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Observations and Reflections on a Career in International Development

Employment History and Publications: available in hard copy only

INTERVIEW

Overview of Career

Q: It is February 27, 2001 and the interview is with Steven W. Sinding. Let's start off with a thumbnail sketch of your career. How many years were you with USAID?

SINDING: Nineteen, from 1971-1990.

Q: What were some of the main assignments you had during the 19 years?

SINDING: The first four years I was a social science analyst in the Office Population, a GS employee. I converted to the foreign service in 1975 and went to Pakistan. I served in Pakistan until early 1978 when, because of Pakistan's decision to develop a nuclear device, the aid program began to close down. I came back to Washington and had a brief stint in the Studies Division of the Office of Evaluation in PPC. And then, later that year in the fall of 1979, I became the Population Officer for the Asia Bureau. A year later in 1979 I was Chief of the Population, Health and Nutrition Division (PHN) division; and, in 1980, I went to the Philippines as Chief of the PHN Office in the USAID. I was in the Philippines from mid-1980 until early 1983, when I was called back to Washington to become the Director of the Office of Technical Resources of the Asia Bureau. I was in that job only for a few weeks when I was asked by the Administrator's office whether I would be willing to take over as the Director of the Office of Population in the then Science and Technology Bureau for reasons that I will come back to when we talk in more detail. So I was the Director of the Office of Population from April 1983 until August 1986. And then I went to Kenya as Mission Director in Kenya from August 1986 until left USAID in July 1990.

Early years, education and work experience

Q: Let's now go back to where you are from, where you grew up, your education with a slant on what influenced you to go into international development.

SINDING: I was born in Orange, New Jersey. My parents were both Hitler refugees; German immigrants from Berlin. At the age of five, I moved to Winchendon, Massachusetts, a little town near the New Hampshire border in central Massachusetts. My father was an industrial engineer and worked for a small company in Gardner, Massachusetts. In 1952, at age nine, we moved back to central New Jersey to a little town

called Pennington. I completed primary and secondary school in Pennington. I went to Oberlin College. There are two things that I should mention in that history that had an influence on my subsequent career. One is that I had a Colombian uncle and my godfather, my father's room mate before he married my mother, was a itinerant journalist reporting on the arts. He used to travel around the world on tramp steamers and do free lance work for the Christian Science Monitor and for various radio stations in Europe and the United States, reporting on the arts around the developing world. He had such an exotic life and an exotic career. The combination of this Colombian uncle and my god father, Henry Koller, got me interested in a very early age in international travel and developing areas. The second thing is that when I was at Oberlin each class selected a faculty member to give a speech to the senior assembly. The one that our senior class selected was given by a history professor named Robert Niel, and he entitled it "The Mushroom Crowd." It was the first talk that I had ever heard this was the Spring of 1965 about the population explosion and the global threat of overpopulation. It had a profound influence on me, although I didn't realize it at the time. I went on the graduate school at University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill.

Q: What did you major in at Oberlin?

SINDING: Government and history but my declared major was government or political science. I got my Ph.D. at Chapel Hill in Political Science.

I went to UNC intending to get a Masters in Latin American studies with an emphasis on political science. But because of the Vietnam war and the likelihood that I would be drafted if I left school and the fact that there was lots of money around for graduate education in those days the National Defense Education Act and all that, I was easily persuaded by a couple of faculty members in the Political Science Department to stay on and get a Ph.D. My dream had actually been to become a foreign correspondent. My role model in life was Tad Szulc, who was the Latin American correspondent for the New York Times. I thought, if I could have that job, it would make me happy forever. So that was what I was aiming at, and I had thought for many years that I would be a journalist, but that all changed probably because of Vietnam. If it hadn't been for the near certainty that I would have been drafted had I left school, I would probably have left without a Ph.D. and my life would certainly would have been different.

Q: You were not enthusiastic about Vietnam?

SINDING: I certainly didn't want to carry a rifle; I demonstrated against the war, but I can't say that I was an antiwar activist. I was opposed to our involvement but not to the extent of being willing to be arrested or beaten up.

Q: What was you thesis about? You must have written a doctoral thesis.

SINDING: Yes, in fact, I went to Chile in 1968 as a Latin American Teaching Fellow. That is a relevant part of the story and how I wound up at USAID. My doctoral thesis was on the relationship between political participation, public expenditure policy and

inflation in Chile. I looked at empirical data over a forty year period - 1928 to 1968 - roughly that period of time, trying to track whether you could discern patterns of political participation that produced inflationary expenditure patterns on the part of government, and what effect that had on electoral outcomes and on subsequent economic growth and economic policy. It was really a dissertation on political economy.

My major in graduate school was really in political development.

Q: What is that?

SINDING: It was a conceit of political science that, if there was such a thing as economic development, there must be something called political development. But what it was really about was the politics of developing areas. I had only one or two courses in political development; that was all that was offered. I took courses on development economics and basically courses in comparative politics and the politics of Latin America. But Latin American politics was a particularly strong area at Chapel Hill. There were two internationally known experts Frederico Gil and John Martz who ran that program. I feel that I got a very good graduate education.

Q: You were fluent in Spanish at that point?

SINDING: I went to Mexico is 1968 with a grant of some kind and studied intensive Spanish. I had done Peace Corp training between my junior and senior years of college but never went into the Peace Corps. Peace Corps for a couple of years - maybe for one year - had something called the "Senior Year Program." It was an experiment to see if you trained people between their junior and senior years, and they used their senior year academically to prepare for Peace Corps, you would get volunteers who were better prepared than people who had only regular Peace Corps training. I think that the conclusion was that it didn't work. For one thing, they had an extraordinary drop out rate. But also academic training has no particular utility for Peace Corps assignments. And so they dropped the program. But I did it actually to avoid getting drafted, because I had dropped out of college in my junior year to try out journalism. I worked for a newspaper. No sooner had I dropped out than I got my notice to take a physical and was within weeks of being inducted when Frank Thompson, my Congressman, interceded with the selective service system in Washington to prevent my actually getting my draft notice. But in the mean time I had discovered that by going into the Peace Corps training program I could regain my deferment. So that's what I did. I would have gone into the Peace Corps, but I had a choice between graduating from college on time which would have meant taking summer courses after my class graduated or going into the Peace Corps and deferring graduation until afterward. I decided I didn't want to go into the Peace Corps without my B.A., which was probably was a mistake, but anyway I didn't go into the Peace Corps. I went to graduate school instead and did spend that summer after graduation getting my B.A. degree. I married my wife Monica, who becomes part of the story. That combination of getting married, having a good fellowship to go to graduate school and her lack of enthusiasm for going to Bolivia all of that contributed to the decision to go to graduate school and get the Ph.D.

Q: So what was the dissertation was about.

SINDING: Interestingly, before I went off to Chile to do my dissertation I got a call from the head of the Carolina Population Center asking me whether I would like to do my dissertation on a population subject. Because he had lots of money from USAID to support graduate theses in the population field, particularly in population policy a man named Moye Freymann who had been with the Ford Foundation for many years in India and was a one of the early leaders of the population movement. I declined that. That was my only brush with population up to that point.

There was one other event that was of some interest. To pay the rent between my second and third year of graduate school, I took a job with another professor in the School of Public Health. He had a Ford Foundation grant to study the process through which states individually were liberalizing their abortion laws. This was before the Roe versus Wade decision and the pro choice community in the United States was providing assistance to advocacy groups in the individual states to liberalize the abortion laws. They were going state by state - California was one of the first; North Carolina was one of the first. New York was, of course, early on. Georgia, Colorado. Those are the ones I remember. This guy, Sagar Jain, who was later a big grantee of USAID, had Ford Foundation money essentially to document that process of abortion law liberalization. I wrote the North Carolina case study. So that was my third brush with population. The first was the speech at the Senior Assembly at Oberlin; this was the second - the abortion law study - and third was this call trying to entice me to do my dissertation on a population topic. But since I had good money from the Latin American Teaching Fellowship and a thesis topic which I had defended in my prelims, I wasn't prepared to change my thesis at that point.

So off I went to Chile and did the dissertation.

Q: How did you find Chile?

SINDING: Fascinating. It was the last year of the Frei regime. Things were heating up for the election of 1970, which produced Salvador Allende. And my thesis in a way predicted the Allende election, because it was the end of a process of growing political participation which was incrementally moving the system further and further to the left as more and more marginalized groups became politically active. And I could see the Allende election coming as that process was playing itself out. We left Chile about three months before Allende was actually elected. It was a fascinating period.

Q: Did you have a sense that the Allende regime was leading into a communist regime?

SINDING: The U.S. Ambassador at the time was Edward Korry, who had been a Kennedy appointee; he had been Ambassador to Ethiopia before he went to Chile. I think he was an editor at one point for Look magazine. A colorful character. Korry was certainly sending cables to Washington that were pretty alarmist about Allende, and the CIA certainly was active. In fact, they tried to recruit me and several of my colleagues.

