peace Core program was very active throughout all the islands too. I'm trying to think of what else. Environmentally we had a major issue with the Japanese; the Japanese fishing approach was to catch everything in these huge nets and then dump anything that wasn't commercial fish, which resulted in an enormous waste of fishing resources. So, we had a couple of negotiations with the Japanese in trying to work out joint fisheries programs with the Japanese.

With the education program, which we had a scholarship program, having scholarships for each island, which was a continual pain in the neck, because the students had to go to Fiji to get an American Visa. They couldn't get one out of the Embassy or the Counselor Officer on their own island.

All of the visa applicants had to go to Fiji and USAID worked out a way of having housing and food for them while they waited for their visas to come through and then they would pay for their airport transportation to the States. We were constantly missing deadlines in terms of the student has to be here by August 29th in order to start orientation. And, September 20th the student was still sitting in Fiji waiting for his visa. A lot of just really strong feelings I guess I came away from the South Pacific as to what is the Embassy role was. I had a much easier time picking out a USAID role in the islands than I did the Embassy role. The Embassy really was a meet and greet for American investors. It was a place for them to go in and say hello, shake hands, get a briefing about the local economy in the countries and then leave.

Q: Were there any Americans to worry about?

JOHNSON: Had a lot of tourists, major tourists, that if you are going to Australia or New Zealand, Fiji is a connecting flight and has an enormous investment from the Japanese on atoll development. It's a major tourist attraction. The Fijian government actually worked it very nicely where they built each hotel but didn't sell the beach front. The beach front was considered needed land, but the hotels could get long term leases on the local area. But, then they had to sit down with the local chiefs and figure out employment opportunities for how the Fijians could actually get the work at the hotels. In Fiji it was particularly difficult, because historically when the British came and set up the colonies, they found that the Fijians were very quarrelsome, not very productive as farm workers; they wanted to set up sugar plantations, so they imported Indians from India who then worked the sugar factories and the sugar plantations. As a consequence, they set up an incredible polarization of society between the Indians and the Fijians. Indians had been there for four generations and 200 years later are still considered Indians. And, if anything happens the India Consular goes trotting down and tries to work it out. They all carry Indian passports. They're the Fijians after 20 years.

Q: What size population are we talking about?

JOHNSON: Small, very small. I can't remember.

Q: Under a million?

JOHNSON: Definitely under a million. I remember some of the islands we worked with were like 2,500 and 7,000. A big island was one that had over a hundred thousand. Fiji is the most developed of all the islands, but I can't remember what the figures are.

Q: Did they have any local capacity to carry out the programs?

JOHNSON: The Fijians had an enormous local capacity in trained Indians. You had very few Fijians who really wanted to go to school. They didn't like school, so they wouldn't go in it for advanced degrees and they wouldn't stick around to get their degrees. The Fijians liked primarily to volunteer for the U.N. military police. They're scattered all over the world with the U.N. security arrangements, because that's an admiral and honorable way to see world and then you go off and do some fighting. Historically, a very war liked people. It's military arrangements are still admired and honored. Very few Fijians go into business. A lot go into government, but they don't go into business. The Indians tend to predominate in business and lawyers and doctors in professional fields. You would have had a very high trained capacity of Fijians. Our problem is that, because Fiji did have a high trained development capacity and they had a high per capita income, we didn't do bilateral assistance with Fiji. We had the Regional Officers, but they worked with the Solomon Islands, the Christmas Islands, a couple of French Islands that are still under the French control, all of which have extremely limited development capacity. They simply didn't have functioning government structures in a lot of ways. Most of them, however, had been taken over in some sort of adoption fashion. Like New Zealand had particularly close relationship with two or three islands; Australia had close relationships; the French had close relationships with different islands. So, one of the things that USAID had carved out as an area that we would work on was donor coordination in trying to get more donors into one set of islands, so you didn't have one donor dominating the whole economy and the government. They were trying to develop little mini-donor group discussions. There were half a dozen interregional organizations. An interregional organization on shipping; interregional organizational on health; interregional organization on airlines and so on to get the islands to see themselves as working together through those interregional groups.

Q: Politically they would never be brought together?

JOHNSON: No, politically they had no interest; they had no background of history of being associated with each other. Fiji and Tonga probably had a history of fighting each other more than anything else and would use the long range canoes almost like the Vikings did to wage war back and forth on each other. Beautiful, beautiful part of the world though. I could see why people served as volunteers or had anything to do with it, you know; they would have a feeling of continuing commitment of trying to do something in that area.

Q: Most of our work was carried out through PVO's?

JOHNSON: PVO's and some contract groups. The USAID office essentially consisted of about seven people, three of whom were OE funded private service contractors. One was Australian; two, I think were New Zealand; and one was a New Zealander married to a Carabaos girl. The argument was that they simply couldn't recruit Americans to go out there when they'd have vacancies and they'd try to go through the USAID Personnel System to fill the vacancies. They'd come up with people who were willing to go out there for a year or two years

Q: How many Americans did we have?

JOHNSON: I think there were only about four (USAID) Americans there. The problem was that the South Pacific program had been perceived as a good place to go on your last tour before you retired. There was very little activity there. Then, they sent John Woods out who was a product of the Africa Bureau; he was very activist and raring to go and by no means, mentally or physically ready to retire. They sent him out because of the promise or the mandate, if you will, that they were going to increase the program and he should start in motion all of the steps it would take to increase the program.

Q: How did the projects work?

JOHNSON: The projects worked really well. Sharon Fee was in the Regional Office in '96 and '97, ten years after I left; I talked to her about the projects and they were all working. The same projects weren't still active, but the Mission was still in the same general theme areas of working with beneficiaries on the environment, working private sector, and health, population and HIV/AIDS. They worked pretty well. Sharon said they got really good cooperation in health from the governments, that the people that were assigned to the projects tended to be good and tended to stay with the projects. There wasn't a lot of switching around. She was very upset when the Atwood's (USAID Administrator) decision that came down in '95, '96 to close down programs that weren't performing, which became translated into close down programs without local (support ed?), because she felt that it was the wrong program to close down. They pulled the USAID Office out of Fiji; I think they do some general regional support types of things out of the Philippines.

Q: What happened to the projects?

JOHNSON: The projects were ended. Contractors were sent home.

Q: They just finished work and walked away?

JOHNSON: They walked away, yeah. Sharon's feeling was that the implication and all of the public announcements were that we were closing down programs in countries where the host governments hadn't held up their part of the bargain, or for poor performance, or for various invidious kinds of reasons. And, the South Pacific essentially got tired of that brush, when in fact, the programs there worked very well and that they'd made good progress on all of the individual type goals and in the general themes of health and environmental, but simply because it was a small program. The political Godfathers, if you will, in State and USAID who had supported the expansion were out because they were Republicans, so essentially we closed them.

Q: Do you think we had a substantial impact with that program?

JOHNSON: It's hard to say. And clearly, the U.S. had a substantial impact on the islands in World War II. I mean, just absolute total impact on the islands to where they developed, you may have heard of them, Cargo Cults, where the airplanes flew in with all this cargo of specialty items and food and drinks that no one in the islands had ever seen before. So, they developed religious cults around the shipment of goods and services through these cargo planes. I was told, to this day, you will have an isolated tribe that essentially worships an icebox. They'll adorn the icebox with candles and wreaths and periodically have services there, and periodically they'll open the doors to see if it's filled up yet. Since the icebox is still empty, they'll close the door and say they haven't prayed enough. And, they call them Cargo Cults and they're still active throughout the South Pacific.

At the same time you have absolute first rate air service, Fiji Airlines flown by the Fijians; you have the Air Traffic Controllers, who all have moved into the modern world and clearly handle communication equipment with no problems. You have one of the more sophisticated inter-island shipping systems for export goods that I think has ever been developed.

It is much more difficult there than in the Caribbean, because in the Caribbean the islands are closer to each other. Essentially to this day, you can sail from one Caribbean island to another and not lay down or put your anchor out and stay overnight and then go the next day during day light. In the South Pacific, you're talking about weeks where you'll go before you see the sight of land again. The South Pacific is a huge ocean. It is like one little finger tip on your piggy; it would be the Caribbean compared to your whole body being the South Pacific Ocean. So, you think about the Caribbean as being islands, and they are, but not in the same sense of isolated, long distance, communication kinds of things that you face with the South Pacific.

Q: What about the impact of health and education programs?

JOHNSON: Health programs, from what I got back, had a hard time. Not because of lack of personnel; it was just lack of priority. The South Pacific Islanders tended to be very healthy. They didn't pressure the government for a lot of health services, because they just didn't see a need for it. Some, who were trying to work with the HIV/AIDs Program, were trying to break through, the myth that the South Pacific Islanders don't get HIV/AIDs, you know, weren't susceptible to them for some reason. The doctor that was out there said, that part of the trouble was they had a very, very low rate and it was hard to figure out that maybe there was some reason why. So, he was trying to get some AIDs research done out there to see whether or not there was some natural immunity going on. I think, even in terms of raising the awareness of people of critical diseases and how vulnerable islands can be to a critical disease, really had an impact. Again, I think people brought to the United States, trained in the United States, returned to home, had the most lasting impact that we had.

Q: Good. Anymore on the islands? You were there how long?

JOHNSON: First trip out I was there for two months and later I went back for another TDY and was there for about six months.

Over a three year period I did a series of overseas TDY's that went from working on the management assessment in Latin America, in Brazil, Peru and Mexico, to doing the Sudan for refugees with the Embassy, to doing the strategic planning for the South Pacific. At one point I asked Ray Love, who at that point was Counselor to the Agency, how long was personnel going to let me keep doing this floating around and charting my own individual TDY's. At that point, I reported to no one, other than Ray who used to be my boss when I was in the Africa Bureau. So, I asked Ray, how long was personnel going to let me keep on doing this. I was enjoying it and I was getting a lot of overseas experience, but I couldn't really see that the Agency structuring this program just for me. A lot of people in Personnel were still mad at me, because I pulled off two years on TDY to Cameroon. They were questioning whether what I was doing was serious or was it just my own development program. Ray's response was, that as long as there was a need, essentially the Agency had to send somebody. If it hadn't been me, it would have been somebody else.

For a while there I became a specialist on the islands, that was the other thing. I worked in the Seychelles, Marianas, Comoros, Madagascar, Indian Oceans Islands, and then I worked the South Pacific Islands, and then when I came back from South Pacific I went over to Grenada and I worked in the Caribbean Islands. Most governments functioned. The areas are small enough and their variables are enough under control that the islands do okay. Much like Hong Kong or Singapore. It's just a lot more feasible than if you're talking about Somalia that goes from Maine to Florida and as far as Chicago. It has one road that goes to Richmond. Islands were fun.

Q: Let's talk about Grenada, because it had an interesting part of U.S. involvement. What was the situation when you got involved in Grenada. You were assigned there, I guess for awhile.

JOHNSON: My perspective on Grenada was very much from an organizational perspective. I was still wandering around and the Agency didn't know what to do with me. They never offered me a permanent job, so I was taking all these TDY. The feeling that the more experienced I got, the better officer I would be. And, after the invasion of Grenada, the Caribbean had a Regional Development Office in Barbados, which again was a situation where Barbados didn't receive any direct bilateral aid, but had the airplane connections where you could get to the other islands. In the RDO Caribbean program, they had a series of regional projects in agriculture, health, shipping, democracy. The Mission would establish an OYB (Operating Year Budget) for each country within the overall Washington allocation. The individual countries and individual embassies hated it. They felt that they should get their allocation directly from Congress. So, for the two years I was down there was a period where the RDO was trying to keep each of the countries happy with this regional approach. Meanwhile, the State Department was agitating for a bilateral approach. State was getting ESF funds, specifically directed to a country and for, an example, a project to build the road in Antigua. We also ended up with congressional earmarks saying that you will spend X amount of dollars in Y country.

In the midst of all this, when Grenada was originally invaded, the first thing they did after the shooting stopped was to set up a bilateral aid program, which was to help the country. It was set up with an USAID bilateral office in Grenada, St. Georges; it had its own bilateral projects; it had its own allocation of funds from Congress. But, the Associate Director in Grenada reported to the Regional Director in Barbados and for some of the technical specialists would pull on staff out of the Regional Office.

As I heard it after the fact, the Mission Director in Barbados had spent most of his time on Grenada, figuring quite accurately that that was when he got the 8:30 call every morning from the National Security Council saying, what's happened. His visibility rested much more on what happened on Grenada than anywhere else. What was most controversial about it, is that the reasons we went in with the invasion were threats to the life of the medical students, but also because the Cubans were building this modern airport that they described as a dagger pointed at the heart of the U.S. Well, in the first 18 months, we sent in a report and said the most important economic thing to do was to finish the airport. That the availability of direct links with the U.S. really controlled any other thing they wanted to do in that country. As long as the only way to get to Grenada was to go to Barbados overnight and take an island hopper, they simply weren't going to get the kind of investment and development, etc. etc. etc. So, we wound up finishing off the airport. By the time I got there, it was like two or three years later, the emphasis in Grenada had-

Q: And what year was that?

JOHNSON: I was in Grenada from 1989 to 1990. By the time I came into the picture, the emphasis that was on we have to show we made a difference in Grenada and that the Cubans were bad guys and we were good guys had pretty much evaporated. The RDO in Barbados was trying to reabsorb the island back in to the regional infrastructure. The Ambassador on Grenada was trying to maintain a bilateral staff and bilateral USAID program. The man who had been the Associate Director had his new assignment somewhere in L.A. And, if you were headed down a path of a eliminating the office, it didn't make sense to replace him, because you were moving everything back to Barbados. On the other hand, if you were going to maintain a separate office, then you needed to replace him. So, I was the compromise candidate to go out on TDY. But, I had no dreams of being assigned to that job, so that I wouldn't have any built in incentive to try and keep it on the Ambassador's track.

I knew the RDO Director in Barbados and he trusted me in that I would keep him honestly informed as to what was going on. So, I spent a year in there, (originally supposed to be a TDY of 60 days and they were going to make the decision in 60 days.) A year later I was still out there, because they never could make the decision. They would write briefing memos up through the USAID structure, and from the USAID structure over to the State Department structure. Meanwhile, the political desk officers on the State side were writing briefing papers up to their guys and over to the other guys. Papers would go all the way up to Secretary Eagleburger and we would get a cable saying, it's up in Eagleburger's office, he'll decide in the next ten days and then two weeks later we'd get a cable saying, Eagleburger had to go to Russia and he passed this down to so and so who's going to have so and so take a look at it. It got nowhere. In the meantime, Ford Cooper was the Ambassador, an excellent Ambassador. Despite all of his pulling and tugging, the program gradually became a regional program. The individual direct bilateral USAID projects began to phase out and in their place were components of the regional effort so that you could tell the Grenadians that the same amount of money was going to Grenada. The U.S. government was not losing interest in Grenada and that USAID wasn't pulling out and all the rest of it.

Q: What did we do?

JOHNSON: It started out, like I say, the major effort was on the airport. Once the airport was finished the major effort was to try and get American airlines to fly direct so that you had a direct link between Grenada and the U.S. Ford Cooper, the Ambassador, took a direct role in the negotiations where he would call up the American airlines and say, OK. what do you need and they'd tell him, well we need this amount of cargo space or this amount of radar control and a tower or whatever. So, then he'd call up the Grenadian ministry and say, okay, this is what you've got, now what are you planning on putting up there. Then he called me and said, USAID put in a control tower. You know, he was the one who was the spider, sort of at the center trying to pull everybody together to get a functioning airport and he eventually did. The American airlines used Puerto Rico as their hub for the entire Caribbean, so you couldn't get a flight directly from New York to Grenada. You had to go to Puerto Rico and then to Grenada; they felt that was better than having to go through Barbados. You also ended up with American airlines essentially wanting a lot of guarantees and concessions from the government, which in the initial years made it much more profitable for American airline and less profitable for the government, in terms of the government waiving its normal landing fee and whatever it was they had.

In addition to the airport, the major push was to try and get American investors to come down and look at investing Grenada and so USAID organized a series of hotel investors who came down and looked at the possibility of investing in hotels. A couple of venture capitalists came down and looked at the possibility of investing in anything. A couple of people came down who were actively associated with cruise lines and wanted the government of Grenada to expand and modernize the port at St. Georges so your bigger cruise ships could come through. They had all the arguments about what a cruise ships with a growing range for passenger traffic and a number of people, a number of visits, and this was the way that Grenada should go in terms of the tourism.

Meantime, I was over in the corner causing trouble. First of all, I'm like the cruise line investors and the guys who came down pushing that. I was telling the government of Grenada to be careful, because, if they base their tourism on cruise ships, essentially the cruise ship has no infrastructure requirements. If you have a cruise ship, a cruise ship can go to any port and if there's a problem with water facility to where your water tanks are contaminated in St. Georges, you know, they just go to St. Lucia. There's another military coup or political unrest in Grenada, you know. Why not go to Dominica. They have absolutely no investment to stay there and work with the government. Hotel investors, on the other hand do. They have an interest in putting up an infrastructure; they've got a commitment; and they're going to stay with you for the long haul. Plus, which may be less unpopular, so you look at Grenada, there's something like four hundred thousand Grenadians on the island. There are another four hundred thousand who were in Canada, Ballston, and the third place in the Northeast. The Canadians outside the country were shipping funds into the country so you had a major capital inflow coming from them where they would send money for their uncle to start up a Bed and Breakfast, and their aunt to start a little hamburger shop. And, for somebody else, this whole range of small scale entrepreneur activity just growing like mad, being funded by the Grenadians outside the country sending money home. This was far more in Grenada's interest than being nice to Hilton Hotel and having a huge Hilton Hotel bill, which wouldn't create the jobs; it wouldn't have the impact on the economy, and it probably wasn't going to happen anyway, despite the fact that we kept seeing all the hotel letters coming in. One of them actually was Doug Bennett, who had moved to South Carolina and had some sort of intra capital program going and he came down to Grenada on one of these investor tours. I think, in the USAID in terms of organizing investment groups was really proactive and did more in Grenada than any place else I've been, but I don't think the economic climb-hanger in Grenada was right for the kind of things we were talking about doing. Where we saw investments by Americans and these big scale things, just didn't have the impact that all of the small scale investments of all the little enterprises were having.

Q: Were we doing any local projects?

JOHNSON: I had some training projects; I had an industrial project: what happened was immediately after the invasion went in, they went for capital infrastructure. So, they built an industrial warehouse park; they had built roads all over the island; did community centers and schools, and it was the Dixon Martyr (?ed) approach across the board. And, even continued that pretty much. The preference of the investor self-help fund was for brick and mortar activities. The classic example of the good and the bad, was that they talked the Embassy into funding a two bedroom housing unit that would be adjacent to a community health post. They couldn't convince the government to set up the community health post, because the government didn't have a doctor to send there, because there was no housing for a doctor when he got there. So, the Ambassador talked to the investor on this self-help project of putting up this two bedroom house and then they went on and started discussions with the government to get a rural health post. And, once they got the rural health post they started trying to get the doctor. Eventually, it wound up that it worked. It all fit together, but it was not by any overall, up-front agreement, you know, that if I do this, you do that or the idea is to put a fully staffed health post here and we'll all work on our piece of it. It was local people working on one piece at a time and it worked.