Not to become CIA employees but to become informants, while we were in Chile, on what our Chilean contacts were saying and doing. I remember, in fact, being invited to dinner at the home of the Special Assistant to the Ambassador, who later turned out was - I don't think he was the station chief - but he was clearly a CIA guy with Embassy cover. And being grilled about what our Chilean colleagues at the University of Chile and the Latin American Faculty of the Social Sciences and other hot beds were talking about. I remember going to what were called in Chile "boites" the French term for a kind of cabaret or night club listening to protest folk music sung by Victor Jara, who later became a symbol of Pinochet's violence. He was killed in that first wave of executions at the time of the coup. None of us ever believed that, if the Chilean military was finally impelled to move, it would do so with the violence that it did. I believed as did everybody who studied Chile did that it was a stable democracy and that there was enormous tolerance and flexibility within the system to deal with dissent. Then through the Allende years, which I basically observed from here. I could see increasingly that the pressures were building for the military to intervene because of the collapse of the Chilean economy and the widespread disaffection of the middle class. I never imagined, and certainly, on the basis of my time in Chile, could not have imagined, that the Chilean military would be as brutal in its actions as it was. That caught everybody by surprise.

Q: Let's move on from graduate school.

SINDING: Finished graduate school and took, for me, what was a disappointing teaching assignment. During my last couple of months at grad school I had gotten inquiries from first rate universities and fully expected that I would wind up with my first teaching job at a place like Michigan or Princeton which were two of the schools that had inquired. I wasn't on the job market and so I had said I will be on the market next year. When I did go on the market in 1970 basically the academic job market had collapsed, and there just weren't may good jobs in any field, and, in Latin American politics that was certainly the case. There were three decent jobs: Duke was a good one; Indiana, which was ok; and Kentucky, which was the weakest. And I didn't get either of the first two. I got the Kentucky job. I went to Lexington and, although I enjoyed my colleagues and I enjoyed teaching that year at the University of Kentucky, I felt totally isolated from the people and issues that interested me. There was very small contingent of Latin Americanists; very small group of people who had international interests of any kind most of them were in the agriculture school. I felt that I was in a provincial place. I had always been on the East coast; not at Oberlin but Oberlin is a very cosmopolitan place and a very sophisticated place. I felt that I was in a backwater; frustrating.

Joined USAID/Washington in the Population Office - 1971-1975

In the Spring of 1971, I came to Washington on something called the ScholarDiplomat Seminar, which was something the State Department was running in the early '70s as a way, I think, of trying to win the affections of disaffected academics. A lot of us out there were critics of Vietnam policy and, basically, of American foreign policy. And the ScholarDiplomat Seminar was an opportunity to sit on a desk at the State Department for a week. We had been precleared with access up to and including Secret communications.

We had a program of lectures and conversations and so on with some fairly senior State Department people and a chance to sit on the desk and read the cable traffic. I was on the Chile desk, and I read a lot of the cable traffic in the 197071 period and, of course, the stuff that I had access to wasn't the good stuff which is now coming out which did reveal the extent of American involvement in the Pinochet coup. But it was pretty clear from reading the cable traffic where the sympathies of the State Department lay and the concerns about where Allende was going. This was just a week. The reason it was relevant was that I stayed with a fellow, who is still in USAID, David Mutchler. David and I had both been Latin American Teaching Fellows in Santiago at the same time. We had been good friends, played basketball together, trips together, our wives were very good friends. So when I came to Washington for that week I stayed with the Mutchlers and David, who had been teaching at Federal City College (now the University of District Columbia), had just joined USAID in the East Asia Bureau in the population program. He was office mate of a fellow named Tom Reese, who subsequently made quite a name for himself in the agency, and Mutchler said to me, you know, there is this brand new population program that has oodles of money, and I think they are looking for a political scientist run by this crazy guy named Ravenholt. You ought to go over and talk with him. So Mutchler made an appointment for me; Ravenholt couldn't see me; he was traveling and wasn't around, but he made an appointment for me to see James Brackett, who was the chief of what was then called the Analysis and Evaluation Division. He was a demographer.

Q: In the population office?

SINDING: In the Office of Population in the old TAB, Technical Assistance Bureau. Brackett offered me a job on the spot. He said if you come to Washington, we will put you to work. Monica had come east with me, and she and our nine month old daughter Kate had gone up to Princeton to spend that week with her parents and my parents. They both lived in Princeton at the time. And so she came back down to Washington at the end of the week to pick me up to drive back to Lexington. On that long drive back to Lexington, Kentucky we debated should I take this job in Washington after one year of teaching at Kentucky? I was doing pretty well. I had just been elected to the Faculty Senate, and I had my first publication coming out. I clearly was on a track to what I think would have been a respectable academic career. So it wasn't an easy decision. But, in the course of that week in Washington, I had really contracted a severe case of Potomac fever. I really wanted to be in the center of the action. I actually didn't think much of USAID and as a student of Latin American politics there was much about what the U.S. Government was doing in Latin America which I highly disapproved of, including what we were doing in Chile.

Q: USAID ?

SINDING: Not USAID so much. In fact, I had a couple of friends at USAID Bob Maushammer and Jean. We became good friends, and we did things together. But institutionally I thought USAID was part of an American foreign policy toward Latin America that was short sighted, inclined to support repressive regimes. I was a typical

'60s leftist and did not think highly of...

Q: You mentioned in passing that you had your first publication. What was that about?

SINDING: It was from my dissertation. It was a chapter of the dissertation.

So we made a decision on that trip back to Lexington in our 1967 VW squareback that we would take a flyer. I remember going in the next morning and telling the chairman of the department that I was going to leave and take this job in Washington. I can't believe in retrospect how naive I was. I had nothing in writing. I had no idea that USAID couldn't just hire people off the street like that. I took Brackett at his word so I called him up and I said I was going to come. And he said: "Oh, well... You'll will probably have to work for the first few months for the Census Bureau. We have a PASA with them, and so we will get them to hire you, but you will actually sit here in the USAID offices, and you will work for me, but you will be a Census Bureau employee." So my first day of Federal employment was in Suitland, Maryland where I went to actually fill out the paper work to become a Bureau of Census GS12 employee. Then the next day I went to Rosslyn to start my career in the Office of Population.

As I was saying in retrospect if I had known then what I know now about what it takes to become a Federal employee, I never would have given up my tenure track position at Kentucky on the basis of a verbal commitment from Jim Brackett. But it all worked out. It took a while; it took a year and a threat of resignation for Brackett to get the USAID system to convert me to GS, and I said with my Ph.D. and experience that I qualified for a GS13, and I insisted on that as well. And they all happened. I remember Don Anderson was the head of the personnel division in TAB at the time. Brackett had to go and plead with Don Anderson to make all this happen. But it did happen; that was 1972. I joined in August 1971, and it took almost a year for the conversion to come though. So I was a social science analyst in the Analysis and Evaluation Division of the Technical Assistance Bureau. The Office of Population had become a fullfledged office a couple years earlier. It had been part of the old War on Hunger before that. But TAB got organized around '7071. Joel Bernstein was the first Assistant Administrator; he was the AA when I joined.

Q: What was TAB?

SINDING: It was a central technical bureau of the agency. The theory was that USAID did its work through field missions backed by regional bureaus. The regional bureaus all had technical offices, but there was a sense that while those technical offices were good for supporting mission programs they were not at the cutting edge of what was happening in each of the substantive fields. So that in addition to the regional bureaus' technical offices, it would be good to have a central bureau staffed by people who would be at the cutting edge of what was happening in agriculture, health and population, rural development, education - the various development sectors of that time.

The job in population was then already different. It was different in a couple of very

important respects. One is that by an agreement, an experiment, which Bob Nooter explained to me (former Deputy Administrator of the Agency), because of the congressional interest in population and the intense pressure that the agency was under somewhat against its will to move aggressively into population, the powers at the top of the agency felt that this would be a good place to experiment with an idea, that was around but looked on with considerable disfavor by the regional bureaus in the State Department, to have a centrally managed global program. So unlike all other sectors, the Office of Population had the authority both approve the assignments of population officers in the field and to have veto power over bilateral population projects. You couldn't obligate funds or get a project approved in a country unless Ravenholt said it was ok. By the same token you couldn't get assigned to work as a population officer in the field unless Ravenholt approved the assignment. So the Office of Population, in addition to its own budget, had effective control over the entire agency budget in population. It was the only example in my experience with USAID going over 30 years of a true unified global program in which the regional bureaus were secondary to a global strategy run out of the central office.

Q: And it had big budget as well?

SINDING: It had huge budget - a budget that was growing by 2550 percent each year. Between 1969 and 1974 the Office of Population budget grew from $25 million to $125 million - in $25 million increments or more over that period.

Q: That included all the mission projects as well?

SINDING: That included everything, but that was a huge amount of money at that time. It was, in fact, more money than the agency could intelligently program through its normal processes. So that there was a lot of money sloshing around in Washington available for young entrepreneurial types who wanted to get things going. Because the Missions weren't asking for funds and Washington could only force a certain amount of money into mission budgets, Ravenholt had a huge amount of money for central programming. His solution for that problem was to find existing organizations in the population field that would agree to take USAID money in return for carrying out projects. So lots of aid intermediaries were created at that time. Some of them were existing organizations that took money; some of them were created out of whole cloth like Family Planning International Assistance program of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which was created to become a channel moving USAID money to local NGOs in the developing world that were doing family planning work. Many of them religiously based organizations. International Planned Parenthood in London, the Pathfinder Fund in Boston, the Population Council in New York, several of the universities which had created population centers around the United States. These all became big recipients of USAID money. The Centers for Disease Control and the Census Bureau were PASA partners in the population program. That was the way in which a great deal of the money was moved in those years. And, of course, an enormous amount was used for the purchase of contraceptives, because Ravenholt had a deep seated belief that the principal constraint was the supply of contraceptives not the demand for them.