One of the things when I was there that we were working on was to clear the (USAID ed) warehouse out. So, we were doing donations to private volunteer organizations, orphanages, and schools and clinics. One of the things that we found in the warehouse were 20 signs, which were these big metal signs about the size of this desk, which would be what, four by six, complete with the USAID clasped hands and the red, white and blue insignia saying, welcome Ronald Reagan, self -help project number 22 school. Or, self-help project 38 community center. They were ordered and supposed to have been put up all over the island before Reagan came down on his visit in '89, '88 and hadn't gotten there in time. So, they had them all in the warehouse. So, I said, look you guys, it's a shame they didn't get put up when Reagan came, but you spent the money and you can't just leave them sitting in the warehouse, the auditors will kill us. We have to show that we did something with them. So, Felix, our Health Advisor, you know, why don't you start going around and making arrangements and we'll put these up and if the communities wants to have a little ceremony we'll have the Ambassador cut a ribbon or something. And Felix who had worked for USAID, but he was then working for the Embassy, an extremely intelligent, talented young man looked at me like I was crazy. He said, no. I said, what do you mean, no, we have to put these up. Well, you wouldn't want to put them up. I said, why wouldn't I want to put them up? He said, well all those places that we put up that we were so proud of, they haven't been maintained, they need painting, they need shingles put back on or shutters put back on. And, you couldn't have the Ambassador go out and shake hands for this dilapidated project. You'd have to put some more money into it before you could take it, you know, before it's a good opportunity. I said, well think of something to do with these signs then. So, what he decided to do with the signs, that since the self help program was ongoing we'd use the signs for new programs where we'd put in a community center, painted a school or something.

Q: Was welcoming Reagan on it?

JOHNSON: Do something with them. You couldn't hardly let them sit in the warehouse. In the industrial park where we'd built the building and put it up and put in the water works, we were also trying to set up within the industrial site a child care center. We would also do baby wellness health activities. The problem with that was that everybody agreed to do it, but nobody could find appropriate funding, because you had the funds that were going into the warehouse that were suppose to be for structural components; you had the funds going in to the regional health projects which were suppose to provide commodities, but they couldn't pay for salaries. I got involved in negotiating with about three different people who were getting USAID funds for three different reasons. How all three of them could work together to come out with the child care center if everybody agreed was a good idea to do. It was probably as illegal as hell, if an auditor ever came down and said, where did you put this dollar, because we were meshing funds from all over the place.

We also had a big push on trying to do eco-tourism. St. Georges itself is a beautiful 17th century city built around a natural lagoon. It goes up the hill to see just an incredible vista and there's a huge fort on one of the points of the lagoon that had originally been built by the Spanish, conquered by the French, conquered by the British, conquered by the French. You know, it sort of changed hands two or three different times and was currently serving as the headquarters for the national police. We began another project to clean it up, reinforce the walls a couple of places, put in lighting, a electrical and lighting system where it could be used for tourism. That was fun. It was something that I don't think USAID would ever have done anywhere else. It was actually being funded in Grenada under a regional project, where I don't know that anybody else knew that we were even doing it until they came down there. But, it was visually an extraordinary attractive site.

Q: Nothing in agriculture?

JOHNSON: A agriculturalist named Oleen Hess who is probably one of the world's leading experts on cocoa was in Grenada working on a cocoa project as part of an agriculture outreach effort working with farmers on the kinds of pesticides that were best to use, and the things that he knew from working around the world in cocoa projects, a different world. Cocoa made a lot of sense for an island economy, because you didn't have refrigeration problems in terms of shipping and exporting it. We were also working with a company known as "Island of Spices", because they produced so much cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg, everything. One of the things we brought down was McCormick's marketing expert. Got him to come down to the country and take a trip around seeing all the different spices that could be sold by McCormick and offer them easy relationships at a time when our existing relationships in Madagascar were rocking. So, McCormick was interested in developing other sources of supply, and they came down and reluctantly said they just couldn't do it because it was a too small scale operation, in terms of McCormick's bottling plant, grinding factory, etc. that Grenada just couldn't ship enough every single month. So, that one fell through.

But, then they had some Grenadians go to a spice, I don't know, for high tech you'd call it a tech fair. I don't know what you call it for food and spices. But, they basically had a booth at a food and spices thing where they wound up making marketing arrangements with a couple of very small gourmet, organic food types of restaurants and grocery stores. So, they were increasing their exports in agriculture and in cocoa. We were working on the actual health practices and harvesting mechanisms. On the other hand, we worked more on the terms of trying to set up private sector contacts and to provide the government of Grenada with what information we could about world prices, world marketing, what kind of environment did they face when they were trying to market their products. I thoroughly enjoyed it, because it was a solid year that I spent doing implementation. We weren't talking about new projects, you weren't talking about strategy, you weren't talking about where do we go from here. It was just making sure that what's there works well and somebody figures out where you go in the long run.

Q: They did work and were implemented.

JOHNSON: The projects worked. I think it was that Floyd Cooper just could not convince his State Department colleagues to hold the line.

Q: So you were the last USAID person?

JOHNSON: Last USAID person. I ended up closing out the USAID Office. We gave the telephone equipment systems switchboard to Lacenia Jordon up in Guyana and gave most of the office furniture to PVO's and other people around the island. I had the pleasure of working with one of the best, most knowledgeable and trained people I've ever worked with was the Executive Officer in Grenada. He had started life with USAID when he was 16, straight out of high school in Guyana. He worked his way up through the whole USAID hierarchical management system and became the GSO and Exec Officer. He closed down Guyana; he was in Jonestown. He was in charge of the evacuation of the bodies from the Jonestown crisis. He ends up closing down USAID Guyana when we pulled out of Guyana; opened up a Grenada office. In the midst of the Grenada assignment, he got pulled out to Panama to close down the Panama Office, because the Mission Director knew Carl Cullus and had full faith that Cullus could handle it, even though Cullus had no Spanish. From everything I heard he did a superb job. He got rid of all the furniture; closed down the office; found jobs for the employees. From Grenada he went over to Barbados and was the GSO over Barbados and then later I heard that he went back to Guyana when we opened up the USAID Office in Guyana. Anyway, he read more books. He knew every single rule and regulation on the administrative office side and what I could and couldn't do in terms of record keeping and all the rest of it for closing out the projects and closing the office down. The Grenadians were most unhappy. They saw closing the office as closing the USAID program. No matter how much PR, we did about the amount of money, would change their view.

Q: Did we keep going with our assistance?

JOHNSON: The entire RDO Caribbean budget was getting cut, so less and less aid was available, so there was less and less for Grenada. And then, RDO Caribbean got caught in Brian Atwood closing down a small programs. So, essentially they did see the writing on the wall. Their point was that when the U.S. came in... the first time I was there, I got in a taxi from the airport and said something about the invasion. The taxi cab driver stopped, pulled off the road, turned around and gave me a lecture. It was not a U.S. invasion; it was a U.S. rescue mission and the troops came down to rescue the Grenadians. And, as a side light they helped out the medical students, but it was really like an antique what those marines came to save, because they had been under a 24 hour curfew for a week. The driver objected to me calling it an invasion. So, it sort of reflected everybody in the country and the government. We always saw the U.S. as having come down there to save them. And, as a corollary of that, they really thought that when the U.S. left that Grenada should be like Puerto Rico and that was their definition of success, to be like Puerto Rico. And, the USAID projects we worked on worked, but there wasn't a turn around. It was not a massive program, you know.

Q: You mean we were not prepared to take it on as a commonwealth country?

JOHNSON: Perpetual client. We weren't prepared to adopt it as part of the commonwealth. And, the Grenadians felt very much betrayed that we weren't sticking to the course, that we weren't staying with it. So, I closed down the USAID Office and left. They were not happy campers.

Q: When was that?

JOHNSON: It was in July of '90.

Q: Let's add your last comment about Grenada before we go on to the next.

JOHNSON: I'd never been any place where Americans were not more popular than Grenada. They really and truly appreciated the fact that Ronald Reagan had sent the troops down. They did not feel that it was an invasion. They felt that the troops came to save them and they went out of their way to express appreciation to any American, tourist, government official, or what have you. At the same time, they were bitterly disappointed, because they felt that by coming down there that America had more or less adopted the island and why didn't we turn it in to another Puerto Rico and that Puerto Rico was their symbol for success in the Caribbean.

Q: And all while you were there?

JOHNSON: Yeah, I was there then. I was there '88. So, it's been 10 years now.

Q: Have you been back?

JOHNSON: Never been back. I understand that American airlines no longer flies directly to Grenada, because there weren't enough people to warrant their trip.Again I was on temporary assignment to Grenada while the State Department and USAID sorted out what they wanted to do about having a staff there. Eventually, they pulled all the staff out of Grenada and centralized it in the Regional Development Office. Essentially, the year that I was in Grenada, the State Department and the USAID went back and forth with policy papers as to whether you needed an independent USAID Office in the Grenada, or whether everything could be handled efficiently and effectively out of the Regional Office of Barbados.

They sent memos back and forth and they'd get up to Eagleburger and he'd send them back and say, work it out. Then, nobody could ever work it out. So, then finally after I'd been there a year, it was clear that they weren't going to be independent and so they phased out the USAID Office and I went back to Washington;

Q: What about some of these other assignments? You talked about management assessments, what were those?

JOHNSON: I forget now if it was under Woods or the subsequent USAID Administrator, his name I can't even remember now, but they did a lot of delegations to the field, in terms of increasing the responsibility and autonomy of the field posts. There was an intellectual or logical feeling that if you delegated the responsibility, there was a need to find some way to measure accountability and that you needed to undertake some type of program as to how well did the field use its delegation to authority. Different Bureaus handled it different ways in terms of trying to do mission assessments. The overall general thrust was that it was supposed to be a management tool so that your team assessment would go only to the Assistant Administrator in the Bureau. It would not become public if you will, for other people to pick on the programs. So, it was seen as an internal report, and it was seen as something that worked.

I guess I did management assessment in Somali with Ray Love heading up the team. I did management assessments in the Latin America Bureau where we had three countries and (?), I can't even think of his last name now, he was a Latin America hand, head of the Latin America DP Office. He headed up the team, in both places, in Samoa and in Latin America. We went in with open ended questions for the Mission Director. What can we do that will help you? What problems do you want to identify that you want to bring as a management issue? What problems do you want to identify that we can take back and report to the AA, what have you, you know, back at the fort? So, they tried to keep it from being a witch hunt type of inspection program. It was seen as a collegial effort where you recognized that an awful lot of the problems were long distance communications and that these teams then served as a way of breaking up some of those communication problems, being interactive and all of the rest of it. My only experience with it was in Samoa and in Latin America, as that nothing was done with the reports after they were done.

Q: What were the main issues raised?

JOHNSON: Let me see if I can remember. In Somalia, it was internal management of the USAID Office there. It had grown from a five to a seven person initial USAID office to where you had over 30 Americans and probably over 50 to 80 local hires; they had set up a compound. It turned into a big operation. The problem was, that despite having such a big operation in everything actually, it didn't work. So, if you wanted a message sent over to the UNDP Director you sent a car and a driver with a message. That staffing and organizing the logistical support needed to overcome the basic limits of the society, just pushed the Embassy and most of the donors up to their limits and meant having large USAID support staffs there when you really didn't have that large of an USAID Program. You had primarily technical assistance, which the Somalis welcomed, but it wasn't what they really wanted. What they really wanted was for us to come in and build dams, build roads, put in the country infrastructure. The mission management assessment was that the USAID office had essentially very low productivity, simply because they were trying to operate in an environment which didn't sustain any efforts. That was a conclusion; it wasn't a recommendation that you could do much about, other than it offered some defense if later PPC and OMB wanted to cut the numbers of people there and got into the perpetual game of how come two people can deliver X million here and it takes 20 people to do Y million there. What we came back with in the Management Assessment turned out to be useful ammunition for why it takes more people in some places.

The only substantive issue I can remember was the PL480 Program. The feeling was that the PL480 Program should be cut way back. It had had too great an impact on Somalia's life and was essentially being worked into the system where it was common practice that as the men and young boys would take the herds out, the women, old people, and children would go to the refugee camps and depend upon the food provided by the donors. They were no longer refugee camps, they were permanent settlements. That one was a hot political potato that nobody could do anything with.

In Peru, the Management Assessment had to deal with the practice at that time of having a USAID Officer handle Uruguay and Peru. He was stationed in Peru and he also handled Uruguay. It had all of the problems that I was familiar with from having worked with the regional programs in Africa and South Pacific, that the way they were set up was a universal constraint, you can't be in two countries at the same time.

In Brazil, the USAID Office there was responsible for one of the largest programs in the world in family planning, where the U.S. provided the contraceptives; it was a commodity drop, like the old commodity import programs. However you want to put it, we were putting large commodity assistance into Brazil. We had a policy statement from USAID saying that we would not do commodity drops in Brazil, because Brazil was an advanced development country and had foreign exchange of its own. What we would provide should come from within a selected list, a more limited list of technical assistance, trying to establish connections with American Universities, scientific, blah, blah, blah. Our major program was a commodity drop and no one was prepared to either acknowledge that the policy needed to be changed. If you wanted to do the commodity drop and the reasons for it in terms of family planning, world-wide issues were so constrained, then go ahead and just change the policy and say that you're going to do it. No one wanted that option, because they felt that it would open the door to too many other countries that really wanted foreign exchange support. Changing the policy for the family planning program was not considered a desirable option, because Brazil was the largest country in the Southern hemisphere, had major population problems; it was considered a leader in what it would permit family planning organizations to do. So, our management assessment team had absolutely no impact that I could ever tell on that particular issue of policy going in one direction and practice going in another. The USAID family planning office in Brazil was one American who had a local hired staff of about three or four people and worked primarily through PVO's or the organizationally equivalence of indigenous PVO's and indigenous equivalence of the Ford Foundation where someone would set up a local foundation to handle X, Y or Z. Primarily the program was family planning in conjunction with some health activities and some public education activities, but mainly it was providing the condoms.

They were beginning to get active in democracy programs, primarily by sending Brazilians to the States to attend seminars. They were trying to get involved in environmental issues with the Amazon Rain Forest. The USAID Mission had no support from the Embassy for getting involved in that area. It had very limited support from Washington; i.e. environmental specialists, but nobody else in program or policy area, and limited money that they could throw at the issue.

Q: Well, did Management Assessments come up with the issues, did you identify issues that you felt were real problems that hadn't been raised that you felt needed attention?

JOHNSON: No. The problems were already known. It was not in any sense a Sherlock Homes investigation trip.

Q: But, sometimes Mission staff were not open on issues

JOHNSON: To a little extent, not much. That happened in Somalia where people wanted to come up and whisper in your ear and say, I can really tell you the true story. But, for the most part, the issues were already really known. They weren't surprised at either the USAID Office or the Embassy. More than anything else, it was a chance to get the issue out in the open and on the table and a document where presumably people would have to deal with it. Although, I found that they had been working on dealing with it. It was something like, in Brazil the USAID Officer had been trying to push for environmental participation, because of the rain forest in the Amazon. He had simply been slapped down by Washington, saying, you're in too many fields, you're trying to do too many things, concentrate on your contraceptive program and don't worry about the rest. I started feeling that the USAID Officer was somebody in country who talked to people about development issues, then felt we should be willing to participate in trying to work out an answer, even if that only amounted to call on someone from Army Corp of Engineers, who was knew what happened in the Western United States in terms of damming up rivers and setting up water control programs and then 20 years later, what was the impact of having done that. Getting people like that to come down and participate in working groups or seminars with Brazilians who were facing those same kinds of issues.

Again, in Somalia, Ray Love participated as a team leader. He was the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa, and in Latin America, ? who was head of the Policy and Planning Office participated. The Assessments served a really good purpose, sensitizing Senior Bureau Personnel to what was going on in quote, "better missions." I think that was probably the most useful thing it did. In most cases, it did not turn up surprises.

Q: Was anything done with the reports?

JOHNSON: No. By practice and by policy a report was given to the Assistant Administrator for that geographic area and then distributed throughout the Bureau as he so determined. So, there was no automatic distribution. The Latin America Bureau always had somebody from the geographic office on the team, so the geographic back stop essentially had a copy and they knew what was being argued. The African Bureau, I'm not sure, but I think that we had a policy that we gave a copy of the report to the Mission Director and to the Office Director for that geographic area. Other than that it went to the Assistant Administrator.

Q: What happened to the delegation of authority process?

JOHNSON: Not much. I think the L.A. Bureau, probably being the most structured Bureau, had a fairly elaborate system for how they were going to follow up on the delegations of authority. I remember being told about it, but I don't know that I ever saw one internal study that they did.. At that time, the field offices were to send in proposed projects in the form of a document called a PID. Then, Washington would approve the project concept, lay out a number of areas that they wanted to make sure that the final project analysis covered, and then the Mission Director would have final authority for the project.

A LA Bureau study of 20 PIDs on how they related to the final project paper and contract scope of work found no relationship in those 20 incidences; that the project paper in terms of the PID would have a basic concept or an idea of what area to get involved in. But, most of what they identified in the PID were the avenues that they would work on, but when they did the project paper analysis. they turned out to be either ineffective or low priority areas and you should work somewhere else. So, the Project Paper would still work on the same problem, but in other ways it would be very different from what was originally approved. The process then of taking a project paper and turning it in to a scope of work for a contract team, also then involved another generation of growth and change. The contractors frequently had never seen the original project paper, much less the PID. By the time the project had boiled down to capsules of paragraphs that would go into a Congressional Presentation on what the project was about, by the time you whittled a hundred page document down to two paragraphs, it read very close to what the PID would read like. The project would have the same title and the same name and functionally be in the same function area, but, at the same time, it would also be very different. I think Congress frequently thought of it as USAID not be trustworthy. They would go out on field trips and they would get their briefings before they went and then they would look at the projects after they got there. There was much variation in the normal evolution of a project from the impact of the people involved would have on it. Your PID would be written by one set of people; your Project Paper by another set of people, and your contract team was a third set of people. The project mostly became how the contractors thought it should be.

Q: What was your view of that process?

JOHNSON: You could never run a control say in a sense of having two projects and one be the project that did what the PID said all the way through and the other would be the project that normally evolved and then compare the end results with a traditionally scientific method. It just wouldn't work. They were always trying to figure out what if's and maybe's, the peer speculation on what would have been different if we had done something different. I don't think there is a way to assess the relative impact of what two different projects would have been if they had been X, Y or Z. There are too many variables. Keith Sherper (from the Africa Bureau and later Agency Councilor) use to argue that every project that USAID did was a new project, because it was done in a different country with a different set of host country characters, with a different set of USAID Mission characters. So, it was the first time for everyone and held out little hope for lessons learned or transferability of knowledge.

Q: What did you think about that?

JOHNSON: First, I thought it was simplicity to the point of being unreal. When I thought about it, I thought well, he actually has a point that, okay, it's the first time a project has ever been done in this country with this set of host government characters and this set of American advisors. At the same time, the American advisors were bringing to that project all the lessons that they've learned, either from reading or participating in other similar efforts. So, there is carryover in terms of having a professionally trained group of people who work with host governments and probably where USAID made its worst mistake was when it went from providing technical assistance directly to doing contractor assistance.

Q: Why?

JOHNSON: Your contractor assistance in many, many cases is excellent, but it is not, as a rule provided by people who see that as a professional career. Nyles Brady use to talk about it (he was head of the Science and Technology Bureau). His view was that if you wanted to be an international expert on corn, you didn't go work for USAID, you went to work for one of the international centers that had research on corn. Then, if you needed him in any particular effort to help the corn center in Bangladesh, you would hire him and he would come out and he would help provide the corn assistance. The technical, scientific base assistance is often the least important component in why our projects succeeded. The most important thing as to whether our projects succeeded or failed was who in the host government worked on it and what their agenda was. And, did their agenda match the government's agenda in terms of what they thought they wanted to accomplish. Then, the second variable that would be critical would be the technical assistance team. It wasn't a case of us funding a corn team to go out and do corn research, as much as our funding a team that would go out and help that government build the capacity to adapt and utilize research that was coming out of the corn centers, or coming out of other areas. And, that I think does require the experience that comes from people doing that in three or four different countries. We lost a lot of that when we stopped using direct hire. I think in the last four or five years they've tried to recoup it by hiring back into the Agency, people who had been effective, you know, those who had tried it. They were affiliated with the university or something and they went out and they did it and they liked it and USAID talked them into coming on board USAID as a direct hire. Because, USAID's own internal hiring mechanisms were so screwed up, frequently, the only way to bring somebody in was in the IDI Program, which was the International Development Intern Program. When I came it had an average age of 24 and the last average age I heard quoted was 42, where essentially you weren't bringing in interns, even though they were newly hired to the Agency, you were bringing in career people with solid technical accomplishments. So, I think the Agency needed that group of people. It was unfortunate that the only way then to tap into that resource was through another program which also would have provided people for the Agency to use.