This was a radical view and not a widely accepted view at the time.

Q: How long were you in this central office?

SINDING: Four years from 1971 to 1975.

Q: What did you do? Then we can go to the larger questions.

SINDING: Originally, in my first year I was in the Analysis and Evaluation Division, Jim Brackett was the chief and a fellow named Tom Lyons was the deputy chief. Jim was a demographer and Tom was also a political scientist. Tom was in charge of the population policy side of things. There were a couple of economists in the division; there were two or three demographers; there was another Census Bureau employee who basically worked on vital registration systems and that sort of thing. Originally, I was given the task of managing grants to the University of North Carolina for a population policy research project. The National Academy of Sciences through which we were channeling funds to something called the American Universities Field Staff. This was an organization supported by a set of the U.S. universities which wanted to have people in developing countries writing free lance reports basically on whatever interested them that was going on in the developing world. They tended to be anthropologists and journalists. They wrote really interesting stuff; we made a grant to them through the National Academy of Sciences I can't remember why we went through the NAS. I think it went through the NAS, because Ravenholt had a brother who was a member of AUS staff. But anyway the NAS managed this for USAID; I, in turn, managed the relationship with the NAS. And then I also managed a grant to the Harvard Population Center.

But during that first year, I did a lot of reading. I began to familiarize myself with the social science literature in the population field, and I became aware that there was a raging debate going on about demand and how inclined families in the developing world were to limit the number of children they had. There was a landmark article written in 1967 by a Berkeley demographer a President of the Population Association of American named Kingsley Davis, in which he had argued that it was very much in the interest of parents in resource constrained settings with no social security system and high infant mortality rates to have as many children as they could both to ensure a supply of labor and a number of surviving children and old age security. I found Davis' arguments very compelling. The more I read articles by sociologists and economists and demographers the more convinced I became that there was much more to population issues and the population policy issue than just putting pills and condoms out there.

This was what basically Ravenholt was pushing. Ravenholt was, in many ways, his own worst enemy. He understood that there was more to population than pills and condoms, but by his own utterances he allowed himself to become a caricature of what he actually believed which is more sophisticated than that. But I don't want to imply that he believed that population funds should be used to create the conditions for smaller families sizes - the indirect determinants of high fertility. He did believe, however, that population funds should be used to put in place delivery systems so that it wasn't just a matter of dumping

pills and condoms on countries. He believed that there needed to be mechanisms in place to deliver those pills and condoms to the community and the household level. He didn't have much use for health systems, and he was not willing to wait for health systems to get to the point where they became the service delivery mechanism. And, in many parts of the world, that put him at odds with the health establishment in USAID because everybody in Africa and Latin America believed you could not deliver family planning services except in a context of maternal and child health. Ravenholt believed in an Asia model which didn't depend on health delivery systems but rather moved quickly with free standing systems. He basically didn't believe in clinicbased systems. He wanted to get pills and condoms to the household level in villages bypassing the health system altogether. There are very few places in which that approach has ever worked. But it did work in a few Asia societies including, for example, Indonesia. He believed that it was a good model.

Views on the beginnings of the population program

Q: Let's pause a minute and get another running start on this subject. What was your understanding of where this population issue came from and how far back did it go. What is your understanding of how the U.S. became involved?

SINDING: There is actually a very good book on that subject; two good books: Phyllis Piotrow's "World Population Crisis: The U.S. Response" and Peter Donaldson's "Nature Against Us." Phyllis takes the story from the mid'50s or even earlier up to the early '70s; Peter picks the story up about that time and carries it up to about 1990. Those two books together tell the story of how the U.S. became engaged in the population issue. But to answer your question, John D. Rockefeller had been an early proponent and pushed the issue. And a man named General William Draper, who had been a decorated World War II hero, was asked in the late '50s by President Eisenhower to do a report on the U.S. military and economic assistance programs. The Draper Report, which came out in 1959, made a major point that unrestrained population growth in the developing world was undermining all prospect of development, and that the U.S. ought to give major emphasis to population in its foreign assistance program. He was measured in his language. It was very clear that he didn't want us imposing population assistance on countries that didn't want it. He was quite clear that we should provide assistance to countries that requested it and so on. But he thought it should be a very substantial part of U.S. foreign assistance. Eisenhower rejected the Draper recommendation; he said in a quote which is pretty close to this: He did not believe "population or family planning was an appropriate subject for the U.S. Government." So that put the matter to rest. Kennedy didn't want to do anything about population, although there were many in his administration who did raise the issue.

But when Johnson became President, he was persuaded, after a year or two, that this was really an important issue. There are couple of things that contributed to that: one is that Senator Gruening of Alaska held a series of hearings on the global population problem which provided a Washington forum of fairly high visibility for leading population advocates to make the point that this was a pressing global problem. And Gen. Draper created the Population Crisis Committee and began to press hard on Congress and the

Executive branch. In 1965 Johnson made the decision to allow USAID to include a population line item in the budget for the first time. Then, after that, once the dam had been breached, an enthusiastic Congress pumped money into the program quite quickly.

So, the Agency began its work in population, and as I mentioned earlier, this was over the fairly strenuous objections and deep concerns on the part of many career professionals that we were pushing host countries into a realm of activity that they were very disinclined to enter. With the exception of a few countries in Asia the vast majority of aid recipient countries were not interested in population and considered it a controversial and difficult subject.

Q: On the U.S. side we have had a lot of controversy since then, but was there no controversy at that time?

SINDING: Not much. It was very interesting. I think in the mid and late '60s this was the time when Paul Erlich's book "The Population Bomb" came out. There was a fairly widespread consensus in the political establishment that population growth was a major international issue. It was viewed in much the same way that the environment came to be viewed in the '80s and '90s as something we had to pay attention to or it would create very severe long term problems for us and everybody else. It wasn't until well into the '70s and '80s that the question as to whether population deserved so much attention was seriously challenged. There were big challenges to how USAID was approaching the issue; as to whether our strategy was the right strategy. But there was very little question in the late '60s and early '70s when the program was gearing up as to whether this was an appropriate subject for government action. Either that or the opposition had not yet organized, and when it did organize, it really rallied around the abortion issue not around whether population was a serious problem.

Q: And that hadn't surfaced at that time?

SINDING: No. Interestingly, when I did my abortion study in North Carolina there was practically no organized opposition. Roe vs Wade in 1973 was what really galvanized the opposition. When the Supreme Court declared abortion a right, the antiabortion movement finally had a rallying pole. But before '73 and during the period we are talking about when support for international population program was developing, it was not that controversial. Likewise on the domestic front, when Title X of the Health and Human Services (HEW) created subsidized family planning services in the U.S., it was not a controversial subject. It was only after '73 that the subject became controversial.

Q: Let's go back to the beginning of the program in USAID.

The build up of the USAID population program and early differences in approaches 1970s

SINDING: I was there during the big build up. There had been a handful of earlier veterans. Ravenholt had real difficulty finding people. And the first generation of

population officers were basically Vietnam and public safety program retreads. They were people who had been in the agency and whose jobs had become redundant, in some cases superannuated. Ravenholt offered them the opportunity to go back to school and, in some cases, get masters degrees in public health. And a lot of people took him up on that. They went to places like Hopkins, Michigan, North Carolina, Berkeley, Chicago, Pittsburgh. They got masters degrees and came, as retreads, as population officers. And a lot of them went out to the field and were extremely loyal to Ray because he had, in effect, given them a second life in USAID. Some of them were very good; a lot of them were pretty mediocre officers to begin with and remained pretty mediocre. It was a curious hodgepodge. There were some young hotshots who had come in from the outside; there were some established health officers who really believed that population and family planning were tremendously important, who signed on because they believed in it and always had. And there was this middle category of people who had been doing other things, who saw this as a chance to revitalize their careers and move on. It was funny group of people. But the intensity of their loyalty too Ravenholt was really quite a remarkable thing. Something I never quite understood; I couldn't understand why there wasn't more of a challenge to his thesis or more open debate within the office about whether the approach he was advocating, which was so controversial in the agency was, in fact, the right way to go.

Q: So let's go back to that now and some of the main lines of approach.

SINDING: Let me tell you how I got into it, and how I took Ravenholt on because I was one of the few in the Office of Population who was willing to do so. And it is part of the reason I eventually became Director of the Office of Population. I was starting to say that I was reading a lot of the literature on social science and one of things that I was discovering was that there was a real absence of research in developing countries that would be directly relevant to the formulation of population policy. There was very little information available to policy makers in specific countries about both the effect of population growth on development in those countries or about what kinds of population policies broadly defined would likely to be effective in bringing reductions in population growth rates. I was convinced that family planning alone in most developing countries was not sufficient. There was already a literature that suggested that primary education, especially for girls, was crucially important. There was also literature that suggested that employment opportunities for women were important; that lowering infant and child mortality was an important contributor to the decline in fertility. And so I thought that we should develop a project that would support research in developing countries by developing country investigators which would be directly relevant to the information needs of policy makers who were wrestling with the question of whether they should have population policies and what they should consist of.