Q: Right. It destroyed the IDI Program.

JOHNSON: Yes, destroyed the IDI Program. I think it resulted in a real professional gap of about eight years, which was then a disaster. They did it by the RIF in '97 (the Reduction in Force process, ed). I use to think when I was an Office Director and I would talk to other Office Directors or Mission Directors: I said, do you feel like the adults have all gone home and left the children in charge of the play pens. Because, there were all these people that I considered compatriots of mine that were still young and that all of the adults had left and that we were in charge of the programs. But, then the (Assistant Administrator for Management, ed) came along and wiped out what he considered to be the old dinosaurs and now I go back in to USAID and I look at people who are Officers and I feel ancient. It's not the group that was ten years behind me, but it's the group that was 25 years behind me.

Q: So, you think the capacity of the Agency has deteriorated a lot?

JOHNSON: The knowledge basis has deteriorated. The experience level that let's you say, "look I know that got tried before in these three countries and it didn't work for these five reasons. So, don't develop a project based exactly on what failed over here unless you know for sure why it failed and why this is going to be different." I think that kind of perspective has been lost.

Q: Along, with an attitude that they weren't really interested in what happened before, others' experience, or did you find that there was some interest?

JOHNSON: Intellectually, you would talk to people and get some interest, but my reaction is, I never felt that the people that came in with Clinton were serious about development. That was my capsule that these are not serious people. And, that in a 10 to 20 minute conversation, yeah, I think you get into really interesting conversations about the need for history and perspective and all the rest of it. Walk out the door and it walks with you. There was no follow up, if you will. I felt very much, I guess it was the four years that Carter was in that I felt that there was a collegial, a real sharing of professional goals between overseas people, Washington people, and political appointees. They didn't always agree. Fight their heads off tooth and nail, but there was a community of interest as to what you wanted to accomplish.

The eight years with Reagan and the four years with Bush, the Agency did better in terms of money than it did anytime I was there, when Reagan set up the fire wall between the military defense national security side of the budget and the domestic side of the budget. USAID was by definition included in on national security defense military. So, our budgets went up very well. McPherson was probably the best Administrator that I worked for, just in terms of having a logic or a thought process in back of what he wanted the Agency to be or become. I think with the Republicans there was a strong bent that it took time before that became reasonable. When they first came in, I would consider it irrational. I remember the first time I ever met McPherson, I was East Africa Geographic Office Director. We had disasters in Ethiopia; we had disasters in Tanzania; we had disasters in Sudan, and so I went down in his office one Saturday.

Q: Who was this?

JOHNSON: It was me and McPherson and whoever at that time was the head of OFDA who I don't remember, and Fred Schick was there.

Q: From Latin America?

JOHNSON: Yes. And, there were other hangers on. I don't remember who was there. But, I remember Fred trying to explain to McPherson Company how USAID had always, that when disasters happened, USAID helped, that we didn't really draw a line between the Cold War boundaries, etc. etc. etc. and he said, we've always helped in disasters. McPherson looked at him and said, that's before we were here. And, took a very strong ideological viewpoint as to whether we should provide assistance to communist leaning countries like Ethiopia. Eventually, the publicity in Ethiopia just got so horrendous that the Agency, became a massive donor.

Back to what I was saying, that McPherson had a sense of what he wanted the Agency to do in an organizational logic that went through it. I think the subsequent years where Alan Woods was Administrator, but essentially was sick most of the time and had very poor relations with his own deputy and so he wouldn't really delegate to the deputy. He tried to delegate around the deputy to the regional AA's and then Roskins who had basically had no interest in anything other than taking photo opportunity trips as far as I could tell. But Roskins saw delegations of authority as a way of getting things out of his office where he didn't have to deal with them. So, you wound up with a lot of things being delegated to the Regional Bureaus and to the Missions for a variety of reasons. The idea of accountability that was built in the first delegation, which I think was with McPherson, was McPherson wanted to make sure that people still did what he wanted them to do. So, he wanted a feed bank system that would tell you what's happening out there. Most of the other administrators and AA's who wound up delegating things as the years went by talked about accountability, but it was more in an accounting sense of making sure where the money went, rather than, did people make the right development choices, did they push the right sectors, etc. etc. I think out of 30 years with USAID, I've seen three Mission Directors fired. And, all three of them were fired for things that were considered misuse of operating expense money, you know, individual personally life style issues. Nobody got fired from making the wrong development choice.

The idea was that Mission Assessments would be used as internal management tools between the missions and the Bureaus, that they worked to improve communications and people knew more about what someone was doing, but I never saw that one really led to follow up actions that said something should change. Now, admittedly in the L.A. Bureau, I didn't have a follow up role and in the Africa Bureau I had more of a follow up role, because I was working there. At that time when we did the Somalia Assessment, I had been Office Director of East Africa and I was Office Director of Development Planning and I did not see that it resulted in any follow up.

Q: Okay. What else did you do besides Management Assessment?

JOHNSON: I worked with John Koehring (Head of Development Resources, Africa Bureau, ed) when he did a major evaluation to come to a recommendation on the appropriate relationship or ratio between the size of the USAID Mission staffing and the size of the country program and how that related to a delegation of authority. It became known as the In-country Study and was supposed to take three months and ended up taking nine months.

Q: Why did it take so long?

JOHNSON: Because there were so many variables involved and the original thrust that this was going to be the study to end all studies. Previous studies of the same kinds of problems on mission size and program size had been undertaken, but no one had ever taken, undertaken a world-wide study using all the variables. And, simply because it had been an issue for so long there were innumerably past studies that had been done on individual countries or comparisons to Kenya and Tanzania or comparison with Mexico, which was an advanced developing country and now another Agency. There was a lot of material. It was a large team John Koehring, Ed Hogan, who was Director of DP, the Dick Blue, who was at that time at the Center for College Studies, and had previously run the PPC's assessment office, Peter Askin (former USAID Director) was part of it, Rosemary Delp (later head of Personnel) was part of it, Victor Moldrun (ph). Rosemary Delp at that time was liaison, Vic Moldrun was head of the Policy from the PPC Bureau, ex Mission Director, Byron Ball, ex Mission Director, Herb Miller, and me.

Q: That's a talented group.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was talented, but it was way to big. For everybody in USAID, the ultimate career success is being a Mission Director. When you are a Mission Director it's frequently you're like a god, because you're trained in everything, and if you want this, it happens, you know, it just works well. Then, you have all these people who came back to Washington as ex-Mission Directors and they have a real hard time learning how to be ex-gods. So, we had a team proposal, a very bright, very talented people, all of whom had been holding senior jobs for a fairly long time. And, all of them had their own ideas of how you should run a mission program. Essentially, the study that was finally produced was very well received by ?, who accounted it remarkable that USAID produced such a critical study and was willing to admit in public to as many of the things that would be insane about it, in terms of staffing and how decisions were made and just how the whole system worked. It was fairly well received in Congress, but it quickly became another study that went on a shelf that didn't get very much use.

Q: What was its main conclusion about overseas missions?

JOHNSON: That overseas missions were critical to affecting development. You could not do development at long distance, because you had to work with host government officials to make it work and that your chances of having something that was sustainable, which was a big issue at that time, your chance of having something sustainable increased to the extent that you worked in-country and you had a chance to meet and know and support key people in the host government.

The major factor affecting size of mission should be the development competence of the country that you're in. And in the analysis the only thing that really related (staffing to program) was the length of time the mission had existed. So, your bigger missions tended to be those who had been in place in stable environments for a fairly long time. The Philippines is one example, and then Latin America and Panama. As the years passed, new mission programs always tended to have fewer staff. And, because of the nature of new programs, it always looked on paper that if two people can move 20 million dollars here, why does it take 20 people over there?

The study did not find a way to really analyze the relationships and say that it looks like small staffs can move large amounts of money in the early days of the program, and then speculate on combined opinion why that was true, because during the early days of the program were emergency assistance and commodity assistance, as well as over time as the program became larger you got involved in more complex issues. The New Directions was cited as one reason why there was a need for more USAID people overseas in the field, you know, sort of a potpourri. CDIE which had been a sponsor of the study did take it and put out the conclusion as a general guideline of here's what to think about when you're staffing a mission, but we recognized that individual circumstances may dictated an answer and so everybody was pretty diverse what they wanted to for staffing size.

Q: There certainly should have been a relationship between the requirements for staff and the complexity of the program, first in terms of whether it was non-project assistance or project assistance and then whether it was multi-sector or focused?

JOHNSON: No sir.

Q: No connection?

JOHNSON: No, because what you had you see were people with different experiences and different life experiences, if you will. They would argue that for a Economic Support program, which would involve a lot of either budget support or commodity import program, that if those were to have the impact that you wanted, you still needed in-country staff economists; you had experts on exports, tariffs, taxes who could help with a problem on occasion with that kind of assistance. So you might wind up with tax specialists and legal reform and tariff and customs specialists, whereas on a different kind of program you might need agricultural advisors, health advisors and what have you. But, to have the impact you wanted you needed the people. You couldn't relate different kinds of assistance that well to staff size. We had some countries where we were putting millions and millions and millions of dollars into a country with like two people, Brazil, which essentially was a commodity drop, we were providing condoms. And, you had some other examples in another geographic bureau.

But, at that time, the early '90s when we did the study, essentially Koehring came out with a recommendation that every Mission should have a Core Staff and they identified what the types of the Core Staff would be. And, then you could bring on other exports as needed, depending upon the task of the program, etc. etc. The Program Office people like it, because the Program Officer was one of the designated critical staff. The Project Officer people liked it, because the Project Officer was one of the staff. The Controllers were also needed staff. I forget about the Executive Officer whether or not, I think the Executive Officers were core staff too.

Although the study did not endorse nor did it say that everybody else could be hired by contract, that's what people read it as saying. That your USAID Officers became your generalists, your overhead management people and that everybody else you could get on contract as needed, technical people, including economists as technical people, which drove the economists crazy. To me, in 1961 a number of agencies were integrated that dealt with foreign assistance. I showed up in 1967 and it was clear that there were separate streams of people. The personnel system was treating each one as a separate category of people. Each one had a career development scheme that was their own, had their own mentors, if you will. And, essentially over 30 years, I didn't see that change that drastically.

Q: What was changed?

JOHNSON: In your technical assistance, which went back to the old Point Four days and the Truman era, you had TA project assistance, capital project assistance, which went back to the Development Loan Fund. You had food assistance, which went back to, I guess it's early days of the Marshall Plan in Europe, where it was seen that the U.S. had surplus food and the world was hungry and this was the mechanism for doing it. Then, you had a separate category of people, food aid specialists, who worried about what was the legislative background, what were the administrative rules, how did you move food aid. So, you had technical assistance, capital assistance, food assistance, and then program assistance, which essentially were economists who wanted to really moved capital associated with large policy reforms that would get all the policies straight. Each of those different groups had some career path of what you did, and how you got trained, and what you were supposed to know and what you weren't supposed to know. Over the last 30 years, more rather than less, it has become both a career objective as well as a necessity for people to take tours in the other areas so that a Program Officer would work in a combined program/project office where your office director would be a program officer and your deputy officer would be a project officer. And, the next time around, the project officer would be the director and you have a program officer as deputy. People became more use to working and understanding what the rules and regulations were for the other kinds of assistance. Over time, the other kinds of assistance became subject to the same rules and regulations. If Congress and lawyers tried to iron out inconsistency so you, if you knew the rules and regulations on capital assistance, you also pretty much knew technical assistance and program assistance. There were some individual pieces of paper that you had to learn. So, the combined program/project type of program, I think is pretty much still evolving.

Q: What about the application?

JOHNSON: Again, the circumstances got filtered through everyone's own personal experience. There were parts of the report that could be used to support a wide variety of the different approaches. I think in hindsight, it was started wrong, it was aimed wrong. I didn't really figure that out until I was in Madagascar two years later. Mary Norris, who was then the Program Economist in Madagascar got another cable from Washington saying, you know I wonder how come it takes 30 people in Madagascar to deliver blah, blah, blah. And starting all the questions all over again about ratio, the program staff, the project size, the program size, and so Mary Norris brought it in to me and she wanted me to help her with it and I said sure, it's an issue that I'm familiar with. Then, she pointed out something that I had never even thought about, but I think she hit it right on the mark, is that in the whole context of managing inputs versus managing outputs, that all of the controversy in all the years of study had always looked at how you manage the inputs and can you relate the size of your staff to the dollar magnitude of the inputs. And, no you can't, because it's the outputs, that's what you're really looking to have. And, in a country like Madagascar where you have seven people and then you have 20 million dollars, you're looking for a different kind of impact and in Eritrea where you have one person and 50 million dollars. And, that all of the studies that had been done had really focused on looking how you manage the dollar inputs which is the bean counter, the green eyeshade view, all of that, where did the dollars go and what did they buy. And, that in affect where USAID had, well the overseas concept of having people overseas seems to have been bought by everyone. All of the literature out right now, Atwood and all the policy statements, even the griping from Congress, all agree that you need people overseas.

Q: And now the World Bank.

JOHNSON: And, the World Bank is now leaning that way too, so be it. I know when we started the NIS Program (Newly Independent States-Eastern Europe ed.), the question was whether or not since we were working with countries that were far beyond the advanced country level they didn't need in-house people. Once again, we needed in-house people. We don't hear really gripes about that anymore. I think people still raise the question of why the staffing is so different in different countries and try to correlate that with the program inputs, and that what everybody use to do is take a big breath and step backward and try to correlate with outputs. I don't know if Mary's kid will ever get anybody down that line or not. That's one I push in terms of talking with people.

Q: A key factor that made that possible was confidence in the government and therefore, its ability to affect the outputs, because you could turn over the implementation (inputs) to a confident government- a very decisive factor. Anyway, that's very interesting. So, what did you do after that study?

JOHNSON: After that I'd been directed to work with the Eurasia Program. The Asia Bureau didn't know what to call it, because calling it the Former Soviet Union sounded like Florida State University (FSU). The State Department wanted to call it the Soviet Independent States Program (SIS) in hopes that you would have a consolidated type of federation with all of the Russian countries still staying under one government. So, they were still insisting on having that reality show up in the names we gave to our staff program and our project. This was '92, '93. when I went to work in the Asia Bureau.

Q: Okay. Let's get to that first then.JOHNSON: The Development Planning Office in the Asia Bureau. They were reorganizing the Asia Bureau to put Asia and Private Enterprise Bureau together. They had a whole reorganization scheme to go with it. One of the functions with the DP Office was supposed to be able to somehow make that a happy marriage, a collaboration of interest. In fact, it was a tribute to the Assistant Administrator for the Private Enterprise Bureau, who was an ineffective lady. They wanted her to have a broader exposure to program content and impact on the Asia Bureau and so she insisted that she bring her private enterprise experts with her. There was also a lot of feeling that Asia was an area in which private enterprise stood a better chance of moving out as a major theme in some of the more advanced countries.

Q: What was your view of the Private Enterprise Bureau function and what they were trying to do?

JOHNSON: The AA never supported me, I would go with him to the big meeting and everybody would talk about private sector initiatives and how we can be bold and take risks and move out in this area, and I would be the person to say, look, when you start talking about this, it sounds like you're talking about Mike Milligan's Junk Bonds; every scam that's ever been run. You ought to be just a lot more careful in terms of what you try and do and how you try and do it. The thing was, I was the conservative one in the crowd of saying that the Agency had a lot of experience with private enterprise programs. The Africa Bureau had an Office of Private Enterprise back in the '60s. We had private enterprise programs, and private initiatives, and a whole bag of history of involvement with the private sector. People ought to be more familiar with the fact that it existed, as well as be more sensitive to the fact that, there are things that happen in the private sector that you ought to be able to know exists, even if you don't want to face the total implications. Case and point.

Large amounts of money were being generated for the private sector in the Caribbean going into investments in hotels, in airports, training companies, etc. There was a very strong feeling that most of the money was generated by the drug traffic and was being laundered for investment in the private sector. And USAID was being associated with the drug traffic. There's just a whole range of scams and possibilities for corruption that you get involved in when you hit the private sector. The normal course of business doesn't happen in government transactions. Or, if they do have any government transactions, they are clearly illegal and you can trace it to somebody and they get fired or in prison or whatever. The private sector is a very tricky place in which to work. I also helped start the U.S. presidential initiative on the environmental for Asia, which was, based on what I'd seen the people do in the South Pacific on environmental issues.

Q: Did this integration work or what happened or did the Private Enterprise Bureau fade away in the process? What happened?

JOHNSON: It lasted for about two years until the elections and then with that coming in it just began to fade away. The remnants of the Private Enterprise Bureau got moved to the Global Bureau and still exists.

Q: What should be USAID's role in the private sector, private investment?

JOHNSON: It should focus on creating an environment in terms of looking at the rules and regulations, at the road blocks that inhibit indigenous private sector efforts. The Reagan/Bush people, who wandered around the Andes, got very frustrated with USAID; it was sort of like turning an ocean tanker's direction; it was willing to change and did change in looking at indigenous enterprise and what rules and regulations needed to be changed with that. These guys would go jumping up and down the hallways, what about America enterprise? How about sending a trade mission? How about funding some commodity purchases so we could buy tractors and help out John Deere? They saw private sector as being an American investment overseas and I don't think professionally that USAID ever saw it that way. USAID was more or less under duress and heavy pressure so that it got incorporated into some programs. But, I think for the most part, USAID saw American investment overseas as being something that was the legitimate province of the Commerce Department, the Export-Import Bank, the OPIC (Overseas Private Investment Corporation), a variety of other places with the investment instruments and a mandate for that. USAID was neither an appropriate institution nor did it have any real skilled people who were interested in doing that. I had a couple of people get grafted on to the Agency who had skills and talent in that area, and they'd get very frustrated because they couldn't penetrate the USAID bureaucracy They couldn't get people to do anything

Q: As I recall, they wanted to make direct investments. They wanted to promote a particular enterprise and make an investment in this particular enterprise or that enterprise.

JOHNSON: Yes. They would find it, for some reason the tourist industry seemed to be very active, but they'd found somebody in the tourist industry who wanted to make a direct investment to put a hotel in a country and the hotel company would buy the land, which in affect meant that the host government would contribute the land. Then, they would put up the hotel, but they wanted USAID to pay it for the roads that would be required to get from the airport to the hotel; for USAID to pay for the training programs; for people who could run the hotel; and/or become a minority owner of the hotel. And, they saw no conflict of interest. They saw no government ethical problem and essentially being the front man for particular institutions.

AA for the Asia Bureau, who I think very highly of, was extremely talented and ran a very good program, but I remember one meeting in which she was saying that a USAID Mission Director should be willing to go into the host government and promote a particular private sector American investor. My reaction was that I couldn't think of a Mission Director worth a ... who would do that. It was just a totally inappropriate role. She and I probably talked 30 minutes going over that. She saw it as something that is very common in the private sector where she had worked. That if somebody worked for you, performed a good job, that you very much would go in and recommend him to somebody else and say, this man's a good man, he can perform the job. But, it did depend upon getting a kickback from that guy, you know, it was just wrong. I said that for me, for a USAID institution, for a USAID Mission Director to go into some government official's office and vouch for a private enterprise, you know, implied that U.S. governments stood in back of that guy. It was a U.S. government guarantee, because the USAID Director was the U.S. government employee. Otherwise, the government wouldn't listen to him. It would be an interesting recommendation, other than the fact that it sounded like the U.S. government was promoting it and would stand in back of it, and if it, say, should fold, we would make it right. The Mission Directors couldn't make it right. There was a limit as to what they could do and so they shouldn't go in and promote individual projects. And, she didn't understand my viewpoint. I mean, she honestly could not see why that would be a problem.