So I developed a project with the Smithsonian Institution with a small program there called the "Interdisciplinary Communications Program." It turned out that Smithsonian and the ICP was a very poor choice as a place to locate this project. And a lot of people asked me at the time why did you choose ICP. It was because I was naive. I thought the Smithsonian was a very prestigious place to have this project There was a guy there

named M.C. Shelesnyak who was actually it turned out on his last legs bureaucratically and was desperate for something to do and who latched onto this project. But he was a catastrophe as project director. The Smithsonian project was not, in the event, terribly effective or successful, although it did support some very interesting research. It provided grants to some people who subsequently became real leaders in the field. But the express goal of producing research and getting policy changed did not work very well.

Q: Did you have support for this?

SINDING: Ravenholt was willing to let me do it. I think that, if resources had been more constrained, he would have been much more negative about it. But he was under some pressure in the likes of Bob Muscat and Ron Ridker, Barbara Herz, Alex Shakow in the Bureau of Policy and Program Coordination (PPC), and within his own bureau, both Joel Bernstein and Sam Butterfield who were in TAB at the time [and by the way he was just written a fascinating chapter on the history of the population program in the book he is doing on the history of aid.] Bernstein himself... a lot of the development professionals in the agency were putting pressure on Ravenholt to do things like what I was supporting. So he found letting me do my thing, a relatively easy way of accommodating those outside interests without costing money that he desperately needed for other things. He had more money than he knew what to do with. He suffered me, but it was clear he didn't support what I was doing. He was hoping that...laughingly he would come around every once in a while and he'd knock in my door and say, "Steve, how many population policies have you changed this month?" That was kind of what he thought about the whole thing.

Anyway one of the things that the Smithsonian project did was to recruit two people who have become important figures in the field. One was a guy named Bill McGreevey. He was an Assistant Professor of Economics at Berkeley who had just been passed over for tenure and was looking for something to do. And the other was a young woman named Nancy Birdsall, who subsequently has had a spectacular career first at the World Bank and then at the InterAmerican Development Bank, and now at the Carnegie Endowment. Bill and Nancy joined the staff there. Sometime in late '73 or early '74, for reasons I can no longer remember, it became important to do a study on the determinants of fertility and the contribution of family planning programs to fertility change around the world. I can't remember whether someone else in the agency had asked for this or why it seemed so important to do this piece of work. I turned to the Smithsonian and to Bill and Nancy specifically, and I said, "would you do a literature search and pull together everything that has been written on this subject and give a kind of stateoftheart review essay on what is known about fertility change and the contributions of family planning to it." They did produce that paper. It was very reflective of the burden of evidence at the time which was that it was hard to demonstrate that family planning programs were making much of a difference - that most of the fertility change was occurring because of social change, declining infant and young child mortality and improving education levels and rising incomes and so on. To the extent that you could attribute change to family planning, it was a secondary influence. So when this study came out, Ravenholt absolutely hit the ceiling.

Q: It was just the opposite of his views?

SINDING: Absolutely the opposite of his view. The study came out on the eve of a USAID population officers conference in Honolulu the Asia population officers conference in the fall of '74. I was scheduled to present the results of the study at that meeting. The old Technical Assistance Bureau, by that time, had been transformed into the Population and Humanitarian Assistance Bureau (PHA instead of TAB), and there was man named Jarold Kieffer who was the head of it. My boss was a guy named Carl Hemmer. I forgot to mention in all this that in '72 the Policy Development Division was created as a spin off from the old Analysis and Evaluation Division -Tom Lyons was the chief of it and I was the deputy. Tom, after a year, had gone off to Nigeria as the population officer. He had been a GS employee and was converted and subsequently went to Kenya and died at a very young age of lung cancer. Very tragic; he was a great guy and one of my most important mentors in USAID. But Carl Hemmer had become the chief of the Policy Division; Carl was an economist, and I was his number two.

Ravenholt saw that I was on the program and had just read the study and forbade me from taking the study to Honolulu and presenting it to the Pop. officers. Carl stood up to Ray in a staff meeting in which Ray was fulminating about this thing. And he said Ray, "this is a good study; some day you will be proud to have supported this study, and it is intellectually dishonest to try to suppress it." I will never forget that that was key moment in my life. It was the first time that somebody, who was my boss, had actually had the courage to stand up and protect me. It meant a great deal to me that Carl did that. Carl retired a couple years ago, and I wrote a letter (couldn't attend his retirement party) in which I told that anecdote.

Q: Maybe this is a good point to ask the question: What was the basis for Ravenholt's view; how did he come to his view? What was it based on; what research?

SINDING: I have actually written about this. In a paper that I am going to give next month at a meeting at Brown University. I think that Ray came to his view in two ways: one which was broadly a reflection of his training and his world view, and the second was a direct result of his exposure to field programs. He was an epidemiologist by training; he had been in the epidemiologic intelligence service of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC); the shock troops of the CDC service. He was very much in the tradition of vertical categorical interventions to solve specific disease problems. And Ray saw high fertility as a communicable disease basically; he felt that like any other disease this was a condition the people, who had it, didn't want. And if you provided the appropriate therapy you could prevent it. So he really viewed providing pills and condoms as the equivalent of vaccinations or immunizations against an unwanted medical condition.

Q: There was a presumption that the demand was there?

SINDING: The presumption was that the demand was there. The presumption was that this was a condition that those afflicted didn't want. And it was reenforced by the second

thing which was an early field visit to India in which, from visits to the villages, he became convinced in interviews with women that this was the case; that, in fact, they did not want to be pregnant all the time; that they were having many pregnancies that they didn't want. And I have to say, although the conventional wisdom in the '70s and certainly in the '60s was that there was high demand for children, history has shown that Ravenholt's instincts in this regard were much more correct than people then thought they were. People largely discounted the preferences of women in favor of the family economic arguments that seem to support the need for large families. But that was male perspective.

Q: It was a cultural resistance to family size limitations?

SINDING: There was all of that sure; there were mothers inlaw with strong pressures on the children to produce children, and there were religious leaders who viewed family planning as contrary to the culture, and there was all this belief of the economists, especially the microeconomists, the socalled new home economics, that rural substance families needed large number of children for basic survival and a basic survival strategy. But Ravenholt's instincts that the women didn't want to have all these children, and they didn't want to be pregnant all the time, were right. What I am saying was essentially a male view. And the women's perspective which was what Ravenholt saw in that visit to India was not widely known at the time and, to the extent it was, it was discounted. The professional opinion viewed Ravenholt as a radical outlier. And I was among those who viewed him that way. I'm getting ahead of the story. In retrospect, I think his instincts were more right than wrong. We will come back to that.

Q: Did you make your presentation?

SINDING: I don't know how Jarold Keiffer found out about this. I suspect that Carl Hemmer called him. He had a deputy named Harriet Crowley and one or the other of them found that this episode had occurred. Keifer called me at home. I was young early 30s and for the AA to call me at home was an intimidating experience. He said Steve, "I heard what happened today. I want you to get on the plane tomorrow." This was a Friday, and we were leaving Saturday for a meeting that was starting Sunday evening in Honolulu. "I want you to get on that plane tomorrow. I will see to it that the papers will get there, and I want you to make that presentation. I will guarantee you that Ravenholt will not give you a lot of trouble." So I went to the meeting; I made the presentation; Ravenholt was in the audience. He immediately stood up at the end of the presentation and started attacking its premises. He believed that he and Jim Brackett together had collected a lot of data which demonstrated that there was widespread demand. I no longer recall what their evidentiary base was, but Ray stood up and said, "this study is not based on the most uptodate information, the latest data. "I know that a lot of the data came from Jarrett Clinton's program in Indonesia and other USAID field program experience. So that a lot of it was service statistics from Asian programs which were showing contraceptive off takes rising rapidly; the prevalence was going up and so on. In fact, it was, and, in fact, the literature that my Smithsonian colleagues had collected did not make use of that information because it wasn't published. At the end of that session, a

fellow named Bill McIntyre who was the Population, Health and Nutrition officer in Pakistan, came up to me and said, "I listened to your presentation with great interest."

There were two Mission Directors at that conference Joe Wheeler from Pakistan and Tom Niblock from the Philippines and Bill said, you know, Joe Wheeler and I were talking afterward and we wondered whether you would consider coming to Pakistan to work with us on the program. Well, I had been having some conversations with Monica over the course of the last year sort of saying: I don't know whether I am going back to academia or not, but, if I do, I need to do it soon. And if not, we need to go overseas, because, if I am going to make development assistance my career, then I need some field experience. Being a GS employee in USAID, I was beginning to discover, was not wholly satisfying. This thing came out of the blue from Pakistan. I thought that this was a great opportunity; it is a country with an important population problem; it is Mission that wants me; and it has an open mind about some of these issues. So yes, I said that I would be very interested; let me go home and talk to my wife about it. So I went home and talked to Monica. She had a very good job at the National Academy of Sciences; she was study director on one of the NAS committees and was enjoying her career. We had just had our second daughter. The last thing in her mind was to go overseas. But we talked about it over a period of a couple of months, and I guess I wore her down so that by the end of the year we decided that, if we could make it happen, we would like to go to Pakistan. So I got back to McIntyre and Wheeler; Wheeler had actually been part of the second conversation. It was important to me that the Mission Director had said that he would like to have me to come to work there. I didn't know much about Joe Wheeler at the time; it turns out to have been one of the great decisions of my life to go work in a Joe Wheeler mission. Joe has remained a close friend up to the present day. Bill, as I am sure you recall, was killed in the bombing of the Embassy in Beirut a few years later.