Q: Okay. Interesting. What were the other initiatives in the Asia Bureau?

JOHNSON: The environmental initiative.

Q: What was that?

JOHNSON: The AA wanted to have a Presidential Initiative and so she wanted DP to think of some potential initiatives. So, I came up with environmental initiative as being something that meshed with President Bush and his policy statements on environment, that it is something that you could probably get the President attached to it as a hook, because Bush had served in the South Pacific in World War II. The whole story of World War II was still surrounded with all these names like Solomon Islands and Tarawa and all the rest. There was something that also fit with the fact that the U.S. actually did produce some of the better environmental equipment that was on the market internationally and so in good conscious we could promote other governments into buying that equipment for cleaning the air or water or what have you. So, it was seen as promoting American exports, as well as working on environmental policy issues with people and governments in the Asia area. Also, bringing in PVOs. That was one of the things that I wanted to make sure happened. That when we defined the private sector, initially the private sector people defined it as helping U.S. exporters and so I worked to make that again to include both the PVO groups who might participate, as well as an indigenous private sector entrepreneurs, rather than just the single focus.

Q: What happened to it?

JOHNSON: I don't really know subsequently what happened to it. I worked on it a very short time, in the Asia Bureau, a very short time.

Q: Did she have a sense that the Asian Bureau was trying to find a role for itself on a new initiative and that it had out lived its earlier development role?

JOHNSON: You got some of that among the career Asia people. And, offhand I don't think the AA had that as a motive. She was a political appointee. She saw it more as an evolution of the program to where you had more contacts with the advanced and open countries, fewer contracts and with the totally undeveloped. But, I don't think that she saw the initiative. She did not see the environmental initiative as a way to try out a new ground, as much as she saw it as a new type of mechanism that could be used in relationships back and forth. I think the career Asian people really did wonder what was happening in terms of their life long interest and involvement in various Asian countries. And, as those Asian countries grow and develop, what should be a USAID relationship or would there be a USAID relationship.

Q: Okay. Does that take care of that?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: Okay. You said your next assignment was to work on the Task Force for the development program for Russia?

JOHNSON: Right. The United Soviet States of Russia had collapsed, the USSR. Out of that, no one was quite sure what would develop. The State Department saw some type of federal relationship and they tried at first very hard to shape and direct the USAID program into supporting some of the regional initiatives. Most other analysts in the academic community, as well as fairly high level analysts coming out of NATO and the U.S. Defense Department, saw absolutely no hope for the federation existing and saw no reason why it would be to the U.S. benefit if such a relation did exist and very much promoted working with the 11, 12 different countries that were becoming independent states. The initial USAID work on this was given to Richard Bissell. (I forget at that point whether he was head of Science and Technology Bureau or head of PPC. It had been rearranged so often.

Q: S and T.

JOHNSON: But, he asked Barbara Turner who had been with the Agency and had left to go work with a foundation and was coming back to the Agency to head up the Task Force. So, Barbara started building a Task Force that initially was like seven people, then it was 17 people, and then it was 27 people, and then it was 70 people, and it just sort of grew like topsy. As an evolution despite the fact that I stood there and stamped my feet and waved my hands and told people that based upon what I'd seen in the Sahel and East Africa, that you could not run a program with seven people, that it would grow to be larger, that you should start from the beginning on planning for a larger team, but you should start from the basic fundamentals of having enough office space, enough computers, yellow legal pads. You know, I mean you shouldn't start with seven, then eight, then nine, then ten, and eleven. If you just inched your way along you will always be behind the eight ball. You'll never be properly office housed, because you told someone that you only needed eight offices and the next thing you tell them you need 28, then you tell them you need 80. So, as a result they finally came up with the 80 offices, but they were scattered on five different floors and different wings of the State Department. Internal communications on the Task Force were made more difficult, rather than eased, in sort of arrangement.

What is the saying: "people who don't learn from history are doomed to the repeated it." Well, that's the same thing here. The State Department couldn't understand why we needed a large staff force, that we could do it with a small group of people. In this case the people who are working within State had never served in LDCs. They considered themselves the cream of the State Department, because they worked on Russia and Eastern European countries; they were the best of the best. They didn't see anything that was coming around the corner that they couldn't handle, much better than those people already in USAID who were use to working in those little poor third world countries. You know, we not working with nuclear powers.

I made the argument and tried to work on them over time. What USAID did was to manage the introduction of change. How much change can you push for; how much is a reasonable degree of change you can ask somebody to make in X number of years; what's the rate of change; how do try to be sensitive to unanticipated affects, even if it was a good idea to begin with, you know, so the consequences aren't working out too hot. And, if the State Department would think of us that way they would understand why it would be really effective for the people and country, because you really only get that kind of country, host government knowledge about competence of personnel and that dynamic that says, yeah, but a country is simply not making adequate progress on...; it's a shell game. Or, yes the country is really trying to implement the program but they're handicapped, because Joe Blow was killed in a car wreck and you know, just all of those things that go into knowing truly what happened in the host government.

But, I have to admit it was fun. It was just incredible to watch the Soviet Union dissolve and the independent states take their place in trying to figure out how much we knew about those states, and what was going on in them, and who would be the American experts that we could tap into, and what kind of programs made sense. As usual again, it was the same and it wasn't because I was associated with it. They followed the same pattern as the Sahel and in East Africa. They started out with the emergency assistance program where we sent in disaster teams that would go with particular air cargo loads of assistance to get some assurance that it got to the people, rather than being diverted to the military base and being used for the military. I worked with terms of reference for the first emergency team that went out and I had a whole section on things that they could find out for us that would be useful for later that it would not take a lot of time. It was clear their major purpose in staff time was to the emergency shipment in trying to make sure that those got to somebody that needed them.

But, in the meantime, if you walk around town and just talk to a few people; you could find out how many people in that area use a bank. What kind of banking arrangements are there. The State Department said they still don't have banks, you don't understand, they never had banks. My reaction was, there probably isn't a branch of the Soviet banking system, but I am 99.1 percent sure too that they have got local traders in that area who send money to their relatives who go somewhere else and that money transfer is represented by a piece of paper and it's not represented by people walking, you know, money cash metal across the border.

I thought the basic lesson from all the emergency stuff that I had worked with in Africa was that there are ways to do emergency aid so that you begin to lay a foundation and can lead to other kinds of activities and that your emergency assistance doesn't have to be disruptive in a sense of interfering and destroying the local agricultural markets. You can handle it so that it is supportive of longer term solutions. And, the first teams that went in, which were these disaster assistance teams, they were going all over the place, could come back with some information on how the local economies worked, not at the official level, because you could go to a piece of paper from the Embassy and read about the official level. But, at the unofficial level, I was just talking to people, well how to you get something to so and so who lives in so and so; how do you send mail; is there a telephone locally; how many people in this town have a telephone. You know, only two people have a telephone, but ten people had cellular telephones.

It is long range information and the State Department said it would look too much like spying that if we had all this emergency team going in and asking these kind of questions, that it would be disruptive and that the USAID people on these teams should limit themselves to making sure you knew where the food went. USAID decided that it was premature to start asking those questions, because the decision had not yet been made about putting in a USAID staff in those countries. So, despite my best efforts, we wound up starting a day late and a dollar short trying to catch up with their people, so this is why I am a little skeptical about experience, lessons learned. No one ever really wants to learn a lesson except the person who learned it to begin with.

But, we finally did reach an agreement. James Baker, who was Secretary of State, did what was in effect was supposed to be a courtesy call on each of the governments that were becoming independent. Up until then, the State Department had been holding a line that they were going to have a Regional Embassy in Moscow handle all of these countries. Baker came back and he gave the staff the instructions, there will be an American Embassy there, you will raise the American flag. And so, the State Department went into a scramble of its own as to how to put in 13 Embassies, the Embassy Staff and logistics and the delegation of authorities and who reports to whom. The Moscow Embassy was just furious, because this whole area that had been under their umbrella was suddenly going to be 13 Ambassadors who reported directly to Baker and the Ambassador Strauss in Moscow. But, actually Strauss did an extraordinary good job. Everything that he worked on personally turned out well.

Q: Who?

JOHNSON: Strauss, who was Ambassador to Russia, who has a leading the role in the Democratic Party; he was appointed as Ambassador to the Philippines; he came back and he is now in a law firm here in Washington. He was superb. Everything I ever heard about him, all the meetings that he chaired and what happened in terms of the State Department growth, and the USAID growth, you know, from my point of view were sensible; very common sense. You know, let's do it, we'll worry about some of those other things you're concerned about later. But, his staff was really trying to hold on to power in a sense that they had previously been responsible for the entire USSR and 60s percent of it was being taken away. There was a real question as to whether Russia, which is a federation of States itself, whether that would hold together and that one still periodically surfaces as to whether that will hold together or not. But, once a decision was made, then we would have Embassies in the individual countries and then the decision was made that we would have a USAID Office. Initially, because of our own staffing problems and logistical problems of moving people around, we would have a Regional Officer in Armenia who would handle the Caucus area, and a Regional Office in Kazakhstan to handle Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. Then, we had a Regional Office in Russia.

Q: That was a huge responsibility?

JOHNSON: Enormous responsibilities and we sent them out with a wing and a prayer.

Q: What could they do, or what did they do?

JOHNSON: First of all, I managed to get some very senior experienced USAID people interested. Unlike earlier programs that I worked with where you recruited someone who was fairly new but very promising and essentially you talked them into taking a chance, because they were young enough in their careers to try this. We managed to recruit very senior personnel from USAID who just found the whole context fascinating. We had Craig Buck go to the STAN countries, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan. I can't remember now who the other ones were. The Mission Director in the Philippines, I cannot think of his name, was being transferred from Indonesia to the Philippines and we caught him while he was in mid-flight and talked him in to going to Russia and then we spent the next year and a half trying to get his household affects to him.

Q: It was Jim Norris?

JOHNSON: Yes, Jim Norris. His household affects had already been shipped from Indonesia to the Philippines and we were trying to get them to ship them onward to Russia and the Philippines couldn't ship, because they didn't have any codes. But the way bureaucracies work, they function when you have the sign language or sign codes that says, go to A, go to B, go directly to jail and don't pass go. Wherever your rule was you need to have it written down somewhere so people can find it. In this office, we didn't. There was simply no time, things were moving too fast and USAID felt that they had to follow the State Department's guidance and the State Department was geared to a much quicker turnaround time, that if you decide this today and you change your mind on Thursday, then you can make that decision. And, we had in the USAID a pipeline of how you move people, how you get things going is much longer than that. So, you have to tell me now so I can have three people next September. So, I've got six months time to recruit them, to get them there, to get their household effects there, to lease the house, to lease the office, and all the rest of it.

Q: What do these people do when they first arrive?

JOHNSON: Jack of all trades. They started with the emergency and the emergency follow up. You know, getting assistance sent to the right places.

Q: Such as?

JOHNSON: Whether it was food, whether it was non-fat dry milk, whether it was cheese, Red Cross bandages, sterile hypodermics, what have you, that we pulled heavily off of USAID's OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Relief) funds until the Congress gave us special funds for Russia and then we started pulling off of the Russia fund. So, part of that time we were really handicapped in how much we could do, because you didn't know what was coming down the pipe. Luckily, Barbara Turner had the sense to when the initial discussions on the Hill were going on, to slip in that all the funds, the pragmatic funds, for administrative expenses, so we didn't have to worry about USAID having enough operating money to support us; we could use the program money for it. I think that really saved us in the long run.

You also had really talented people like Jim Norris who's a professional senior guy fully, practiced by the background in dealing with host government officials and embassies and explaining economics and explaining relationships for aid agreements, and for World Bank agreements and what USAID can and can't do. At the same time, there was no support staff. They had no GSOs; they had no Exec Officers; they had no Contract Officers. Basically, they were carrying the entire load themselves where as much assistance as we could get by pulling the people in TDY and sending people out on TDY for support. But, if you don't have the staff, then you don't do the paperwork; you know, it just doesn't get done. If you don't have the staff, you still have to lease the building and if you don't have the Exec Officer to handle some things than whoever's the ranking USAID officer does it. The work of wiring offices, ordering telephones and getting telephones installed, making sure that stuff isn't stuck in customs, you know, that doesn't go away, somebody's got to do it. If you don't have an Exec Officer or a junior officer to do it, then your senior officer goes and does it. That's the way it was in Moscow. So, a large part of what the first guys did was essentially housekeeping of setting up the support base. They could handle other kinds of activities and people. Pretty much the areas in which we would be involved grew out of a series of seminars (not really the right word), but basically what Barbara organized. Back in the first days when the Task Force was just being set up, they had a series of seminars, three-day workshops, where representatives would be invited from Russia and various parts of Russia. You would have donors who are already active in Russia and you'd have U.S. experts in those areas and they would organize technical lines so you'd have an energy working group, you had an environment working group, you had a nuclear working group, you had health working groups. And, pretty much the areas in which we did things were set up and flowed out of the original selection of different working groups, and that was pretty much done by the donors, the U.S., World Bank, Germany. They had e-mail and phone conversations at fairly senior levels and sort of carved out these big chunks of areas.

Some of them directly related to things that we were interested in like how nuclear energy was processed and handled, and the security of nuclear energy, where military war heads were a major national security issue for U.S. So, we had one group of people who just worried about that, and worried about Chernobyl and how the Chernobyl Nuclear Factory had been designed and the fact that the Nuclear Facility in Romania had exactly the same design as Chernobyl and could easily blow up like Chernobyl did. That led to the donors and the U.S. talking to the government of Romania and trying to get the government of Romania to close down the nuclear facility. And, the Romanians responded very sensibly that they lived in a very cold country where cold was a factor two months out of the year and that the Nuclear Power Plant was their most reliable source of warmth. That made it more difficult, because the Uzbekistan border had been closed and the Romanians and the Uzbekistanis were actually fighting at that point, and they'd put an absolute blanket embargo on any fuel oil being shipped in to Romania. The only other way that fuel oil could get into Romania was through Turkey and Turkey was a continual historical opponent, so the Romanians were a landlocked country with no access to any other source of fuel, so they wanted to keep the nuclear power Plant running or they wanted the donors to guarantee that their fuel could come in. You had very special particular interests like that scattered all over the area.

The interesting thing from my view point was that (for at that point the 25 years I'd been with USAID), the push had been on doing better planning, of more effective planning, more successful planning, of being able to have plans so then you could see what your progress was, you could go back and evaluate. At one point I understand, we'd insisted that the governments have a national plan before the donors would help them. In the case of the Soviet Union, the USAID organization had moved from a Task Force through several subsequent stages to where eventually we became a Bureau, independent and all to ourselves.

When the Bureau was set up I was going to be the Office Director for the Development Planning Office and the State Department had an absolute tizzy that we couldn't call it a Planning Office, because that had too many overtones of Russian state planning. What we wanted to do was convince the Russians to do entrepreneur, pre-market capitalism, so they didn't want an office called planning. They didn't want an office called development, because that implied that we were being materialistic: Russia was a country equal to our own and that we could do development in all the other countries, but this was a major European ally and we couldn't do development there. So, we came up with Office of Policy and Program Coordination, so that we didn't have any other buzz words that State disliked.

Q: Were they (PVOs) there?

JOHNSON: Yeah, they were there. Incredibly enough they were there. Land O'Lakes Dairy Cooperatives had been there for years, working very low key and hiding under a bush, but they were there. What essentially we did was we funneled money. Any American institution that had some kind of contact or link with someone in the former Soviet Union that could be related to the original working groups that were set up by the donors that started the whole process.

Q: But, you did have a framework for the different programs from the seminars. That was a degree of planning.

JOHNSON: Right, you had that kind of framework and those groups from the very beginning in cooperation with people who had made life histories of knowing about or learning about the Soviet area. They weren't neophytes in any sense. They knew the Soviet Union; they knew the system; they could speak Russian; others had been there many times. But, there was no attempt to use those groups as planning groups in any structured sense of having, you know, here are goals; here's our baseline data; you can see how far we've moved. They worked; they got together; they came up with things that were pretty sensible.

Q: And go to the person in the field with these categories and look for opportunities within those categories.

JOHNSON: Pretty much. We probably gave out our briefing books to everybody we sent out, and so the massive quantities of what had happened in the working groups, various policy statements by Secretary of State Baker, as to what the policies were, everything like that, and told people to draw an oath that that was as much guidance as we could give them. That operationally was the guidance; we will try and build a staff under you, but recognize at first you will be out there by yourself. So, for at least the first generation of projects, you know, go with things that are already in place. If there's an American PVO that for years has had some type of relationship with the local Community of Christ Church Outreach Day Camp Center, go for it. Fund the Day Camp Center. Build into your curriculum how great capitalism is. But, basically the chance to spread the money to have visible impact in as broad a section as possible and that our operational method of doing that was to lean on pre-existing links with someone in the American system. Be it PVO; be it academic...

Q: Didn't that lead to these mega projects with the U.S. institutions?

JOHNSON: It left a lot of proposals like that. It probably would have happened, except that was a side growth to what initially was pure technical assistance to what a strong IMF program and the World Bank supported doing. Putting Supporting Assistance funds (ESF) into the Ukraine. It was our own dumbness, I guess is how you put it, that we mentally envisioned the Ukraine and Romania and Kazakhstan stretched out on one belt. And, they were all very different countries. Like Ukraine, had one of the first banks; it's the largest country in Europe. It is much larger than Germany or France. The program in Ukraine we started was a very small technical assistance program primarily worried about Chernobyl, you know, quickly became to the point where we were a major actor in the internal reforms in providing Supporting Assistance (ESF) in conjunction with the IMF. So, the big chunks of money started going for the economic reform policies and programs as opposed to-

Q: Import kind of things?

JOHNSON: Yeah. And, some just budget support, rather than the technical assistance taking off on the big multi-mega umpteen billion university initiatives and on like that. What was also a problem was on the Hill in the House or the Senate. In order to get a bill passed for support to Russia, we had every living President write and support it and every past Secretary of State write and support it. But, then the Congressmen and Senators would give their vote only if their pet initiative got included in the bill. So, there were hundreds of earmarks in the bill for assistance. In the conference meeting between the House and the Senate, most of those got dropped, but they were kept, quote as "soft earmarks", which our legislative office, and more importantly the State's legislative office, felt that we had to honor, because otherwise you wouldn't get the guys vote the next time around. You had really small scale projects written into a soft earmark.

Q: Like what?

JOHNSON: That we should provide assistance to the airplane links between Russia and the Far East of the Soviet Union; that we should promote better trade back and forth, and that should be done through airlines that had existing passenger service prior to June 10 of 1985 what. It took one year to set that up. It was under Ted Stevenson from Alaska who for years wanted us to build the airports and runways in Alaska and in Vladivostok or whatever it was. We had one earmark that encouraged us to experiment with long distance education using television as a means of reaching across under-populated areas, based on the model of telecommunications used by school district 22 in Portland, Oregon. It was little things like that up to big things like to get ladies support we wound up with 20 million dollars earmarked for Vermont dairy products.

Q: To buy?

JOHNSON: We used money to buy the dairy products and then ship the dairy products out and distribute them to various people, various groups. I mean, everybody wanted a piece of that action and everybody on the Hill had a different idea: did you trust the Russians? Did you use this as an opportunity to further embarrass and humiliate old leaders, did you use this as an opportunity to train the youth of Russia? There were specific instructions that we bring, I think it was 500 teenagers in on youth education in our high schools. You know, Cooperative Extension Program that we had had for years, I think. But, it was extremely difficult, because that program had so many ties that were pulling in different directions and the basic coordination was being done by State, which was, I don't know whether it was better or worse than USAID would have done, but it was different. It was another complicating layer that we had to deal with in terms of making any decisions about the budget, about the staff, anything. At that point when I was ready to pull my hair out, Clinton won the election and set up transition teams to work with each of the cabinet little agencies and Golar Butcher (former AA for Africa) was picked as the transition leader for USAID.

Q: Before we go into the transition period, how do you size up your experience with the NIS countries and how long were you there?

JOHNSON: I was there for about a year and a half and then broke into the transition team work and then came back for about a half a year before I retired. I was Director of the Office of Program and Policy Coordination and then I went to the transition position. When I came back I was a Senior Advisor. I think they concocted some sort of title of Senior Policy Advisor, but it was being a special assistant to Barbara Turner.

Q: She was the Deputy then?

JOHNSON: At that point she was the Senior Deputy Administrator working with Malcolm Butler. The AA and then later when Malcolm left and Tom Dyan came in. What Barbara wanted was somebody who worked with her, but who was senior enough to where when she had conflicting meetings she could delegate me to go to one of the meetings and speak for her as a substitute DAA. It was a great job. You couldn't have asked for a better job, but by the time that came along I was so burned out that I just wanted to retire. I was very cynical about the entire process.

Q: Why?

JOHNSON: The NIS process: I think it was so micro-managed by the State Department and it looked like the future of the Agency just evolved more and more, no consultation or coordination or State Department setting foreign policy objectives or anything in that role, but it was more that they micro-managed the day-to-day operational level and had no feel that development was a professional technique that you learned. That it was something that anybody could do. It was mainly a process of processing money. They saw USAID as being useful to keep around, because USAID had certain operational talents that they didn't have in terms of being able to handle money transfers and commodity transfers. But no respect for USAID professionally.

Q: I know there was no effort at the higher levels to try to separate these functions.

JOHNSON: Interestingly enough, Malcolm Butler did some of it, probably more effectively than anybody else did. When the program first started, and he was the senior coordinator in charge of it and then later as it kept growing the internal fight was whether or not it joined the Eastern European Bureau or became a Bureau of its own. The decision was made that it would be a Bureau of its own under Malcolm Butler and that Butler wound up working, I would, say 95 percent of his time trying to keep State under control.

USAID would periodically show up in a form of one of the senior PPC people or somebody in the Administrator's Office. They would shake their heads at what we were doing or what we were not doing and it would go away again. Malcolm had no backup or support for cover from the Administrator, from General Counsel, from PPC, from any of them. They were perfectly prepared to tell Malcolm what they thought Malcolm should do, but they were not prepared to go meet with State and tell State, yeah, nay, this is it, this isn't it. So, Malcolm had to make the best deals that he could to keep the program going.

The main problem with that in what I saw much more in the Eastern European effort than in the INS effort is, that the whole staff in the Eastern European effort knew that essentially whatever State wanted State would get. And, if they had a fight with State and they tried to buck it up the channels on USAID's side that no one in USAID would support them. So, everybody started cutting the best deal they could. You wound up with it being done at the Assistant Desk Officer level and the junior control level, because they'd just cut the best deal that they could get, because they didn't see any help in getting a better deal or pushing it further up the ladder. In the INS, I think people did see grounds for hope, that Barbara and Malcolm would go to bat for them and had more success than failure in terms of saying like, this is the way USAID works and this is why USAID works this way and we're going to keep working this way.

Q: What were the primary factors guiding State, what they were pushing for or what they wanted that we disagreed with?

JOHNSON: From the original staff of these working groups, the State Department had designated State people who were supposed to follow up on each working group. So, they had an education expert who was a Junior State Department Officer who had worked, I think in Canada before; they had a housing officer; they had somebody comparable to each of these staffs, but they were very Junior State Department Foreign Service Officers. Because, internally inside of State, instead of it being run by the Bureau for European Operations, which would be more equivalent to our Bureau structure, the State Department set up a separate Task Force that would handle all of the key issues of Eastern European and INS to where, I think, at one point on USAID budget decisions, we had five different points in State to clear with, which involved their Task Force, their Regional Bureau, who otherwise wasn't involved with the program, their legislative office who never told our legislative office what they were doing. To the point, I kid you not, at one point the State Legislative Office had set up a Senate briefing where they wanted to brief the Senate on the budget breakdown of what the U.S. Executive Branch would be asking for. They set it up, had it all ready to go, the Senate staffers called USAID and said, State is coming up here this afternoon, don't you think you ought to come too? So, Marianne Sullivan (USAID Legislative Affairs) grabbed me and we went up and we got the briefing on what our budget was going to be like from State as they gave it to the Hill. It was the most round about coordination, communication that I've ever heard of and then they went ballistic over no changes were allowed in the budget that this is what they said in the budget and this is what they're going to do.

USAID finagles budgets all the time, you know, you go up, you go down, your percentages shift. So, half our time was spent trying to fit what we were going to do anyway into one of their statements as to what they said they were going to do. Housing was a big issue with them, because the Soviet Union was pulling back all of their military from Eastern Europe and there were no military barracks to put the military people in. There was a fairly great fear on the Soviet's side that if they didn't have something, preferably they'd like some employment for these people, but in the meantime until they could get the employment generation going they needed housing for them, definitely. So, we entered in to an emergency housing program. It was rational, but it was very much a commodity drop. It didn't lead to any other reforms in the housing system, changes in their rules and regulations which related to why it takes 20 years to build your house. It didn't do anything about the underline problems; it was just a band aid, a patch. And, in that particular case, State loved us, because the Housing Office got the funds and they moved fast. They were happy with it and their response and actions were such that State was very happy with it. On the side lines, you know, I was sitting there gripping it up, it's a band aid, it's a patch, it didn't do anything about the underline problems. And, the State Department didn't care. It's not that they didn't believe me, it is they didn't care about the underline problems; the problems that would come up in ten years or 20 years.

Q: Just a quick short term effort?

JOHNSON: Very quick, very short term, keep the lid on it, make sure it doesn't fall apart

Q: Very superficial, in some sense, you know, a quick response is sometimes needed, but you have to do more than that. Well, okay. You can add more on this is you want with it. But, you helped out with the transition and what was that job?

JOHNSON: To back up a couple of years when I was wandering around foot loose and fancy free, I was working with PPC on trying to translate the In-country Study Report into a meaningful internal guidance and not getting very far with it, because everybody wanted to make a footnote for why they should be different under certain circumstances. Mark Edelman was the Deputy Administrator who had previously been my boss in the Africa Bureau. So, Mark decided that there's been, well the Agency had just gone through a major reorganization sponsored by Roskins. A consulting team came in and they came up with different organizational boxes that they moved around all over the place. Mark wanted to do another reorganization study, but not in a sense of moving organizational boxes around. He wanted to look at what would be the change in policy given that the Cold War had come to an end and assuming that USAID would continue to have a role in post-Cold War world, what would that role be. So, he formed something called the "No Name Study Group-the "No Name Task Force." Because he didn't want a lot of rumors going around the Bureaus and the agency that we were going to have another reorganization or getting people upset, because there had already been so much action. And, it was Mark Edelman, who was Deputy Administrator, Ray Love who was Counselor, Senior Foreign Service Officer, the man at that time who was running General Counsel as acting DC, Larry Saiers from the Africa Bureau. I think there were one or two people that I can't remember, with me being the Secretariat, or the drafter, or the articulator, and coming up with drafts about what I thought about the Agency, did the role of the Agency change because the Cold War had stopped. If it had changed, was there something different we should be doing that we weren't doing. That took about, I guess we worked on it for about six months and it was called the "No Name Task Force."

Q: What did you produce?

JOHNSON: Produced a paper, as usual and presented it to Roskins and Roskins thought it was excellent, very good. This was like six months, finished probably in August or September before G.H.W. Bush and Roskins and then they were out the door and the new Administration was coming in.

Q: What was the particular message from this paper?

JOHNSON: To recreate the argument: there's a fairly active body of opinion intellectually, academically, and throughout the government, that with the Cold War ending and East/West issues no longer predominately shaping policy and programs, you would move to North/South issues and that would become, the agenda for the next decade. I argued that that was wrong and managed to sustain that through the Task Force and on to Roskins.

Q: Why were they wrong?

JOHNSON: Merely because the countries, the developing world, had during the Cold War taken on client status with one or other of the super powers. As a side line there was a lot of discussion that what the real North/South issues were between the developed countries and the undeveloped countries and the major focus attention should be the U.N. The U.N, working through a Myers-Briggs Personality type of test: developed, undeveloped, less developed, relatively developed, whatever way to characterize it . I argued that it wasn't going to happen.

Primarily it wasn't going to happen because the third world south countries really did not have a community of interest and a common agenda that they wanted to pursue their interests in an international forum like the U.N. or the IBRD. They liked being able to hit up individual donors; they had different agendas one from each other. If you will, the operating tactics that they had used during the Cold War of trying to play one side off another side would probably go away since they now had one superpower to deal with. But, they still maintained that in terms of their negotiating positions they would find different actors within that system to try and play off. And the North/South agenda simply would never be adopted as a common agenda, either by the host undeveloped countries or by the developed countries and that we were probably in for a period of more commercial mercantilism, you know, rivalry, than we had previously been in. So, that there would be more discord rather than more commonality and that from USAID's point of view, the need for donor coordination would be greater than ever. Our ability to do coordination would really depend much more on the White House and the State Department than on what USAID could do. They were going to have to set the lead and we could work at the fringes, if you will. The World Bank Consultative Groups or the U.N. Round Table mechanism. But, the overall donor coordination would have to be through State and the White House. That was my major issue, so I guess that's the one I remember.

The other issues that I dealt with were the health question and private sector activity, had the Agency gone far enough or did they need to go farther. A large part of the vocal ideas that were thrown around were again the tension between USAID wanting to do local entrepreneur capitalism, versus doing promotion of U.S. exports and capital investment. The paper came down primarily on the USAID being an activist in creating the environment and promoting local entrepreneurism while being a briefing agent for interested American private sectors, that certainly we could brief them about local rules and regulations, but providing much more of a facilitating role for American investment and a direct supportive role for local entrepreneurs.

Q: Did the paper include anything about the major areas of program activity, like environment or democracy or anything like that?

JOHNSON: It talked a little bit about again it, but, I guess, it was pretty much the Larry Saiers' argument. We need to move away from the functional categories that Congress funds; that we needed to have a broader array of rules, if you will, that we needed to take a much more aggressive role with Congress and fight both the use of actual earmarks, as well as soft earmarks. Otherwise, we were going to wind up being the Agency of parks and condoms as Larry described it. And that the next immediate country was the window in which we could have an influence on the Hill, and change it, etc. etc. etc. There was some attention given to what would we do if the functional earmarks went away. How would we program our funds, what would be different about what we'd do. I can't claim that that was particularly insightful. It said, you know, give us more flexibility in terms of looking at how fast projects could be implemented and making professional judgments about priorities. But, I didn't get a strong feel from anybody that there was a major, untapped, untouched problem, that if we had functional flexibilities we would go do them. Part of that was because we did a little bit of everything. We were scattered into so many sectors, ideas, functions, that one of our major problems was that we needed to pare that down. We needed to do fewer things and do them better. I can't recall anything that came up.

Q: So, you prepared that and then we had a change of Administration. Did anything happen with that paper?

JOHNSON: Nope, not that I ever heard. We did do the presentation to Roskins and he said all sorts of nice things about the good sounding paper, but it went on a shelf. All of my papers that never went anywhere.

Q: So, election came and Clinton came into office, what then?

JOHNSON: The "No Name Task Force Study" was done and over with and then I went to work on the NIS and did the Soviet Union bit for a year and a half. Then, Clinton got elected and Golar Butcher, who had been my boss in the Africa Bureau, under Ambassador Korry in the '70s was selected to head up the transition team for USAID. She called me up and said, I believe it was Sandy Burger who was the head of the overall international team had recruited Golar to do the USAID part. Golar told him that her health was not up to doing it, because she had had a couple of strokes and that she just didn't feel that her health was strong enough to do it. Burger said, look pick any staff you want, whatever resources you need we'll get them. So, Golar said she would do it. She called me up and asked me if I was interested in working with her and I said, "Yes, ma'am." And, she got in touch with Gayleatha (Brown, ed?), who had been her special assistant and who was currently working in the State Department as a desk officer, I think. They had another black woman who was active in politics, Bob Lester from USAID who was a lawyer, who's worked with every USAID organizational scheme for the last 20 years, I think. And, the Chief of Staff, also his name I have forgotten, were the transition team. The basic mandate of the team was to task USAID to do vision papers for the new administration, which would highlight things that would have to be decided the first six weeks, first six months in office, others that could be delayed until later. But, essentially USAID was tasked to do the basic briefing papers. Then, the overall Task Force would read what USAID did and decide whether it was acceptable or ship it back to USAID and saying, what about this, or what about this or that. The guy from the Hill, I cannot remember his name, he was a Senior Foreign Policy Staffer.

Q: Dick McCall.

JOHNSON: No, Dick McCall was working with the transition team, but he wasn't working specifically with USAID. But, McCall was the one that most of the time when we did briefings over at the big team, if you will, it was the only one at State, USAID, USIA, all of the Foreign Affairs Agency, Dick McCall was our contact person. Anyway, the guy from State did a basic draft of what he saw where Clinton would take the USAID Agency in terms of changes or revisions or major issues and then Lester and I reworked what he did, put it into an overall paper and Golar would sign off on it and transmit it to Sandy Burger and then we redid it. We had a short piece on stuff that USAID put together in terms of ranking priorities and a transmittal note sending back to Sandy Burger and Dick McCall. Golar worked with a woman from the private sector, who did personnel decisions or personnel recommendations, recommending things that should be done.

That process went from November through December (1993) and then the transition team broke up and everybody went back to their home office, except I went on Christmas Eve vacation and when I came back it was a comedy of clowns type of operation where it seemed like on January 20th, somebody on the Clinton team realized that come Monday morning after Clinton was sworn in, he was going to have all these agencies that had no representation from Clinton. And, come Monday morning you're responsible, you're in charge. So, the major effort in the two or three days before the inauguration, they brought in Clinton's supporters who would serve as eyes and ears, or acting outposts, or acting administrators, or somehow liaison representative of the White House to the different agencies. At that point, Warren Christopher was already semi-designated to take over as Secretary of State. Basically, he told the Clinton people that he would be the Clinton representative who looked after foreign affairs that he didn't need any of these political appointees. And so, USAID and USIA and Peace Core and OPIC, no not OPIC, were basically listed as reporting to Warren Christopher and that he would handle all policy issues until permanent heads of agencies were established.

In the meantime, because of the old Carter International Development Cooperation Act (IDCA), USAID was under something called the Overseas Operations or something that included the Commerce Department and OPIC was over in the Commerce, OPIC and Export-Import Bank by the Commerce Department. USAID was lumped together with all these agencies that were seen as domestic agencies with an export promotion priority. So, come Monday morning, (name?) and (name ?) Office said, we're here from the White House. And (name?) said, I beg your pardon. So, absolutely nobody had told USAID that they were coming; nobody had told State they were coming. State had already told them, don't show up at any of the foreign affairs agencies, because Warren Christopher is in charge. And, these guys, one had been the advance man for Clinton in Arizona and the other was a California businessman who had been active in democratic politics since the days of McGovern. He had gotten on a plane in California and taken the red eye special overnight and gone directly from the airport to the White House and had been given a briefing on his responsibilities as the Clinton Liaison Officer and then went to (name?) office, who said who in the hell are you and where did you come from and what are you talking about. So, evidently that first week was just total confusion. With, of course, nobody really willing and able to say, go away. He didn't know Christopher had told everybody to go away and State was upset with us for having somebody. USAID had another transition team, Clark and Phillips, who were the two guys sent over from the White House.

Actually, I got a call in Texas while I was on Christmas vacation, telling me that Jim Michael (USAID DA) and Sherper (USAID Councilor) wanted me to stay on the transition team so there would be somebody from USAID working with Score(?) and Phillips. Then, I got back to town and Score called me and said how much he wanted me to stay on the transition team, meaning in-house and all, etc. etc. etc. So, then I went to talk to Malcolm Butler and said, hey, the deal was I was released from the NIS Task Force for six weeks, the original deal. And, this time the deal would be that I would stay up on the transition until we got a permanent Administrator, which nobody knew when that would be. It could be a month, it could be six months, it could be a year.

So, I went down and talked to Malcolm Butler about what was going on, etc. etc. And, Malcolm's advice was that it was really something that I couldn't turn down. They had both, Michael and Score had asked me to stick around, but I really shouldn't stick around. It probably wasn't going to be any fun at all, but his past experience that anything got tied up in reorganizational, organizational staffing, new policies, etc. etc., that whoever did the briefing became a defender of the status quo. That no matter how you tried to word something, that when you explained how something worked, it always sounded like you were defending it, even if the reality was that it was something that you had originally opposed and didn't want to see done, but you lost and let the program do it that way, and so you explain it to somebody else that this is how we do it. Anyway, they probably would catch all of the flack from being a defender of the status quo and he really couldn't release me from the Task Force and not somehow replace me. They needed somebody; they were short, desperate, etc. So, I finally worked out with Carlos and with Michael that I would go ahead and stay with the transition team and that Carlos(?), my Deputy would be promoted up as Acting Director and be the Director, even though on paper I was still on the job, but he would be in the job.

Q: In the NIS?

JOHNSON: In NIS. So, I stayed with the Transition Task Force until August or September of that year; they went through a whole series of people that might or may not be interested in it, who might or may not fit certain criteria, you know, that the White House personnel group had, and we started constantly doing briefings for people sent over from the White House who were potential candidates for Administrator or potential candidates for something.

Q: That was your main function?

JOHNSON: That was our main direct function. The secondary function was briefing Score. Score was absolutely tremendous.

Q: Who was this, Score?

JOHNSON: Dick Score. He was nominated to be the White House eyes and ears. He had no official delegation of authority. Jim Michael had all of that. But, everything they did they checked with Score to see if that fit what the current White House line.

Q: Within USAID?

JOHNSON: Yeah. And, Score supposedly had the contacts with the White House to where he could see if it passed the sniff test or if it needed to go to the White House or further checking. Score's an engineer by training, was an extraordinarily competent man who got very frustrated every time he got into the internal workings of USAID, you know, absolutely bureaucratic and red tape, and that how on earth do we ever get anything done when we had that many different bases to touch. In later life, he wound up being the President's special envoy to Bosnia to try and do an emergency rehab roads and water supplies program there. He became very sympathetic to what it means to be operational. I understand he did a fairly good job. He spent his first three months stomping his feet and throwing temper tantrums, because the system wouldn't produce what he felt it ought to be able to produce with a 24 hour turnaround.

Q: Was there any substantive function there in that role in terms of new directions for the Agency or anything of that sort?

JOHNSON: No. Only extremely peripheral. You know, talking people through why, what does the Agency do now, what are their issues, especially for Score and for some of the other political appointees as they gradually arrived. But, not really developing the kind of creditability, I think that the new people would turn to me for ideas on what do you do next. They very much saw me as a hold over from the last regime.

Q: So, there was no new thinking or no attempt to view the world differently and how we responded to it?