First overseas assignment to Pakistan
with the USAID Mission's population program - 1975-1978

Let me tell how I got to Pakistan. Because Ravenholt had veto power over the assignment of population officers, his considerable skepticism about whether I would be a useful addition to the Pakistan mission had to be overcome. He was very resistant to letting me go to Pakistan, despite Wheeler's and McIntyre's appeals. Finally, I remember a conversation in his office in which - I guess, Carl Hemmer was present; I don't recall who else was there - Ray made me promise that I would conduct what he called a thousand household study, if he let me go to Pakistan. What Ravenholt meant by thousand household studies was demonstration projects which created the ideal service delivery environment of household distribution of pills and condoms. He was convinced that, if you could put that in place, it was possible to demonstrate in almost any setting that there would be a significant level of demand for those commodities. He, in fact, had established in Bangladesh what he called a thousand household study. It became the famous Matlab contraceptive introduction project, which had demonstrated in Bangladesh (which had been East Pakistan) that even in the most backward setting through good delivery of services at the household level you could increase contraceptive prevalence. So he made me promise that I would do a thousand household study.

We arrived in Pakistan on the 13th of September 1975; I remember because it was my wife's birthday. When we arrived at the Karachi airport, and she saw what she had gotten herself into, she was just beside herself. She thought she knew the developing world from our living in Chile and travels through the Andean region, but she was not prepared for the subcontinent. So we got off the plane in Karachi; McIntire had flown down from Islamabad to meet us. I remember at the Midway Hotel, McIntire took me off by the pool and wanted to start talking business; it was Monica's birthday, and she cried her eyes out. It was one of those moments with these two little kids ages three and five. So that was the beginning of our foreign service career.

The first thing I did when we got to Islamabad was to go and see the director, actually he was the codirector of the family planning program, he was joint secretary one of the two joint secretaries in charge of the program. A man named Maqbul Sheikh. And I said to Maqbul Sheikh, "Dr. Ravenholt (who he knew) asked us to do what was necessary to carry out a thousand household study, and I would like to talk with you about how to make that happen." And Maqbul looked at me like I was crazy and he said, "Thousand household study! We are doing a contraceptive inundation program in the whole country." He said, "We are testing the supplyside Ravenholt hypothesis on a national basis; why do you want to do a thousand household study?" He said, "two years ago, we did the Sialkot experiment in which we inundated the district with contraceptives, and it was on the basis of that experience that we decided to go ahead with the national inundation program, which USAID is lavishly funding." These are not his exact words, but this was the spirit of the conversation. "So what are you doing coming here; who are you coming in here talking about a thousand household study; it doesn't make any sense." Well, I made the mistake of not reporting that back to Ravenholt; I kind of let it sit there.

I meanwhile got busy with all kinds of things in the mission. McIntyre decided that it would be a good idea alongside the mainstream inundation program - and it really was a contraceptive inundation program - that it would be a good idea to have an R&D program that was kind of experimenting at the edges of what, in addition to contraceptive inundation, might be needed to bring down birth rates in Pakistan. And this included consideration of a lot of things that were in the literature and the wind at the time, like no birth bonus schemes, and other kinds of incentives. Ron Ridker and Bob Muscat both had written papers - both economists in PPC - and essays, and there was in the literature the suggestion that there were measures "beyond family planning," as it was called, that could bring down birth rates to the level that they needed to get to in order for population growth not to be a development problem. So I was designing what was called the "Population Research and Development Project" to create a mechanism for experimenting with some of these things. In retrospect it was a ridiculous undertaking; I mean there was very little capacity in Pakistan to do any research at all, much less highly sophisticated interventionist research of this kind. But I worked away at designing this thing and, meanwhile, became more and more convinced that the contraception inundation approach was not going to work in Pakistan.

Contraceptive inundation meant importing enormous quantities of pills and condoms, training a cadre of young field officers - young men and young women - who would work as teams going villagebyvillage to introduce contraception. A vertical program completely unconnected to the health system and managed out of Islamabad in a country that was federal in nature, where the provinces were supposed to have the responsibility for the implementation. So it was deeply resented by the health establishment at the provincial level, in fact, undermined. The central government had no capacity to manage anything like this logistically or otherwise. It was a colossal failure. The pills and condoms piled up in the warehouses; many of them found their way into the black market and actually over the border, especially condoms. There wasn't much demand for pills, but condoms disappeared in massive quantities to show up later in Afghanistan and Soviet Union and, in some degree, India. But most of them went over the Khyber Pass and up into Central Asia. I got there in mid '75, by the end of '77, it was clearly understood that contraceptive inundation was a massive failure.

Joe Wheeler had left in the meantime; he left in the summer of '76 and came back to become the Assistant Administrator for the Near East and South Asia. McIntyre left a year after that. I was in the mission when two things happened simultaneously. First, Dick Cashin came as the Mission Director from Indonesia where he had been highly regarded and a very successful Mission Director and presided over probably USAID's most successful population project up to that point. Second, the nuclear reprocessing issue arose, and all USAID disbursements were frozen. Something else had happened at that time. Monica had worked as a rupee contractor in the USAID mission. Joe Wheeler had put her in for a lateral entry as a direct hire Capital Development Officer. And she was all set to come in as a direct hire, and she had made that a condition of her willingness to return for a second tour. Well, Jimmy Carter imposed a hiring freeze in 1977 as soon as he came into office. The nuclear issue made it impossible to make a credible case for a waiver for Monica, and Cashin didn't like me and didn't like what I stood for. He was a Ravenholt man down the line, and he felt that I was not on board. Ravenholt had written me a letter - Christmas of 1976, in which he accused me of - I'll never forget the phrase - "failing to get my utilitarian wheels on the ground." That was his terminology. Ray was famous for coming up with these original turns of phrase. I wrote him a letter back angrily defending myself. That letter eventually found its way to Sander Levin and became part of the dossier when he went after Ravenholt - but we are getting ahead of the story.

So I went back to Islamabad from home leave in summer of '77 with Monica - not having a job and refusing to return to Pakistan, although she would follow a few weeks later. There was a guy on the desk, David Levintow, who basically persuaded Monica that, if she came back and hung in there, they would eventually get her exempted from the freeze. So she agreed to do that.

So I was back there; Cashin had said to me he did not want me to work on population; he'd like me to consider becoming the Mission Evaluation Officer. I didn't want to do that. And besides the Pakistan Mission wasn't going anywhere; we couldn't obligate any new money. And there was no job for Monica. But the only way I could get out of there

was by exercising my reemployment rights to the civil service. The foreign service was not going to transfer me. I got in touch with friends in Washington and told them I wanted to come back. Ravenholt wouldn't have me. But Joe Wheeler offered me the job of pop officer in the Near East Bureau; Jack Sullivan offered me the pop officer position in the Asia Bureau, and I had three offers from PPC. One to go work with Barbara Herz in her social sector division; one to join the new studies division in the Office of Evaluation, and I can't remember what the third was, but I remember there were five. But under the rules, if I was exercising my reemployment rights, I had to pay my own way home. So we flew back the four of us - Monica had come back and both kids were there at the end of February '78. And I joined the new Studies Division. I can remember people in the Mission and people in Washington asking why in the world would you go to work for PPC when you had the opportunity to go work for a regional bureau. Why would you turn down Joe Wheeler. But I had it in mind to work in a place where I could do something analytic. In retrospect, but maybe I knew it at the time, I needed to get out of my system all of the things I disagreed with Ravenholt about.

Q: Before we turn to that, let's finish up on Pakistan. What was your view of what we were able to accomplish in Pakistan? Talk about the Pakistani government and the people you worked with and their attitudes. What was your sense of the environment for carrying out programs?

SINDING: Both at the level of the society and at the level of the bureaucracy, I thought the situation was pretty hopeless. I can remember going out at one point into the Punjab on a field trip and having a conversation with a farmer. I spoke a little Urdu at the time. I said to him, "How many children did his parents have?" and he said, "six." And I said, "how many children do you have?" and he said, "six." And I said "if you could do it over again, would you still have six children." He said, "Oh, absolutely." He said, "I need six children." He said, "I need one son to work with me on my land; I need one son to go to Lahore (by which he meant to get a job and to earn income for the family); and I need a third son in case something happens to one of the other two." And he said: "Allah blessed me with three daughters." I said there is the explanation of the six child family in Pakistan; unless there happens to be a change in that basic equation, family planning is never going to be of interest to a guy like this. That was my mindset.

Q: Did you talk with his wife?

SINDING: I did not talk to his wife. Ravenholt had talked with the "wife" and heard a different story. You know, I did believe that there was some demand for family planning, particularly in the urban centers. I didn't think that Pakistan was an utterly hopeless case. But on the other side of it was the complete incompetence of the bureaucracy. They had pursued it down a road which had placed the central government and the provincial government at such loggerheads, so that the system was not capable of producing the kind of delivery system that even would have gotten them to the point where they could have gotten contraceptives out, given the social circumstances. It was a completely inept delivery system.