JOHNSON: I don't know of anything. A couple of us that started work with the new crowd came to the conclusion that they were, their viewpoint of USAID was a reflection of the early '70s and New Directions and that USAID had moved into private enterprise and capitalism to the detriment of all the New Direction ideals of working with the rural majority and the poor, etc. The things that they talked about, the things that they wanted briefings on were like echoes from the '70s. There was an unwillingness or an inability to recognize what the Agency had learned in the last 15 years, and more importantly, that host governments in the LDC world had learned. And, that the LDC attempts to dismantle some of the economic rules and regulations and change the rules of the game, which came out of the Berg (Elliot Berg report on Africa, ed) report and all the work done through the '80s on getting the government out of things and allow local entrepreneurs to have a chance. They were very suspicious of, but somehow the 12 years under Republican Administration had tainted everybody. We were really all greedy capitalists trying to manipulate these countries into a position where they could never develop. Whereas, what we ought to be doing is putting money directly to work in rural areas and direct action programs, which would make a difference in the quality of life-a tendency to see everybody who had been there through Reagan and Bush as somehow tainted and the need to get rid of those people and bring in fresh people and an unwillingness, in my opinion, an unwillingness to recognize that the 12 years had happened, that the world went on without Carter, the world went on without their political appointees, and that not only had USAID changed, but the world had changed. Even more importantly from what we did, that the LDC world had changed and that not only were we active in the LDC world, we were also active in Eastern Europe and the NIS and in Russia. And, this was a whole new ball game and each Administration gets a set of dumb priorities, but you ought to recognize that some progress was made in the last 12 years and the world was not the same world it was as when you left in the early '70s. That was probably the most substantive role I played.

Q: So, you carried that on to August and September of '93?

JOHNSON: Yes, that carried up until August or September of '93. Then I went back to the NIS as a special assistant to Barbara Turner on the NIS Program, Former Soviet Union Program. I essentially came to the decision that I wanted to retire probably around March or April and we worked out that I'd retire end of September, 1994. So, the last period was with the NIS. It was an extraordinary job and because Barbara had full faith in me, she just let me do anything that I wanted to do, so the problem, I think was on my side. I was just burned out by that point and I was tired of dealing with the State Department and I was tired of dealing with the new group that had come in at USAID, who in my final conclusion were not serious people. Atwood had come over as the Administrator and he constantly built up expectations and then destroyed them, because he would send out policy statements and policy papers, and make statements to the troops, and have open forum meetings where he would say absolutely everything that people wanted him to say.

He was very articulate, very dynamic, you know, USAID is positive, we've got a great blah, blah, blah, blah. Then, he'd turn around and go back to this office and let Larry Burns (AA for Management) make all of the decisions, who was his new chief operating officer who knew absolutely nothing about development. He thought USAID could be run primarily out of Washington and that you could run it through a computerized system which he was going to develop called the New Management System where you would put in performance factors and they'd get multiplied by other factors and at the end of it the computer would rank all of the countries as to who should receive budgetary funds, allocation of funds, and that you really didn't need people overseas. He quickly worked himself into the most hated man at USAID, simply because he really saw it as a mechanical kind of activity and I saw no point of sticking around. I didn't have any fun any more and I'd always said that I'd stay with USAID as long as it was fun. And, it was not fun, it was painful every day. You felt like you were constantly fighting fires to try and keep something from going off the tracks. But, while you were working on one railroad, another railroad completely went off the deep end.

Q: Okay. You retired after your last assignment with the NIS countries and when did you retire?

JOHNSON: In August of 1994.

Q: I see. And, when you were in retirement did you have any special assignments of interest?

JOHNSON: In '95, I retired in '94 and before I retired the people in Science and Technology had asked if I was available to participate in an evaluation. They wanted me to go in August and I told them that I was retiring in August. They said, well we'll get back to you. And, it turned out that the evaluation wasn't until February and March of '95. I went with the Management Service Science, Inc. and was doing evaluations for S and T, which became the Global Bureau and participated in that and did-

Q: The evaluations of what?

JOHNSON: The Global Science and Technology Bureau had a program which supported linkages between American Universities and overseas universities. They had been through three years of this linkage program and were starting into the next round of award of grants. There was a fair amount of controversy as to whether they were working or not working, or what exactly were they doing. So, the Global Bureau sponsored an evaluation that looked at three linkage programs in Africa, two in Mexico, and two in India. There was a six person team and we divided up in to two people each and took a continent. I went to Africa along with a lady from Tuskegee University. We did two linkages that were in Uganda and one in Mozambique. Out of those, one in Uganda was totally off from its original target, which was human rights linkages between the University of Uganda Law School and Florida University. It had gone off into seven or eight different avenues, none of which were in its original proposal. Then, there was Uganda School of Medicine linked with Cleveland, Ohio, Western Reserve Medical School and that one was just doing extraordinary well. It fulfilled every hope in the original contract or the grant, which had University Specialists coming out from Cleveland to Uganda working with the people in the Medical School, primarily on epidemiological studies with a side specialty in HIV/AIDS, which was a major issue. People from the University going to the United States for short term seminars and training in specialized programs set up for them by the University. They were linked, they had e-mail communications that were linked back and forth and just very active, very alive, a very collegial kind of relationship. Then, we went to Mozambique, which was a disaster for a totally different reason, which was the Harvard International School. I can't remember if it was IIS or just International. I think it was Harvard International Institute of Studies or Science. It received a grant to work with the Mexico Medical School.

Q: In Mozambique?

JOHNSON: No. Harvard received a grant to work with Mexico on medical issues. Part of the grant was the idea of strengthening ties between third world countries. So, Mexico did a link with the Mozambique Medical School. And, the people in Harvard were advisors who over time got called into Mozambique. But, the people in Mozambique never understood that theirs was a secondary grant to Mexico. They were just totally confused. They felt that the contract with Harvard had been technically abused, and in terms of strengthening or institutional contact, or any of these linkages that were supposed to be happening, none had happened. And, no one had linkages with Mexico. In the meantime, the weight of the grant, anyone who knows an overseas underdeveloped institution, knows how precious funds are. The situation in Mozambique had gotten so bad that the head of the Medical School in Mozambique refused to sign the agreement with Harvard that would free up his local currency. Because, Harvard would not give him an accounting of where all the money in their grant was going. And, he felt that there was too much chance of the grant funds being misused and that he would then get blamed for it, but he had signed the local agreement, so he refused to sign the local agreement. I think that the whole concept of the Mexico and Mozambique relationships may have worked if they had been differently programmed, because Mozambique was not that far from its independence. It was very feisty and it had a chip on its shoulder about, we can do it, we don't need outsiders help. And, the Mexican Medical School was fairly leftist and also, you don't need outside help, you can do it all. So, emotionally there were some problems. They just never understood the grant and they couldn't figure out how come they never got any money in to the grant, or if they got any money in the grant why Harvard wouldn't explain to them where the rest of the money was going. And, the Mission had been unaware of this whole program, because it was a Global S and T Bureau program initiative, which went to Harvard and Harvard had contacts with Mexico.

At the same time, the Mission was in the process of developing a fairly large health sector plan, but they were a year and a half to two years away from it. If the S and T grant had been done differently, it could have been a great initiative in that whole sector, which would not have taken Mission money or bilateral money. We could have given them a whole series of contacts and could have developed a base of knowledge at Harvard that they could pull on. However, it never happened.

So, we came back from Africa and reported that two out of three links were disasters and one was going well. Then, we found out that the team that went to India felt those were going superbly, the team that went to Mexico, felt those were going superbly, and so the final evaluation that was written up for USAID said that they were working. I said, what do you mean they're working, there's two out of the three that worked. They said, well, that it was Africa. These are our advanced sophisticated grants which may not be appropriate for Africa. I said, "No, no." The problems involving the grants were not on the African side, they were on the American side. I found out that the consulting agencies have never really understood the order of clearances. So, when the team report gets turned into a consulting company, you know, they're free to rewrite it however they want to. I decided that I did not, I felt liked it so I'd retired.

The evaluations would be a good way to use whatever knowledge I'd developed over the years. And, after that exposure, I thought nope, evaluations are not the way to go. One, because I was very frustrated at not participating and fixing what I found wrong. That I wanted to go talk to people in USAID, the Mission about all the things that I thought they should have done, which clearly was inappropriate for a contractor to do. Secondly, because I felt that a report got written that had my name on it over which I had very little editorial control. So, I decided that my work with USAID had been interesting and for the most part, extraordinarily challenging, but it was just time for me to walk away from it and get on with my life. So, I didn't do anything more with USAID, and I really didn't intend to do anything more with USAID.Q: On this University linkage business, this wasn't linkage based on prior relationships between American and developing countries institutions? What it sounds like is a new relationships that hadn't existed before, is that right?

The original purpose of the grant was more towards getting the Ugandan University Law School involved with government in trying to establish a human rights record of what was within the law in general terms. And, instead the main emphasis had gone to developing an East Africa Law School and Publications on Human Rights. Academically, the people in Florida thought that it was great, but it really wasn't within the original terms of the grant. I thought it was far more academic than intended. If their major effort was supposed to be working with the government, it was going to be an extremely long range hands off point of view. The original man who was heading it up; who was in the law school and headed up the human rights division had quit and gone to London. The second person who had headed up the rights division had come to the United States on a scholarship. The man that...when we got there first of all, we could not identify who we should talk to before we left the United States. I sent faxes, e-mails and telephone calls, but nobody got back to us. We finally got one call from the guy at Florida State University who suggested that we skip going to the Uganda at all and just come down to Florida. So, we arrived and wondered whether we would find a project there or not. We were immediately met in the grandest tradition; we met two different groups of the Ugandans and that were fighting it out in factions at the Law School for different faculty reasons. One met us at the airport and took us to the hotel, and another showed up at the hotel later that night, and both were eager to tell us the true story of what was going on. What had happened is that the Law Schools or Universities or Institutions and their bureaucracies had gotten all involved in bureaucratic in fighting on the Uganda side as to who was going to get the status of having the degree and who was going to be able to pass out scholarships. And, the publisher perish syndrome had taken hold.

Q: Well, stepping back from that specific one, looking at the evaluation overall, what was the assessment about the idea of these linkages?

JOHNSON: The overall assessment was that they worked very well. They provided a valued opportunity for linkages to be developed between non-governmental sources.

Q: And that they should be continued?

JOHNSON: Should be continued and expanded, if I recall correctly.

Q: What were the main things that needed to be improved, if anything?

JOHNSON: As I recall, I'm probably no longer accurate on my numbers, but there were something like 13 colleges, universities, vocational schools that had gotten grants under the first two year go around. And, there were another 13 who had gotten them the second year. This was for the 26 grants outstanding and this was in the third and fourth year at the time of the evaluation. The decision was made not to evaluate the second group of 13, because they hadn't been active long enough for it to work, but they did a desk audit of the first 13 and then six of those had overseas evaluation. Essentially, the conclusion was that it was too soon to tell whether or not they'd have any sustain ability. For the most part, the universities had had prior contacts with the country, if not the particular institution. There was a strong feeling that a link had been established that would be sustained over time, but it was simply too early to tell that the major issue of any sustainability over a long time was going to be financed. And, the universities and host country institutions had worked to create linkages on all other fronts, but neither side had figured out how they would do the financing once the program finished. There was a fairly strong recommendation in the report, as I recall that USAID should reconsider the two year limit to the grant; that they simply wouldn't be long enough and that USAID should provide more funds to assist it over a long term. They also felt that this was an appropriate tool that could be extremely useful in countries which were graduating or had graduated and for the advanced developed countries that no longer received bilateral assistance from USAID. That this represented a way to have U.S. involvement in the world to both help the country and bring back from the country the perspectives of what was going on throughout the world.

Q: Do you think the program had support within USAID?

JOHNSON: I think the program was basically unknown within USAID. As a large institution, the different grants were mainly the concern of the different Bureaus that gave the grants and in this case it was S and T or Global. It was in a timeframe when Global was reorganizing and going through transition, and pulling people in and pulling people out. As I understand it, under the old organization there was a center that worked with colleges, a University Center, under which this particular grant was monitored. That University Center was combined with several other activities and ultimately Global set up a Center for Human Resource Development. As I understand it, the University Center was sort of an appendage that no one paid much attention to and its funding is fairly small and that's about it.

Q: How big were these grants, roughly?

JOHNSON: I think they were all under a million. They varied, but I would say anywhere from five hundred thousand dollars to a million. So, in terms of USAID's overall funding, they are very small. Like in Mozambique, I could see where this kind of a grant would have provided just an extraordinary insight in resources for the Mission in developing its own bilateral major health sector plan. Rather than providing funding for temporary assignments, project design teams, the grant could have been given that linked Harvard and the local university, etc. etc. etc. Wouldn't have counted as bilateral money, wouldn't have committed the Mission to anything in terms of following up, it could have been very useful. But, because it was laid out in isolation it was irrelevant.

Q: So, it wouldn't have required a lot of the programming work over the long time?

JOHNSON: No. From the American University's point of view, it wasn't peripheral. It was the exactly what they wanted to do. So, I don't think that they were the ones at fault. I think it was USAID who simply didn't give it enough thought to how this could be used.

Q: What about other assignments?

JOHNSON: After I finished the evaluation, I stayed away and said no whenever anybody talked to me. But, in early '97, Gary Nelson gave me a call who was a friend of mine in USAID who had also retired and he'd been doing some consulting work. He had to go to Madagascar for six months and he didn't want to take that long, but he said he'd try and find somebody to help him and so he called me. I'd said I'd try it, because the job was going to one place and staying there long enough to have some impact on what happened. Secondly, because it was one of the few countries in Africa that I'd never made it to; and third because part of the trouble with evaluations for me anyway, was working at this third hand distance. Working for a contractor who had a contract with USAID. And, in the case of the Madagascar job, it would be a Personal Services Contract directly between me and the Agency. So, I said yes and he worked out the details and I went out to Madagascar from June to November of '97.

The basic problem was that the Deputy Mission Director was moving up to the Mission Director. At the same time the U.S. mission support team had been cut to seven. Of the seven full time positions, five were vacant. Either because people hadn't arrived at post yet, or people at post were taking home leave, and so it was just the Mission Director and an International Development Intern (IDI), there over the summer. Although some people stayed and some people left, it was eventually a two person operation over the summer. They wanted somebody who could come out and be jack of all trades, do whatever came up that needed doing, as well as work with the economists to come up with a new strategy for their program development process. When it was approved, it had four strategic objectives under the new terminology. Overtime, the Agency put the squeeze on the missions; if your country didn't qualify as a development case, you couldn't have four objectives; you could only have two, etc. etc. Madagascar had had a fairly good reform program in place with the IMF, but it had a series of elections and internal political issues. They hadn't been meeting their IMF requirements, so the Mission had put them on a watch list and then subsequently USAID in Washington had said, well since they're on the watch list, you know, we have to cut the staff, which is why it went from 14 to seven and their objectives went from four to two.

So, I went out there and found that I just thoroughly enjoyed it. It was highly operational. It turned out that I really didn't get involved that deeply in the strategy, in of writing the strategy. I was just a resource back-up person for the economist, which I felt was good, because I think USAID made a mistake when they turned strategy writing over to outsiders. At that point, I was an outsider.

The Mission's program was either being phased out or trying to move from four objectives to two. They were trying to take things that they hadn't been doing or had planned to do under some of the objectives and consolidate them. And, they were winding up with two objectives; one in environmental programming and one in health and population programming. Their agricultural activities they were reworking to phase into the environmental side so that you would have a combined environmental agricultural approach. And, their economic support program that they had, I think to support the IMF reforms, was up in the air. They didn't know what to do about it. For the first three months all I did was provide support. I found that there were extraordinarily talented people (Madagascans) out there and they really didn't need me, other than they needed an American to say, yes that's fine. Then, when the American staff started coming back, they were also very talented and very strong. The head of the environmental/agricultural unit came back and I started working with her. I felt their basic thrust on the environment was that as long as you did pure environmental work, it simply would not be sustainable. People invaded the protective lands, because they needed to for economic reasons. They needed to chop down the wood for firewood, either to heat their own home or sell to the Charcoal Company. They needed to eat the animals; they needed the space for planting corn, which the animals would eat if they didn't kill the animals. It was just all sorts of economic reasons as to why the hope to preserve some of the protective areas was in trouble. You had preceded along the lines of trying to find economic ways that were of use to local farmers in protecting the habitats; Madagascar is the home of, I think about 400 species of plant and animal life that don't exist anywhere else. So, there were major U.S. Private Voluntary Organization initiatives there. I was trying to work with the Born Free effort, which was pure environmental conservation and preservation.

I worked with the government, which was primarily concerned about economic growth and development but was beginning to see that there could be some advantages from ecotourism. But it but felt that they needed to do something about the farmers who lived in these areas and generate alternative employment for them. It had the understanding of all the different active groups that were partially concerned about what happened. Unfortunately, I thought their major mistake was that they were repeating some of the things that happened in the Integrated Rural Development programs, where certain areas were set aside for development. In the Sahel and Africa, otherwise self contained, political units, were picked. Agriculturally, you could help that group reach, move more quickly on the development of these activities, but providing an insulation around it. So, that it usually had special funding and special rights and special privileges under the local government. I thought that the only significant weakness in Madagascar was that they were setting up units to work on intermixing the economic activity and environmental conservation activities, which in effect were being set up as Integrated Rural Development programs. They weren't called that, but they had the potential of having the same vulnerabilities. The other part of the agriculture program that they were trying to mesh dealt with exports, working with the different groups in Madagascar to promote exports.

Q: Did you find an alternative approach that didn't destroy the environment?

JOHNSON: They're working on it is all I can say at this point. It was just too new. They had gotten to the stage of setting up separate governing authorities. They were having a series of public relations, public education meetings where they were pulling together the local farmers and the environmental groups; they had a link with some of the community development groups. And, then because the agriculture program included work on export promotion, they had links to the business community; they had representatives show up, but it was far too early in the program.

Q: What about the health population initiative? Was that going anywhere?

JOHNSON: The health population initiative was going great guns. I had very talented local government folks to work with. While I was there some of them were gearing up to get ready for a polio vaccination campaign. They had polio vaccine and getting it around to all the different districts and then doing a big public relations campaign with banners all over the streets. It seemed to be going quite well. They were working with the Administrator of Health on various outreach programs, and this particular one was polio vaccination. They had had other outreach programs; they had a PL480 Title II Program that was run by the Health Office where they tried to a blend school feeding program into other health activities.

Q: Did they have a centralized health system, primary health system, district officers and all that ?

JOHNSON: They did; they had the rhetoric or the philosophy of why the system worked. My guess could be because it was an island. It was misleading. The Minister of Health made (you know, and all countries probably should do it.) made regular inspections and calls on different health units. In Madagascar, although Madagascar rates as one of the poorest countries in the world. For a good 25 to 50 year period, it was a major colonial capital. The country had all of the initial investments. They had roads that go all over the place, they had good schools buildings, they had all of the capital bricks and mortar institutions in place. And, they had excellent ports and harbor facilities; they had good airplanes, a good airport facility; a telephone system that ran all over the country. And, they became one of the original laboratory areas for USAID's initiatives on computers and the Internet access that was named for Mickey Leland for the Leland Advisory. Actually, they had hired a Leland coordinator for the Mission who was working on setting up a government unit and a government telecommunication law. They had previously nationalized the telephone service and they were moving to privatize the telephone service. The Leland Advisory was working with them on that initiative; they had cyber cafes and hotels to an extraordinary extent for a country that is nominally, in terms of GNP one of the poorest in the world. They had a ten year stretch where essentially the government wasted itself in to bankruptcy, and now it's trying to work through its debt. The Ministry of Health is decentralized and in the pattern of the government, they had decentralized many of their activities. But, because it was an island it didn't have, I think the kind of impact it would have in Botswana or Tanzania.

Q: Were those the major programs, and family planning was really well accepted?

JOHNSON: Those were the major programs. Family planning was really well accepted. The access to family planning, as I recall was not a controversial area. The Mission was funding a campaign on AIDS, a public awareness of AIDS and safe sex. I know they had a big PL480 nutrition activity going on.

Because Madagascar is in the path of hurricanes and cyclones, they had almost perpetual disaster relief going on for the eastern end of the island. I felt they were doing really well in terms of setting up the disaster assistance that led into some of the longer term programs, especially in the health area, which I think happened, because health was the organizational unit that had the management responsibilities for disasters. They were very creative in ways of linking the disaster assistance to the ongoing health programs, both as epidemiological studies and gaining knowledge about the general health and nutrition of the area, as well as operationally strengthening Ministry of Health in terms of what they provided to the area. They were beginning to work with the agricultural people in finding ways to link the agricultural people to the disaster service so that you could have longer term development effects.

Q: How did you find working with the government?

JOHNSON: It was great. It was extremely well educated, talented government. Stay away from the politicians. The politicians would frustrate you. All they were interested in was the relative political strength, but again, they had a really strong technocrat level of government that wanted development to happen and were trying to make development happen. The morale among the Madagascar USAID staff; I have never been any place where the morale's as high. And, they all felt that they made a difference.

Q: I gather by the time you were there that the economic reform process had broken down and the government was not following through on its commitments.

JOHNSON: Policy had broken down. The government has not followed the IMF reform measures. The U.S. and other donors, six to eight months before I got there, had a major demarche with the government, saying that their ability to help support Madagascar would decline. So, for about six months the government had gone through all of the initial stages of denying the IMF reforms that were needed and it had come to the point of saying, well yeah they are needed and we will do them, but we just can't do them as fast as you want them. So, during the six months that I was there it was a question of trying to monitor the steps the government was taking, trying to find out from other donors exactly how much movement was occurring and, if any was occurring. In general, it was looking pretty good.

From a small point of view, they had major, major delegations of authority for the entire program. The Mission had practically no delegation of authority on the Operating .Expense side. Massive changes in all of the program documentation in terms of how you identified for Washington what you wanted to work on and then the field almost totally in charge of figuring out how to do it. But, out of practically no delegation of authority. So, everybody else was trying to manage for results and manage the outcome and keeping all of their paperwork on that level. The Controller had to have paperwork on how much money did you get and what was it spent for on the input side. The New Management System had just totally collapsed, the computerized program which was supposed to bridge to the country had totally collapsed. It was like being present at the evolution type of thing. You could see the changes, changes were happening and they were moving things much faster. I found myself being the conservative old type. Are you really sure about what we have been doing?

Q: How do you characterize the new programming system? What are the basic concepts behind that?

JOHNSON: Its purpose was in managing for results to set up the program so that your eye is always on the outcome that this is where you want to end up five years from now. I think I characterized it earlier that some of what the New Directions did. This put more emphasis on results, and the purpose of the project, for example, is to strengthen the Ministry of Agriculture. And, under the New Directions policy, the purpose of the project is to strengthen the Ministry of Agriculture so that it can provide Extension Services for small farmers - the outward orientation in the management for results. It's taken that the next logical step, which is the purpose of the project, is to strengthen the Ministry of Agricultures so that it can provide extension outreach services for the farmers so that they can grow more corn, or more sorghum, or more rice. And, that your project is successful if more rice is grown, more corn is grown, rather than being judged as a success because the Ministry of Agriculture has a higher budget.

Q: Didn't we have those kinds of objectives in the projects before?

JOHNSON: Sometimes they were there, but I think it's a question of flushing them out and putting more emphasis and higher priority on them and making them more conscious in terms of your talking to the contractors, talking to the government. It becomes the subject and you work your way backward from, okay, extension needs to grow more corn, how can that happen. Well, first of all we could try and do a land reform or then we could do this. And, you work your way from the statement of the problem back to what kinds of things you can do about it. In many ways you still do the same things. You have a contract with the University of Idaho that says, strengthen the Ministry of Agriculture.

Q: What did you have in the lieu of a project paper?

JOHNSON: You have the scope of work in the contract, which then becomes your working document between you and whoever you hired.

Q: How do you know how much to fund it for?

JOHNSON: I've never figured that out. In terms of figuring out how much money its going to take to grow more corn, which is where the system ideally leads you, they're not there yet. In terms of, (I'd been involved in other projects in other countries) in other times you'd sit down with the contract team and the contract team would tell you they'd never seen the project paper. That was an internal lead document. And, what they were working off was the scope work in the contract. There were some lawyers I know, and some controllers who have felt very strongly that project papers are internal documents and they have tried to say, it is illegal to show these to a contractor.

Q: Particularly the budget.

JOHNSON: So, I think that this system makes for more open communications with the people who write the implementation edge of your projects. I don't think they have every issue solved. There is a huge gap between managing for results and looking at your activities from our point of view, which now has a parallel system of looking at your inputs and how much they cost, so that everybody is really doing double duty. We have yet to convince Congress, but they have tried to report to Congress on the basis of the sector objectives and the development results and Congress said, how much money are you giving to the country. So, now they do a country write up as an annex of appendix E or something. There's more confusion with the Hill on what is the Agency trying to do and how many countries is it working with, and is it really substituting geo-political issues in the allocation of funds for development issues. And, on that one, I think they are probably right. We need the geo-political; we look at the weighted system as to how projects are supposed to be prioritized, you know, how they've been built it into foreign policy objectives. And, that in itself, to me, distorts the system.

Q: They always have.

JOHNSON: Congress was always being suspicious of that particular element.

Q: Is it just a choice of where a program is concentrated as a top dollar or a bottom buck or a mixture process? In the old days, people thought that the priorities should be set by the Mission in the host country that senses what the priority should be and where the focus should be based on what the situation is in the country?

JOHNSON: I'd say it is still a mixture; partially influenced and warped in the large big part by the Hill by what earmarks and language the Hill puts into the legislation. It's also influenced and warped by the State Department in terms of what they perceive or identify as our political interest. And, it is also influenced by things that the USAID headquarters office does in terms of staffing cuts, Operating Expense availability; what skills are on-call within the Agency as opposed to outside the Agency.

Q: Does the Agency then select a certain area that it wants to concentrate on, program areas, like population health and environment?

JOHNSON: USAID has been for so long on the kick of consolidation that it's hard to really tell what's different now from what was 20 years ago. The rhetoric is pretty much the same that you want to focus, you want to concentrate, you want to cut back on the numbers, the types of problems that the Agency works on. In an effort to do that, for example, part of the reorganization of the Global Bureau was to set up five Centers of Excellence, which would incorporate or represent the five areas that the Agency was going to concentrate on. Due to public outrage and political push, they added the sixth, which was Education and Human Resources. They had originally put education development inside another center, but they broke it out as a separate activity so that it could be tracked better as to what we were doing in education development. So, the Global Bureau wound up with six Centers and one special area of development: education and human resources.

The six Centers: I mean there is a 1) Center for Economic Growth and Development, which they had incorporated with the agriculture area. And, there is a 2) Center for Population, Health and Nutrition; there is a 3) Center for Environmental issues; there is a 4) Center for Energy issues; there is a 5) Center for Democracy (and Governance, ed) and 6) Education and Human resources. So, the general themes are not that different. They didn't try and graft on a new area that the Agency hadn't been working with already. The various initiatives that people promote: either State Department wants us to do or somebody on the Hill wants us to do, or that the Administrators decided that we should do it. They're still both fairly broad; they're all over the map.

You wind up, if you're a small program like Madagascar, doing the traditional, volunteering to be the guinea pig for all the initiatives, so they got the Leland coordinator. They volunteered to be one of the test sites for the partnership arrangements between USAID and contractors; they volunteered to be a lab for the new organizational arrangements. They wound up being eligible for a whole variety of activities just because they were willing to volunteer. You still wind up with a bilateral country program, which is described in some sort of planning document, plus initiatives which were extraordinary and outside the program, or which have been added to be part of the program, but only exist, because there was a special category of funding. If you go back to the logic of special initiatives with special funding, it is to promote and get started a program that otherwise would have met a lot of resistance; an array of issues, which the Agency still faces.

It is the same problem that when McPherson came in, McPherson got a lot of good publicity from the Republicans and a lot of creditability with the Republicans on the Hill by a public relations stunt of taking back funds from countries that had not been expended. And, wrapping those all up into, I think, 16 million dollars; he had this huge check made up. It was like ten feet long and four feet wide, and there was a picture of him at the White House presenting the check back to the Treasury in front of President Reagan. Everybody within the Agency regarded it as a stunt. In many cases, the projects still needed that money. It didn't make sense to take it away, and others, yeah the money was available and would ordinarily be deobligated over time, you know, why make a manpower headache out of it by pushing to have it all done by a certain day. But, McPherson got a lot of personal creditability from the Republican side of the Hill and from the President in the White House.

I think Atwood did the same thing in terms of a much valued initiative of closing down missions, of cutting back on the number of overseas missions and wound up closing thirty some posts. I think because of that he got a lot of creditability with the Democrats and the Republicans, that this was a new tough management and that he was really going to concentrate and straighten out problems. I don't think it's worked. I think in most of those countries where we officially closed out a mission and pulled the staff back, we wound up scrambling to find other kinds of initiatives that could be done through the Global Bureau, like the university linkages program, (cited above, ed.) So, one of the big issues in the Global Bureau was who's responsible for countries after we cut bilateral relations and what criteria do we use in deciding what the relationships would be. That actually is one of the issues that's in my current contract with the Global Bureau to be worked on.

Q: Were there other things that you worked on before we wind up; after Madagascar?

JOHNSON: After Madagascar, I came back to the States. I was energized, you know, on working with USAID and doing something. Barbara Turner called me up and asked me if I would be interested in working in the Global Bureau. She was moving over to the Global Bureau as the new DAA and was very interested in my in doing some work for it, and I said, yes I definitely would. So, all of my earlier ambitions about not wanting to work directly for the Agency; that it would be better if I worked through a third party, turned out to be wrong, and that it's much better to just go back and work directly with the Agency. There is a point at which you have to tell yourself that you're a contractor. You are not a program employee and you have to be willing to step back in some areas and let people who are junior officers learn, the way I learned when I was a junior officer. You can't take over from people just because you've done it ten times and you can do it again; it's no big deal. For them it's a big deal and it's exciting and they want to do it. I think as a contractor you have to keep reigning yourself in on those kinds of areas. But, right now I have done two short-term jobs for the Global Bureau and they're talking about doing some more and I would be more than interested in doing something.

Q: Various ad hoc subjects?

JOHNSON: They are ad hoc subjects; they're almost all with USAID's internal organization and applications; I wanted to take advantage of things I had done through the 30 years. I found that one way to do that was on these short term jobs by just talking with people. To some extent, it is like getting two guys together and they tell old war stories. And, at the same time, there's information channeled that you pass on. There are some things that I use to do that I'm very good at, like strategic planning. I don't think it's appropriate for an outsider to do. They're to come in and write a paper and leave is not what the strategic plan is all about. And, no strategic plan, that works it's because you spent a lot of time talking people into agreeing that that's where you want to grow the program.

I spent a lot of time and energy on the implementation and support of that particular approach. So, in my opinion, I think I'm the best strategic planner that the Agency turned out. I don't think that I'm terribly creative, but I think I'm a hell of a sensitizer or I can spot patterns and say, that's true over there, and this is true over here, then if we did this here, you know, type of relationship. It's fun, I like doing it. It's like putting crossword puzzles together. But, I don't think that is as useful a talent for an outsider to bring the bear. For some of the areas I can just historically say, these are the different things that USAID had tried and these seem to have these problems and those seem to have that problem.

Q: That opens up an opportunity to look back over your career. What are the lessons over the 30 years or so of your work that you feel stand out as universal lessons or conclusions that still guide you when you approach development issues and approaches and new programming? It's a broad subject, but maybe there are certain things that stand out, mostly at the project level, but also at the level of strategies on which you've done a lot of work,?

JOHNSON: The major one, the lesson that I would pull out of it, that I would reemphasize anytime you go back into it is: you have to pay attention to what the host country wants. It is far too easy to get ahead of the country and then you get to the point where you're more invested in the success or failure of the program or the project of the country.

That lesson, I think, actually started in Ghana 30 years ago. We had a program analysts at U.S. Office of Management Budget (OMB) who was absolutely certain of the fact the U.S. shouldn't provide more than 50 percent of all donor assistance to any country. They use to make us go through these endless exercises in Ghana of trying to figure out how much assistance the U.S. was providing, versus somebody else providing and always keeping the U.S. at 49 or 50 percent. And, given the fact that donors differ in terms of obligation accounting, expenditure accounting or pledging, it's just in many ways a paperwork exercise.

But, in other ways, in looking back I think he was right that the U.S. makes a mistake when it becomes a major donor. It's like the old song about, if I owe you six hundred dollars I've got a problem, if I owe you six million dollars, you've got a problem. We wound up that we had so much investment in Vietnam that we couldn't control the Vietnam government, because they knew that we weren't going to pull out, because of our major investment. The easiest mistake to make is that because the U.S. cared about something so much or that we think it's so important to achieve, that we wind up with our investment being, either financial investment or emotional investment, greater than that of the host country.

Q: What about in program areas like population where the country is not aware of a problem or for whatever reason is unwilling to address it or didn't want to get involved or accept advice on the program area and yet it's something that you knew was important. How do you deal with this gap between what our understandings are and what we think is important and we know it's going to be a big issue and what the country's view is?

JOHNSON: Population and family planning probably represents the best example of the USAID's efforts to change the situation; introducing and accelerating a change that we saw as beneficial and positive. If you look back at it, I think the population and family planning people made some initial mistakes in terms of going faster than the host country really wanted to go. Ghana was one of the first countries in Africa that had government support for family planning. And, the U.S. funded contraceptives for the country. I remember Burt Gould (USAID Mission Program Officer in the 70s,ed) telling me about a trip he made up to Northern Ghana where everybody in the Mission was on standing orders whenever they went out on TDY's to various places in Ghana to check and see what was happening with contraceptives, because they'd had a major breakthrough of letting drugstores sell contraceptives. And, so everybody was supposed to go into a drugstore and find out where the contraceptives are. Were they on the shelf, available or were they underneath in a closet, you know, how easily were they accessible. So, Burt told the story, it's a long involved story, but the punch line was, the pharmacist had foam contraceptives which he was selling as a form of shaving lotion, an instant greasy matter that you could put on your face that would let you shave more easily. I think that happened throughout the family planning, nutrition, health period where a lot of it was spent on public education or educating policy makers in getting policy makers to see what was happening and then moving into the logistics of implementing it. I remember the population people use to have a Rapid Assessment program that they did. They would go around to various countries and show to the decision makers that if your population growth rate continued at a certain level, these were the number of schools that you had to build in order to educate them. These were the number of teachers that you had to train in order to staff the schools. Just portraying the implications of demographic growth and letting people see what the results were. It was not necessarily carrying a message of, you have to do this, but a message of, look this is a problem. You can work on the problem anyway you want to, but the problem is this and family planning is one way to address it and increase training of teachers is another way to do it.

The Agency made public discussion of family issues and population growth legitimate development issues in terms of having the studies, e.g. in the Uganda and the information so that you could talk about it. In many cases, the U.S. government's tendency is to throw money a problem. And, people put more money into the population programs than they could really use for public education, demonstration. Then a lot of that money wound up going for funding contraceptives that went in the back of closets and never got used or the classic one that showed up in all the studies, like in Egypt where the condoms got used as balloons for birthday parties.

There are rates at which you can move and pour more money into a problem, but it doesn't necessarily accelerate the rate of acceptance. You can be creative and you can use the money in a lot of different ways to attack the problem and set it up as an experimental situation where you expect eight out of ten to fail and then push on the two that were successes. The Agency has never been in a good position to talk with Congress. We were the experimental agency, but we've never really sold that to the funding agencies. So if we try ten different things then we better have a pretty good understanding or reason that all ten will work. And, if eight fail then somebody in USAID failed. And so there's that problem in introducing change.

One of the things about population and family planning that we did in the Africa Bureau, was it was to introduce it along with a health module, if you will, where it was doctors talking to doctors; it was talking about the health implications for mothers; it was talking about family spacing as opposed to family planning. Just an arrangement so that family planning and health became synonymous. The staff that did health did family planning. The bureaucratic group that was responsible for one was responsible for the other. There's a lot of evidence that show that there were other avenues that could be used. Education of women. Show the clear correlation to desired family size and actual family size. I was trying to think of another good example now besides the education. In general, I think the USAID was; it was intellectually a lovely place to work, because you had bright people who were concerned about issues and who tried to figure out ways to work on those issues. In some cases, like population of family planning, it became a force in of itself in changing the opinion on the Hill, changing legislation, as well as changing how the issues in development were framed.

Q: Do you have any other area?

JOHNSON: I think the environment is beginning to be one of those areas. I don't think it has happened yet, and I think initially the whole push for environment was much more of a Hill initiative, but after the Hill pushed it, the USAID started hiring people in that area and they became an internal lobby for it, as well as an education lobby of showing how environmental issues were relevant to success in other fields. Much like population did with the Rapid Assessment Projections. The environmental people had done with pushing natural resources. If forests keep being cut down at the rate they're being cut down, you know, it will be X number of years before they are exhausted. And doing the basic statistical analysis helped create public education and awareness.

I think in energy that we have the people who are talented enough to do that, but it has not become a main line issue. For example, the Mission Director in Tanzania, Vern Johnson, was worried about agriculture. That as long as people are limited in what they could plant, harvest, take care of by the within the limits of their own physical energy, you were never going to get basic reform in the agriculture sector. Trying to introduce animal energy into the equation or trying to introduce tractors into the equation; finding ways to attack that energy limitation. I think we were on the right track. I think the energy people ought to be much stronger within the Agency than they currently are. The agricultural people wound up being the ones who fended off bad ideas. That their overseas experience became the barrier at the gate that helped kill crazy ideas, in terms of being practical people who had a feel for what would or wouldn't work. So, I think they've kept the Agency on numerous occasions from going down the wrong trail. I don't know other than, the massive publicity that went to the Green Revolution in Asia, that the agricultural staff had, as a group, an impact on host country ways of thinking and doing business.

Q: What about other areas of lessons and conclusions?

JOHNSON: The Agency should continue to be primarily a country focused overseas mission focused Agency. I think that's the unique talent and skill that we can all add to the equation. I think, in recognition that 30 years ago, you were the only game in town; that's not true any more. There are a number of other American institutions and groups functioning overseas, ranging from private sector, private volunteer organizations, individual entrepreneurs, universities, immigrant sponsored groups. There's just a lot of links, if you will, between the U.S. and the rest of the world and that USAID probably will continue. I don't see any alternative; I think the merger of USAID with State came as close during this last couple of years as it has ever been and the fact that it stayed an independent Agency, it will pretty much stay an independent Agency. I fear growing interference from State, but I think that will be less and less important, because I think USAID will continue to be the important funding source, as well as an operational source. But, I really see it being a smaller player in interacting relationships.

Q: Let's just talk a little bit about the relationship of both State and USAID which is essentially the relationship of political/security interests and the development interest. Do you feel that they are in conflict and that the political security interest priority undermines the efforts to deal with development issues or do they complement each other? What's the relationship?

JOHNSON: I think the political/security interest in geopolitics warps USAID, in terms of people being assigned to work on certain problems, in terms of funding available for the staff, the priorities. It warps the funding for the staff, and it warps program funding, because I don't think large amounts of program money are really that critical. I think the tendency of Americans is to throw money at problems; so when you have big geopolitical problems, you immediately want to put a lot of money on that problem, to the detriment of the development activities which could use the money for the development programs, but you still do the other activities. You do them at a lower rate, you try and finagle other donors, etc. etc. But, I think the main problem is that the geopolitical problems are a category where we care more than the host government does. We have to save Somali. No amount of money we put in; no Marines landing on the beach. To save Somali at that particular point and time when Somali was tearing itself apart. You can do emergency assistance which helps ameliorate some of the agony that the innocent stand-byers suffer, but in effect when you do that you are also lowering the pressure on the local groups to find a solution, to the extent that they care about their people at all. If they don't care about their people, you probably wind up with them stealing the supplies, which then enables them to continue hiding them as opposed to running out of food and drink.