I can remember the Prime Minister's wife Megum Nusrat Bhutto at one point went out on a field trip; I think Fred Pinkham had become the AA at this point in the PHA Bureau which was eventually to come the S&T Bureau. Fred came on a VIP visit to Pakistan, and he went off on a field trip, and, I think, Begum Bhutto went with him. It was then or when Robin Duke came one of the periodic VIP visits that we had. And I remember her commenting with shock when she met with the field workers and she said, "These are kids. What does a child have to tell a Pakistani mother about family planning?" And basically her politician's instinct was right on the mark. That they had the wrong people employed by the wrong agency doing a job that was essentially impossible under the circumstances. So the combination of the resistance to family planning and fertility control, the increasingly conservative religious environment, and a bureaucratic structure that was just inept led me to conclude that the prospects for fertility decline in Pakistan were negligible. When I left, I was very negative.

Q: But the population program was very substantial?

SINDING: It was huge. In the years that I was there Pakistan may have been the single largest USAID population program in the world. Indonesia may have been larger. India had, at that point, closed down because of the IndoPak war of '71'72 so we really didn't have a presence in India. I don't think we had a project anything like the size of the one in Pakistan; except the one in Indonesia.

Q: The mission had bought into it?

SINDING: Joe Wheeler had a gambling streak in him; he was willing to try things. He thought let's test the Ravenholt hypothesis. He had an open mind; he was prepared to believe that maybe it wouldn't work. I should add that I was not in charge of the population project. I was responsible for designing this Population R&D project. But there was a population officer by the name Andy Haynal, who was a physician, had been with the Ford Foundation, and was a Seventh Day Adventist; a fervent believer in family planning, who subsequently left the agency. But Andy was the architect and the manager of the population program.

Q: What was his attitude?

SINDING: He was a true believer. He believed that if we had been able to effectively implement inundation, that is, to actually get the commodities to the households at the village level that the scheme would work.

Q: That wasn't happening? So the concept was never tested?

SINDING: That was Ravenholt's argument always; he said you can't conclude from the Pakistan experience that availability is not the key to use, because they never really implemented inundation.

Q: No where?

SINDING: That's one of those imponderables. There were thousand and thousands of villages, and there were tens of thousands of field workers; surely the supplies and the workers were present in some places. But the Pakistan fertility survey was carried out in 1978 - field work in 1977 - and published in 1978, and it showed absolutely no increase in contraceptive prevalence over the period of the inundation project.

In fact, there is a little bit of a story in the Pakistan Fertility Survey, itself. There was an officer of the Population Planning Division named Nizamuddin He was based in Lahore and became a friend of mine. Nizam had received a Ford Foundation Fellowship to go to get a Ph.D. in population studies at the University of Michigan at the conclusion of the Pakistan Fertility Survey. But he was responsible in the meantime for conducting it. The people in Islamabad, the powers that be in Islamabad, were well aware that the results of the Pakistan fertility survey would essentially represent the verdict on their effectiveness. So the stakes were very high. There was a new Secretary of Population by the name of Zahidi. He was a little guy, less than five feet tall, and a Bhutto henchman and a real thug. Anyway Zahidi understood that the fertility survey was going to be the report card on inundation, and so he was paying close attention to what was going on. Nizamuddin called me up in July of '77 when the temperature in Lahore was 120^0 F and said, "I've got the results, could you come down and help me work on them?" So I flew down to Lahore, took a room at the Intercontinental Hotel. Nizam and I sat there for three days in my room poring over the printout of the tables, the raw cross tabs. And it was absolutely clear that inundation was a failure. The desired family size was essentially unchanged; the completed family size was unchanged; the contraceptive prevalence was essentially unchanged. Basically nothing had happened despite this massive expenditure of funds and mobilization of ....

Q: The thousand village test was never done?

SINDING: The thousand household study was never done either, right. In fact, Nizamuddin told me that the decision to proceed with the inundation program, which had been ostensibly based on this experiment in the Sialkot district a few years earlier, was taken before the results of the Siakot Study came in. And, in fact, the results from Siakot did not support the decision to go with inundation. The decision was not really based on anything except some hunches about what might work. And it was totally unrealistic in terms of what the public bureaucracy in Pakistan was capable of doing. That was the worst mistake. I think even worse than the mistake of believing that, if you got the pills and condoms into the villages, people would use them was the mistake of believing that you could get the pills and condoms into the villages in an acceptable way to begin with. The Pakistan system was simply not capable; a country that can't deliver the mail is not going to be able to deliver pills and condoms to households under conservative religious and cultural traditions. It was a mind bogglingly inappropriate set of decisions in my view.

Q: What do you conclude as the lesson from that experience?

SINDING: Well, I am going to come to that, because what I went back to PPC to do was directly related to that. But let me anticipate the answer by saying that I think that what Bangladesh did right, and Pakistan did wrong, was to seriously test out ideas before going to the large scale. Indonesia did the same thing. What Indonesia discovered was that what worked in Bali didn't necessarily work in West Java. And what worked in West Java, didn't necessarily work in East Java. What Bangladesh discovered was that just getting the pills and condoms into the villages was not enough, that you had to have trained experienced and trusted field workers at the community level, you had to have a referral system, and you had to have a capacity to deal with sideeffects of contraceptives. If Pakistan had observed those basic rules of testing honestly on a small level and learned from that before going largescale, a lot of pain and suffering and money could have been saved. The big mistake in Pakistan was not actually letting the Sialkot Study be completed and going ahead with a massive inundation program that was highly risky. Taking the risk is one thing, but doing it without any pilot testing I think was irresponsible. Subsequently, Jack Sullivan, when he became the Assistant Administrator for Asia, had the courage to say that - to say that the Office of Population was pushing supplies out in an irresponsible manner - with this full supply mentality. There was enormous pressure on the Mission from Ravenholt in the Office of Population to accept very large shipments of pills and condoms. You were working in Africa at that time, so you may not have been subject to such pressure.

Q: Yes, we had it.

SINDING: I remember Bud Prince (Dr. Julius Prince, African Bureau Population and Public Health officer) got it. Bud was very resistant to it. But what you got was nothing like what the Asia missions got. Just enormous pressure to accept the pills and condoms and to test the supply side hypothesis. Partly because Ravenholt had gone out and bought them, and they needed to be put to use.

Q: On the Africanside the countries were not ready to buy into it because of all sorts of political and cultural objections...

SINDING: It was a decade later when Africa moved a bit. I can remember visiting Ghana in '74, before I went to Pakistan, and I went out to visit Dr. Fred Sai, at Legon at the University of Ghana Medical School, and Nancy Birdsall was with me from the Smithsonian project. I remember meeting with Bud, and Bud explaining to me why in Ghana, at that time, a largescale family planning program was not in the cards.

Q: We had the Danfa family planning project which was supposed to be the researchpilot effort.

SINDING: Right, it was basically an integrated service delivery model that you were testing.

Q: Right, alternative models.

SINDING: Ravenholt hated that project.

Q: He sure did.

Returned to USAID/Washington to the Studies Division of the Bureau for Program Policy and Coordination and developed the Framework for Population Program Strategy - 1978

SINDING: So I got back to Washington in the Spring of '78, and I went to work in the Studies Division which had been recently established in the new Office of Evaluation. Bob Berg was the director of the office. I think he was an Associate Assistant Administrator in PPC. Alex Shakow was the Assistant Administrator, PPC. There was a fellow from Boston University named Allan Hoben who had been hired to head the Studies Division. He was an Africanist and anthropologist. Allan was confused and never figured out what that job was all about. But that didn't bother me, because I was very clear about what I wanted to do.

I wanted to do a study of family planning program effectiveness. I had very clearly in my head at that point a model and I wanted to commission some case studies, get some country level information and see if this model would work. The model was a very simple one; it was a four cell matrix. On one dimension you had the social setting; and on the other dimension was political will or policy commitment. And, basically, what I said is that, if the social setting was conducive and the political will was there, a population policy implemented through a family planning program could be highly effective. If neither condition was there, you had a Pakistan. And in between you had these intermediate cases. The B cell, in which the social setting was favorable but the political commitment was not there, was typical of Latin America in which you had high levels of education, relatively high levels of income, the social conditions for smaller families, except perhaps in a cultural religious sense, but certainly in socio...

Q: What do you mean by social conditions?

SINDING: By social conditions I mean opportunities for women, higher education levels for women, relatively low infant and child mortality. Culturally, with a strong Catholic tradition, you, indeed, had some problems. But, basically, I would argue that the Catholic problem was a political problem not a social problem, because at the individual family level, people don't pay much attention to the teachings of the church, at least on contraception. At the individual level, people do what they think is good for them. But the church does wield considerable influence at the political level. And so what you had in Latin America was a social setting which was conducive to fertility decline, but a political environment that was not supportive. In parts of Asia, you had a social setting that was not particularly conducive but very strong political will. That was the case in Bangladesh where you had a government that was very committed. China, Indonesia, where the social setting was perhaps not all that conducive, the political will was sufficient to overcome the social impediments.

I commissioned studies, carried out some myself, for about twelve countries. Again McGreevey was part of that process, and I wrote a paper; it was Study Number One of the Studies Division. It came out and was called "A Study of Family Planning Program Effectiveness." It was published by USAID. Bob Berg and I organized a meeting to which we invited all the Assistant Administrators. This would have been the summer of '78; I think you were at that meeting.

Q: I was DAA for Africa Bureau at that time.