Q: Shouldn't they share more than the other people?

JOHNSON: This reminds me of a college freshman course I took. I can remember the professor doing a very dramatic theatrical type of thing, other than being a dry lecture. He was talking about the big debate in the Hill and Congress: who lost China, who was to blame for losing China. And, the witch hunt that went on with the State Department and the Hill and various other places. His question was, China was never ours to lose. Why ask the question?

It was a very similar situation in Somalia. Somalia wasn't ours to lose and it really wasn't ours to save. I think for all of the immediate public sympathy that goes to the pictures of the starving people that went to Biafra during the Nigerian Civil War. It really doesn't help.

Q: You mean we shouldn't be providing humanitarian assistance?

JOHNSON: I don't see anyway that we could step aside from it very honestly. I think it's a characteristic of the American culture and one that in most cases, you know, I think it's a positive attribute that we have of wanting to go in and help. We need to be more realistic about what we can help with. I think there is a growing body of people who actually have worked in enough emergencies to where they can take the concern that is generated by the emergency and move it for programs which have a more lasting impact or beginning to set up a foundation for a lasting impact. Emergency feeding programs that don't interfere with local growth and pricing of products. If the U.S. was more flexible, which it has gotten over the years in terms of a crop failure in Zimbabwe resulted in U.S. shipping our excess commodities to Zimbabwe. We got better at seeing inter-reactions in programming when we got approval to buy corn in Tanzania, which was having a surplus year. Sell the Tanzania corn to the Zimbabweans As we begin to figure out those relationships, I think we've gotten better at what we do. Although there's been a lot of loosening of the purse strings, if you will, there's still a large feeling that if we do something to help others in a short term, it ought to help the rest.

Q: Is that how our objectives get mixed up?

JOHNSON: Yes. I remember one discussion I had, there is one type of policy put into the legislation or into USAID internally, that you will buy 50 million dollars worth of John Deere equipment, and then we look for places overseas where we can peddle the John Deere equipment. But, that's a totally different approach from working with the host government and deciding that U.S. tractors are appropriate due to the soil situation and rainfall situation, and tractors from John Deere are competitive and so you wind up buying tractors from John Deere. In both cases, you wind up with the same product, but for very different reasons and analysis. Again, USAID is a promoter of American enterprise and investment as opposed to USAID as a promoter of establishing an environment that is conducive to investment. You know, I think one works better than the other, but it is successful and ends up at the same place.

Q: What is the interaction of the political/security and the development interests? Any other aspects of that?

JOHNSON: I don't see that they ever fade or go away. I think USAID compounds the problem frequently by saying that we can do both. We can respond to the geopolitical imperative and actually also achieve development objectives.

Q: Do you find that there is a difference of perspective in terms of time frame in which one wants to see results between the State Department's political/security interests and USAID's development interest?

JOHNSON: Very much so. I think I've commented on it before, as the State Department looks for immediate impact. Some of which has a publicity, a photo opportunity. They're intelligent, they're super intelligent in some ways. They will not argue whether or not the problem that you're raising is a real problem or not. Frequently, they just take the tact, we'll worry about that six months down the road; we'll worry about that two years from now. They really do define their goals and objectives in a very short operational timeframe, We are blessed with people like Harriman or Marshall, who in the early days of the Marshall Plan had a longer term view. But, for the most part, State's internal pressures and reward system goes for keeping the problem under control, not solving problems. Honestly, they talk about USAID and the State merging. Their two corporate cultures are different. If they merged, I think the USAID approach would go elsewhere. It would find its voice or its avenue in the various universities or the lobby groups on the Hill. I don't see the State Department changing.

Q: Okay. Another dimension of your experience that you would like to comment on.

JOHNSON: I think the other thing on the geopolitical side: I would say that the Eastern Europe and Russia and the Newly Independent States program is probably the best expression of geopolitical needs driving fund allocations. I think that the Agency and the U.S. were extraordinary lucky in having talented people from USAID who worked on that. And, whether they were in Russia, or Malcolm Butler here in the States, and certainly Barbara Turner. I think they did a lot to speed up USAID methods of working to try and meet the State Department's repeated, to me, obsession about results. After working on that program, I will admit that if left to itself, USAID could happily fund studies, study after study, after study. A classic example being OMVS, the Senegal River Organizational involving Senegal, Mali and Mauritania, all three of which had interests in putting up a dam on the major river that flowed through all three countries, and which resulted in, Dr. Adams' expression of office buildings being built in order to hold studies (by various donors and the OMVS, ed.) that were done.

The State Department does provide a good emphasis, that you should do something now, don't just study the problem. USAID in many ways has been shell shocked by having tried things that failed or tried good things and had unintended bad results. There is very much the reaction of once burned, twice shy. Some of that shyness is valid, you should learn from lessons in the past, and some of it is just they don't want to go through the chaos of congressional queries and audits and everybody jumping up and down and second guessing on the sideline. So, if somebody is likely to second guess, they do a study about it before hand.

One of my bosses, (who was actually a very, very good boss) used to say that if you wanted to know how to get to Chicago, and he was the most imaginative and creative person I knew in figuring it out: you could go by train, you could go by canal boat, you could go by airplane, and figuring out all the ways in which you could get there and what the various costs and draw backs and time would be. If you asked about going to Houston, he would give you a range of the problems involved and how you could get there. If you asked him whether you should go to Chicago or go to Houston, he'd go back and do more studies on the how, rather than the why. And, that you'd get to a point where you have to pick Chicago or Houston, and the study itself wouldn't tell you which one to pick. I think the State Department provides a good approach that pushes USAID to go ahead and take some action. As much as I criticized them in their short term time frame, I would also criticize USAID for having the ultimate long range term plan of not wanting to do anything until they'd studied it to death.

Q: But, as you say, the studies have grown out of the experience that some things might or might not work or you didn't know enough about?

JOHNSON: Yeah. You want to raise the income of people in Calarn so you want to do a project that will generate jobs. The result is that they will then leave agricultural farming, come into a city and take a job that will raise incomes, which looks like a desirable thing to do. The unintended consequence of it is that it leaves behind women and children who become a single family head of household type of problem, that the income that is generated in the city is used by the men to drink and gamble and does not flow back to the farm and the women and children. Studies have shown, in many cases, that, if you generate jobs for women, the money that they earn is much more likely to be invested in the family for better health, more education. No one in their right mind would do a project with the goal of the project to raise money for men to increase taverns and such places.

There are unintended consequences of some of the projects we did. We had an organization with associated jobs; we've pulled men in to the city, but didn't offer families any place, you know, that's what happened, an unintended consequence. Part of that USAID has learned to cope with more comprehensive studies to begin with. They learned to cope by putting in the project papers funds that could be used to cope with some of those unintended consequences as they show up; and by more effective monitoring what the results of the projects were as opposed to monitoring did the money that was supposed to go to equipment actually go to equipment; and by monitoring the impact of who got the equipment, how was it used, and what were the environmental consequences. USAID has gotten smarter and more sophisticated through experience and has ways to try and cope with some of the problems that I had identified as coming from State Department's rush to move fast. I don't think we have a good methodology of teaching USAID staff all the knowledge that's been gained. It mainly is transmitted by personal experience and then by word of mouth, and by calling on colleagues' work, if you will, hey, I know Tom used to work in the Philippines, and he worked on a problem like that, talk to Tom; where you do it all informally. I know Al Hoban who was anthropology professor from Boston University, he said USAID used up its own human capital faster than any Agency he had ever seen.

Q: What does that mean?

JOHNSON: They were hiring a person because he was technically competent, well trained at the edge of his field. They would send him for six years into the boondocks where he becomes six years out of date in his field and three years later retiring him, but never investing anything in bringing his knowledge back up to where it was when they really hired him. He would use the example that in the military services the statistics show that 30 percent of your time - if you have 20 years in the military-that 30 percent of your time is spent in actual formal course work, going to the defense institute, going to the navy intelligence institute, going to Harvard University. That another third of your time is spent in more informal learning situations. In USAID you don't get either, you don't get the formal; you don't get the informal.

Q: USAID did have a development studies program and they did have people sent off for training, I guess. But, I guess that's fairly small?

JOHNSON: In 30 years with USAID and I had six months at the Foreign Service Institute on economics; I had two weeks at the Senior Management Course on how to be a good manager, and I probably had a total of three months training under the Senior Executive Service Training Program that's where you go down to the Federal Executive Institute in Charlotte or up to the Kings Point Civil Service Institute. So, I spent ten percent of my time.

Q: Do you feel that there are many people that come in who are interested in what's happened before and learn about what's worked or not worked or do you find it hard to get people interested in past experience ?

JOHNSON: I really can't decide. In working on the transition with the Clinton people, I presumed there would be a lot of interest in not talking about the history and what happened when and why and what some of the issues were. There was an equally strong feeling of, like to get rid of the old dinosaurs, the ones who prevent new thinking. I think political appointees showed an unwillingness to listen, you know, to what they thought was a great new idea and find it had already been tried before. At the same time they had a lot of curiosity about, what's gone on in the past; how come countries aren't developed. I think some of that does exist. There was a point in time within USAID when people thought they had the answer to development and, more recently, so did the economists. They thought if you put the economic policies in place, everything else flows, it works; very true. Except in the Somalia, the IMF guy say, it really doesn't matter what policy they adopt, because they don't have the institutions to carry it out. You have a strong push for democracy and the rule of law, contract rights, land titles, so that, if you get that system set up, the country will then work out its own problems and development will happen. People keep looking for the silver bullet (I don't go as far as Ken Sherper in saying that everything that USAID does is new and that it is new to this country and to this set of people). But, I think, there is a lot of what works in one country is different from what works in another. You take what you can from what you can learn and you use that and figure out what else you need to know. Much more, you get pragmatic. I don't think that your economic policy or democracy policy represent the ultimate answers. If I had to pick an ultimate answer, I'd pick education. If you could only do one thing, I'd do education and primarily starting off with bringing people to the United States for graduate studies and then if you had enough money and you could do it, work your way down to universities and then work your way into the host country on educational policy of trying to promote policies that would have an impact.

Q: You found that the case?

JOHNSON: Yes. That's partially based on going to Somalia, Sudan and Uganda and finding that the lasting remnant of what we used to do there were the people who had somehow had had contact with the U.S. under the old program. They'd trained at Idaho; they'd trained at Salt Lake City, what have you. And, partially it is due to educational institutions by their own internal cultures and mandates are more open to keeping records about what's happened and looking at it and seeing: are there any lessons you can learn and being self-analytical. I think those are valuable skills that anyone who comes to the States for any kind of technical education, picks up that general approach to a problem. I think that kind of problem-solving approach is in many ways what differs us from the French or from the Scandinavian countries. There has been a lot of discussion that third country education is more efficient and it's less costly and it's much better to send someone for veterinary training to the University in Senegal where the conditions are closer to what they are in Cameroon, and they speak French, so the guy gets his training in French, and he comes back and he does have a technical base that he didn't have before. But, he's missed the whole exposure to an education in problem-solving -an educational approach based upon establishing your baseline data and look at what happens, so then you can tell what you should have been doing.

Q: Let's turn to another direction Do you think over the 30 years that you've been involved and looking back on the overall Foreign Assistance Program, has it made a difference in the world of development or in developing countries?

JOHNSON: It's been like a roller coaster ride. Sometimes you are really up high and you're having a lot of impact, and then sometimes you're headed straight downwards. And, you're watching what you worked on so hard and find it working and then wiped out. I think of the Rwanda: there were development efforts by the donors as well as USAID that had really worked in Rwanda and had in many ways had had an impact upon the country; a promising future. It was graded as one of the countries in Africa that could really make it and then it went straight down into hell on earth as the internal tribal fights broke out.

One of the things in Madagascar that made just an incredible impression on me was the high morale of the local hire staff and how they were really convinced that they were making a difference in Madagascar. I think that USAID succeeds when it has local nationals, who, because of USAID backing or because of USAID funds, really feel that they've had an impact on their country. I think the ultimate test of whether USAID should continue, or matters enough to where you want to keep it going, really comes from the host countries to the extent that they feel that what we do is beneficial or that the people that we have had impact on over the years feel that we can help solve a problem, and really make a difference. And, as the economist at Yale, who worked a lot on development use to say, our money didn't get our viewpoint accepted, our money got us a seat at the table so that we could then present our viewpoint. I think USAID made a difference in what got discussed at various tables, both in the formal governments and informal institutions. I think they made a difference in what topics were discussed, what solutions were discussed or how much attention was paid to a problem that we perceived as being critical that other people didn't think was that important.

Q: Such as?

JOHNSON: Population was the very best example. I've used it before, but it was something that we felt was important and that we didn't have to convince other people it was important. I think Elliott Berg and the whole push to private sector, entrepreneurship of getting the government out of certain things and having the government regulations changed is another excellent example of where we've put something on the table. In this particular case, it was an Elliot Berg's study on Africa for the World Bank. So, in the end, it wasn't us who made the light shine in midst of darkness, but we, as a donor and as a country, really saw to it that what Berg was getting out and the issues that he raised were the subject of discussion in more places, and had more impact than the World Bank would have had.

Q: What about other areas?

JOHNSON: Human Rights. I think Carter, when he tried to make human rights part of our overall foreign policy projections and relationships, made a major difference in the State Department and the diplomatic interchange. Although the State Department tried to keep human rights as something that it had; it wanted to program human rights money. Inevitably, as long as it was a foreign policy concern we started incorporating it in our dialogues and I think that's made a difference. Again, initially in the places where you can show USAID made a difference in what was talked about and what was on the table.

Q: What about in Africa and the Sahel; one of the things you worked on?

JOHNSON: I think it made a difference in terms of institutional capacity to handle droughts and emergency disasters. I think we made a contribution in terms of increased training of the manpower base of who, in those countries is still there, can worry about the problem. We didn't make a difference, e.g. in that Niger remains a very poor country sitting in the middle of the Sahel Desert and on the border of the Sahel Desert. Unfortunately, it will never be a Nigeria. It just does not have the natural resources. I think because we were there the people have a better chance of making use of their resources, but whether that glass is half full and sustainable or like Rwanda development work vanishes overnight. No bets.

There is nothing inevitable with the U.S. assistance. I think at one point in our history, we saw development almost as evolutionary, that you move from this stage to that stage, from that stage to that stage and that development was an absolute good that would occur even though the intermediate stages were painful. I don't think that's true, I don't believe that anymore. I think that development is not something that will automatically, at some point, happen. We still have the pockets in Appalachian, Texas, California. Lord knows there's been enough publicity about the educational issues inside the United States and what's happening. You don't find permanent solutions in major problem areas. What you're looking for, if you're lucky, are is people who are willing to make a commitment to work on an issue and then you let a thousand flowers boom. You tried as many different ways as you could figure out.

Q: Well, this leads us to your thoughts on how you size up your experience in foreign assistance.

JOHNSON: It has been extraordinary. I worked for a number of very good bosses. I worked on a range of interesting problems and that at an age of 28 or 30 years old, the Agency had a lot of faith in me and put a lot of responsibility on me. As I look back at it, I can't think of doing anything else. There's absolutely no sense of here's another career that I wish I'd done and I'm sorry that I didn't do it and now I'll go do it. I can't identify anything I would have rather spent my life working on. There are a range of problems that you spend 30 years knocking your head against the wall trying to figure out solutions and at the end of that you're going to have a headache and that's all you can show for it. But, as a significant problem, you're having a 30 year headache. I can't think of a problem like the developing countries and the range of pain and agony and starvation that still is rampant. There are sections of Cameroon where you still have human slavery; there are section of Sudan where the U.S. tried to start a major initiative to help orphans and we kept sending these cables back to Washington explaining that the orphanage that they wanted to give a grant to had black southern Sudanese who were adopted by northern Arabic Sudanese as a form of slavery. It was not an adoption in any sense that the Americans recognized it; but it was a problem to work on.

Okay. It would have been fun to have been a millionaire. It would have been fun to have all the money in the world, spend it on anything you wanted to do, but I can't imagine spending 30 years watching the stock market go up and down or trying to figure out the difference between the junk bond and a triple A bond. I couldn't spend 30 years worrying about that, and so I have no second thoughts, no regrets whatsoever about spending time on the issues that I did, working for USAID. When I retired for a couple years after that, yeah I said I enjoyed it; but I wouldn't recommend it to anybody.

Q: That was my last question: given your experience and career, would you recommend to a young man, young woman who has just come out of school to go into this international development business?

JOHNSON: Yes. When I first retired my answer would have been no, because I would have seen that as: do you recommend somebody making a career out of USAID. The way you phrase it, make a career in the business of international development, definitely I'd say yes. But, I think what's happened is, there are many more ways to do that now. Where USAID was the only game in town in many senses; there are other organizations in development on the outside. But you know, USAID was the major actor. I don't think USAID will continue to be the major actor in most areas, most functional fields, most countries.

Q: Who will? Who's going to take the lead?

JOHNSON: Don't know, don't know. There are a number of NGOs, non governmental organizations in the world. Some of them are operational and they run programs overseas. Some are lobby groups and they just try to have legislation passed that have certain elements. But, as a group they're much more active overseas than they were 30 years ago. They have developed and trained their own staffs to where they do have a professional cadre now that they use; the universities and colleges are looking for ways to be active overseas. They face funding problems. But, the interest and the desire to work on development kinds of problems are very much in the university community. I think the international arena is more substantive than it use to be. For a long time, the World Bank and the IMF both were regarded as the professionals and regarded themselves as the only professionals. You have other international avenues opening up. As a product of my own experience with them, I have a bias against regional organizations and I just tend to think that they do very little and they siphon off trained people that could be used bilaterally. But, I also bite my tongue and say some of those are doing a lot more than I thought they could. Starting from such simple areas as weather prediction, where you have inter-regional weather studies to telecommunications and looking at telecommunications on a broader basis. The World Trade Organization and how it tries to establish the rules of the game. You've got a lot of regional institutions which were becoming more important and are taking more of a role. In some way, I think the World Bank will probably remain the overall senior advisor, if the government wants a senior advisor. They probably won't turn to USAID. They may turn to USAID in certain sectors or on some problem areas. And, part of that is because the U.S. will always have more money than other people have. But the senior across the board development experts at The World Bank will probably wind up with that kind of knowledge. And, for someone interested in economic development across the board, I'd recommend that they try and get a job at the World Bank. If they're interested in international development, then USAID is perfectly a good avenue. But, there's also other avenues, even CARE., if they want to get more involved in the humanitarian and emergency side of things.

Q: Any last thoughts you want to add at this point?

JOHNSON: I'd recall a Joan Crawford movie where it has her going up the stairs and she turns back and looks at the people in the lobby and says, hang on, it's going to be a hell of a ride. That's sort of the way I feel about the past 30 years. It's been extraordinarily interesting, challenging, all the positives you want to say about it. I think the one area that I would really, if I could change something in the USAID, would be the divide between Foreign Service and Civil Service, which I think is a leftover of past organizations, but has resulted in damaging people. I think I am extraordinary lucky as a Civil Servant to wind up with the jobs that I held. I can also say I never felt discriminated against in USAID, because I was a woman. I never felt discriminated against in other sections because of being a young person. I always felt that there was a bias against me because I was Civil Service and that the Foreign Service people said, well what do you know about it, you've never been there. I think that is so strong throughout the Agency.

Q: Except in your case you had an opportunity to be overseas.

JOHNSON: It also convinced me that in the Foreign Service, it's different when you're overseas. And, like I said before, overseas, and the Missions, the ultimate career objective is to be a Mission Director and in many ways Mission Directors are gods. And, you come back to Washington and there you are, an ex-god and they don't pay any attention to you. So, overall an A+.

Q: A good place to stop. Thank you for this most interesting interview.

End of interview