SINDING: We made a presentation of the results, and I laid out this framework and said depending where you assess a country to be in this matrix, the strategy that you would pursue would be quite different. It was the first time that anybody had laid out an alternative to the Ravenholt view that made sense to people who were more broadly working in development. A lot of people at that meeting, including Jack Sullivan, said, "This really makes sense; this is a basis on which we can develop population strategies for countries in different circumstances in our regions." The Regional Bureaus, in particular, really responded to it. And Jack came up to me after the meeting and said, "You turned me down when I offered you the population position; but would you reconsider?"

Transferred to the Asia Bureau as the Population Officer;
Testing the Framework - 1979-1980

By this time I had figured out that I didn't have a future in the Studies Division, because having done this study, I couldn't figure out what I would do next. And so I said, "yes, I would be delighted." So I went over to the Asia Bureau at that point. I used that framework to develop an Asia Bureau population strategy. It was the first regional population strategy. The reason it was possible to do it was because earlier that year or late the previous year the Carter Administration made a decision to remove the special power of the Office of Population. Population became the province of the Regional Bureaus in the same way as all other sectors were. The Office of Population lost its control over assignments and lost its control over budgets. And so the Asia Bureau had its own population budget and completely independent authority. Being in a position, therefore, as the Pop officer to work directly with the missions and not be beholden to Ravenholt was an offer that I couldn't refuse. So with this framework and with the pop strategy for Asia, I really established myself as an independent voice on population in the agency in the region. It was really the only region that was seriously doing a lot on population, a lot of bilateral programming. Sullivan liked me and I liked him; Tom Arndt was the head of the Technical Resources Office and Jim Brady was the head of PHN. It was a very good arrangement for me. I did a lot of work with the missions in the region. The Pop Officers had a little trouble because they were so accustomed to being under Ravenholt's thumb that working with the Regional Bureau independently was a new experience for them. They weren't quite sure what to do; they really didn't want to get on the wrong side of Ravenholt and the Office of Population. But Sander Levin had come in also as the AA for the new Development Support Bureau, and he was determined to clip Ravenholt's wings. Ray became insubordinate - he would not accept Levin's authority -

Levin eventually downgraded him and made him a division chief and in a matter of months Ray had made a decision to leave the agency. And so my ascension in the Asia Bureau coincided with the end of the Ravenholt dynasty in the Office of Population.

Q: You were in the Asia Bureau for how long?

SINDING: I came back from Pakistan in late February '78; I went to the Asia Bureau around June/July of '78, and I went to the Philippines two years later in the summer of 1980. Betty Boorady, who was head of Personnel, had to approve my conversion back to the foreign service, and I had to endure about an hour lecture from her on why what I had done was wrong in exercising my GS reemployment rights and how, that if I ever tried to pull anything like that again, it would be the end of my USAID career. I listened politely and hung my head, but I never felt that what I had done was wrong. But in the eyes of the foreign service it was inappropriate.

Q: But before we go to the Philippines, did you test out your matrix?

SINDING: Yes, we got all the missions in Asia to develop country strategies that were in one way or another...

Q: How was it applied? What countries used it one way or another?

SINDING: In the Philippines, it was interesting; in the Philippines, we had doubts about the depth of commitment of the Marcos government. The Philippines was a place in which we agreed to work. There was a high demand for family planning services, but a lagging commitment on the part of the government. So a natural thing to do would be to try to work through private agencies. A major effort was made to shift resources from public to NGO channels for service delivery. That's an example.

I went out to India in '78. We had just reopened a bilateral program, and I went out with a team. We applied the framework in India actually statebystate. There were some states like Maharashtra and Punjab where it appeared that the commitment on the part of government was there and the predisposition to limit family sizes was strong enough, that strong public programs made a lot of sense. There were other states like Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat where it was much less that that was the case, and where we argued in favor of a much stronger private sector approach. Also for Rajasthan, we felt that the social setting argued in favor of major investments in primary education and primary health care along with family planning services.

Q: What stood out in most cases: political will or the social context, or was it just too variable?

SINDING: I think the social setting provided the parameters within which fertility could vary and political will largely determined within those parameters whether you were at the upper end or the lower end. But Bangladesh surprised me.

When I went to Bangladesh for the first time in '78 actually this is an aside that is an important part of the story. As I was leaving Pakistan, I had very little to do; the Bangladesh Mission called me John Dumm was the Population Officer with Charles Gurney; they were there together. They asked me to come over; they were getting ready to produce a population strategy paper. And I said I would be glad to. So I went over and I spent a week or a weekandahalf looking at the data, traveling around familiarizing myself. I concluded after a very brief and cursory look at the situation but informed by almost three years of experience in Pakistan, that the most that Bangladesh could hope for given the social setting was a contraceptive prevalence rate of 2025 percent by the end of the century under the most favorable political conditions one could imagine. But, in fact, by 2000 Bangladesh had a contraceptive prevalence of over 50 percent. I was proved to be very wrong and, in fact, my experience in Asia led me to believe that, my Pakistan experience notwithstanding, there was a lot more demand for family planning out there than I had believed there was.

The Philippines experience was part of what convinced me about that. But I also took a trip to Indonesia in 1976 where I saw a situation that was completely different from anything I had experienced before with a well managed government family planning program that was determined to bring down fertility - what could be done where political will was really strong.

Q: and service delivery was effective?

SINDING: It was really effective, yes. It really happened.

Q: This model, you had for the Asia Bureau, worked.

SINDING: Yes, it worked well.

Q: And each of the missions came in with their own strategies?

SINDING: Yes, you know I wouldn't say it worked perfectly. The missions were still relatively free to do what they were going to do. But I had created a planning framework that made sense to people and which enabled them at least to think about this issue in a more sophisticated way. That set of ideas began to gradually permeate the thinking of the agency.

Q: Were there a lot of pilot efforts to test out ideas?

SINDING: No, not really. Most of the Asia countries by the time I was in that job were pretty far along. The Thai program was well established. It made a difference in India as I said. We tried to make something go in Sri Lanka. That was an interesting case. Sarah Jane Littlefield was the Mission Director, and she basically didn't want to do anything in family planning. She didn't think it was necessary, because she thought everything was going in the right direction anyway. She was absolutely right. We had a gung ho population officer who really wanted to do stuff. But Sri Lanka was approaching

replacement level fertility on its own without USAID's assistance and Sarah Jane knew that. We couldn't work in Burma; Vietnam was, of course, long gone by then.

Thailand and Indonesia, both had mature programs and I've talked about the Philippines.

Q: Nepal?

SINDING: I never visited Nepal, and I still have never visited Nepal. Sam Butterfield was the Mission Director and David Mutchler was the Pop officer. Sam certainly believed that you needed a combination of family planning services and improvements in social services, social setting, the socioeconomic conditions. I think he believed that he could develop a general development strategy in Nepal that would reenforce a small family norm along side the family planning program effort that was underway. But Nepal was basically doing a sterilization only program a la India. And one of the things, I know, that we called for in Asia Bureau strategy was to pay more attention to (a) the underlying determinants of fertility, particularly focusing on girls education and mortality reduction; and (b) a more well rounded approach to family planning with temporary methods along side sterilization.

Was the strategy really applied in the field? Not in the sense that I laid out the strategy, and then the missions fell into lock step and implemented it. But yes, in the sense that Sullivan bought into it, the Bureau bought into it, the Bureau basically liked this way of thinking about population, and, in a couple of selected cases - the Philippines and India being two that I distinctly recall - we did actually apply the principles of that framework to country programming.

Q: It opened up a way to think about it rather than be caught in a rigid mode.

SINDING: Right, before this happened you found yourself on the Ravenholt side or the other side; there was no other way to be and my framework created a way in which you could work on both sides of the issue simultaneously and intelligently. I must say that I owe a great intellectual debt to Bernard Berelson, who was the President of the Population Council and was developing the same set of ideas at the same time. This didn't come full blown into my head. I had a lot of correspondence and conversations with Berelson. He was writing a paper on the subject just about the same time I was doing this study at USAID, and the two things came out together. I'm sure that I would not have come to the conclusions I did or in as elegant a fashion if it hadn't been for the influence of Berelson, who has always been my intellectual hero in the population field.

Q: After the Asia Bureau, you went off to the Philippines as Population Officer?

Assignment to USAID Philippines as the Population, Health and Nutrition Officer - 1980-1983

SINDING: Population, Health and Nutrition.

Q: What was your position, your job?

SINDING: I was chief of the Population, Health and Nutrition Office in USAID Manila. Tony Schwarzwalder was the Mission Director. He called me up one day asked me whether I would be interested in that assignment. He said he thought he had a good job in the Capital Development Office for Monica. So it was our first tandem assignment. We were very pleased that there was an opportunity for both of us in a large mission. I think both of us had a certain amount of misgivings about working in the Philippines because of the Marcos regime and the very complicated nature of U.S.Philippines relations. But it was good career opportunity for both of us, and we knew that it was time for us to get back overseas. So off we went.

Q: What was the situation in the Philippines at that time in general, not just in population?

SINDING: I would say that we arrived kind of at the beginning of the end game for Marcos. It was clear that he had lost his popular support; there were a lot of Filipinos who, in the absence of an alternative, would support Marcos, but the early popularity that Marcos had had as a reforming authoritarian had passed. He was now seen as a reactionary authoritarian, increasingly. The corruption of the regime was widely known; and many of the people around him were disliked. I felt that we were arriving in the Philippines at a time of cynicism, corruption, and a regime that was rapidly losing it legitimacy. Nonetheless, I was very enthusiastic about working on population issues in the Philippines.

Q: Ok, lets focus more on the population, health, nutrition issues that you were moving into? How did you view the situation you were to work with?

SINDING: In the early years of USAID involvement in population in the Philippines this was preMarcos the government because of the sensitivity of family planning and population issues in the country was very reluctant to adopt a population policy or a family planning program. The result was that a lot of the USAID resources flowed to private nongovernmental organizations of which there were several; some of which were quite effective. And in that early period - thinking back to the late '60s and the very early '70s - contraceptive use increased so rapidly from near zero to about 25 percent in the population of reproductive age, and there was corresponding decline in Philippine fertility. Interestingly, the Philippines was one of the earliest of the southeast Asian countries to experience a fertility decline, before Indonesia and Thailand.

Q: Why do you think it progressed so well?

SINDING: Because it was private, and because, I think, there was a latent demand for fertility control. The Philippines had unusually strong social indicators, very high levels of female education comparatively, and relatively high income by southeast Asian standards. It was before the rapid economic takeoff of many of the neighboring countries. And the social setting was conducive to lower fertility and demand for the means to

control fertility, particularly among the women.

Q: Was this fairly widely spread around the country?

SINDING: Particularly in the urban and suburban areas, as is usually the case. But it wasn't limited to the urban areas. And there were a couple of very brave pioneers. There was a woman named Fe del Mundo, who opened up a large family planning clinic which gradually spread to other parts of the country. The dean of Asian demographers Mercedes Concepcion, she contributed importantly to the early recognition of population pressures and rapid population growth in the country. The Family Planning Organization in the Philippines was one of earliest affiliates of IPPF. I think a lot of this had to do with the fact that the Philippines was so closely linked to the United States; a lot of American missionaries and others, who were sort of hanging around the Philippines, started these things. There was an early movement that was comparatively effective.

What happened when Marcos took over was that after two or three years family planning became an enthusiasm of Imelda. She started up things. I used to say that the development landscape of the Philippines was littered with the discarded enthusiasms of the first lady. And nutrition and family planning were two of those. She got private people to put up money, and she established the Population Center Foundation, the National Nutrition Center, and a few other things. They had big palaces, not palaces, but very fancy buildings out in Makati. But, at the same time, Marcos really pushed the government to get actively involved in the family planning. Something called the Commission on Population (POPCOM) was established in the Marcos years.

Initially the population program of the government enjoyed some success, but there were two reasons why ultimately it was doomed to fail. One was that the Philippines followed the pattern of a number of the Asian countries of establishing a population program outside the health service. Like Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and a number of other countries, but, unlike Thailand, they decided - and I don't know why this was, I don't know whether USAID was particularly responsible for this, or whether this was a decision of the Filipinos; I suspect that USAID had a role - they couldn't wait for the health system to incorporate family planning. In any case, even if it did it would probably have had a low priority, and so they had to bypass the health system. In doing so, they created an adversary relationship, and that never went away. That was the first mistake. The second mistake was in shifting the resources and the responsibility from the private to the public sector. In a lot of Asian countries that would have been the right thing to do, but in the Philippines it was the wrong thing to do because it really incurred the wrath of the Roman Catholic Church. It became a matter of public policy and public programs that the church felt that it had to oppose it, and it did but with increasing vigor over the whole period of the Marcos regime. So that by the time I got there in 1980, the dialogue between the church and the government was at fairly high decibel level and Marcos had already begun to back away. This became a discarded enthusiasm, and the government was on the defensive.

One of my predecessors, Lenni Kangas, had carried out a study in the late '70s in which

there was the striking finding that there was a very strong inverse relationship between the distance a woman lived from a family planning clinic and the likelihood that she would be using contraceptives. From that Kangas and his colleagues in the government drew the conclusion that the government ought to shift from a clinicbased to a village or outreach system. The national outreach program became the centerpiece of USAID's support for population in the Philippines. Responsibility for the national outreach program was housed in the PopCom, again bypassing the Ministry of Health. PopCom was to work with the local governments to find specific mechanisms, but a huge outreach force was recruited and deployed who answered to PopCom. So that instead of finding existing service delivery mechanisms that were already part of the structure of public serves in the Philippines, they created a new one at enormous expense and, essentially 100 percent underwritten by USAID. I wouldn't say that it didn't work; it wasn't the classic failure that we had in Pakistan, but it didn't work very well. We pushed very hard in spending a great deal of money and nudged contraceptive use up from 25 percent maybe to 2728 percent. It didn't have the dramatic impact that I think Kangas and his colleagues had hoped for.

Q: Why didn't it work?

SINDING: Why didn't it work? Well there a lot of reasons why it didn't work. One was that the Philippines made the same mistake that Pakistan made; that is, the workers were basically young college graduates, typically unmarried, who had very little credibility in the villages. Also it depended heavily on whether the local governments were willing to be cooperative and in many cases the local mayors and governors didn't believe in family planning and weren't willing to give it their support. By this time Marcos was no longer speaking publicly on the issue; this is, in part, based on what I subsequently observed in Kenya and also saw during that same period of time happening in Indonesia. Had Marcos spoken out forcefully and publicly and powerfully for family planning, the local government authorities would have recognized this as a high priority and would have given it much more time and effort to it. But they knew that Marcos himself was on the defensive and didn't have much enthusiasm for it; he never spoke on the subject, and he wasn't particularly interested in holding them accountable. And so they put their time and effort into other things. Without local government support, without political support generally, programs of this sort often don't do very well. So I think it was the lack of political support. I left the Philippines after three years convinced that the public sector strategy didn't make sense for that country; this was a country where it would have made a lot more sense to stay with a strategy of working with NGOs and building up the capacity of the NGOs to be the primary source of service delivery, as it had happened, for example, in Colombia.

The Colombians solved the same problem the Philippines had, which was overt Roman Catholic Church opposition. They established a very large and effective private family planning association with the passive support of the government to permit international resources to support its work. The Church found it much harder to go after a private organization than it would have to go after the government. I think that that kind of a strategy would have worked better and, in fact, in subsequent years that was the way

USAID turned in its support for population.

Q: During your time there you were trying to get this national outreach program to work?

SINDING: Yes

Q: What were some of the problems you faced given there wasn't much support; what were some practical issues you had to deal with?

SINDING: Well, I think I have mentioned most of them. The bureaucratic organization for outreach was actually quite good. The people at PopCom, who were responsible for it, were young but very energetic, smart people, highly committed, who understood the importance of working with local government authorities, and who put a lot of time and effort in doing it. It was just an uphill battle because of lack of support from Malacañang the presidential palace. And the young people were the wrong kind of people for the outreach work. We didn't have big logistics problems. This wasn't the case where we had overloaded the system with contraceptives that weren't being used. It was primarily an oral pill program with some condoms and IUDs. But I think by that time we had gotten a handle on how to estimate demand to make sure that we didn't overstock, which had been a problem in many of the Asian countries in the earlier years.

Q: Was there much resistance among the people?

SINDING: No, I don't think so. I think that, if the program had itself had been more enthusiastically embraced by political figures at the local level and they had spoken in support of family planning and responsible parenthood, there would have been more of a response. But I'm not enough of a student of Philippine culture to be certain of that. The Philippines is an interesting case. It is a country in which because of socioeconomic conditions one should have anticipated a strong demand for family planning, particularly given the high status of women and so on; at least the high accomplishments of women in educational terms.

Q: Was that true at the lower levels of society?

SINDING: Well, it was truer than in Indonesia or even in Thailand. Even in the rural areas most Philippine girls had a few years of primary education. The primary education system in the Philippines was very highly developed, and the people had an implicit faith in education; and in fact, there was compulsory primary education. Girls were pretty well educated; there weren't a lot of jobs for them when they finished. Male dominance and machismo were very strong in the Philippines, and that was one of the negative factors. But I also think Roman Catholicism was important. I think the Filipinos internalized the church to a sufficient degree so that church teaching became an important inhibiting factor. Many of them believed that it was a sin to use contraceptives and wouldn't do so for that reason. This was different from Latin America where I think people were inclined to take the teachings of the church with a grain of salt, particularly where they saw the

teachings conflicting with their own interests. I think Catholicism was perhaps a more important feature in individual lives in the Philippines than what I had seen in Latin America. But I'm not really enough of a student to be very certain about these things. But I had no other way of explaining why the Philippines performed so much less successfully than its neighbors in family planning. The government didn't do a great job, but it didn't do an awful job. It may not have pushed as hard as Suharto and his lieutenants did in Indonesia, but they certainly pushed as hard as the Thais did at the level of advocacy and public policy. They didn't run the program as well as the Thais. The Thai program was magnificent; it was an integrated program; they delivered family planning through the Ministry of Public Health and gave it high priority. But the social conditions in the Philippines could have produced more of a demographic response to the availability of family planning services.

Q: Was the program countrywide?

SINDING: There were parts of the south where it couldn't be implemented because of an Islamic rebellion. But for the most part it was in every region and every province. It was certainly throughout Luzon, Sebu, Panay, and large parts of Mindanao and in the smaller islands and provinces. It was pretty much countrywide.

Q: You said at the beginning that it would have gone better if it had been with the Ministry of Health, but it wasn't but, on the other hand, you implied that that would have been a very slow way to proceed. How did you see that connection?

SINDING: Let me put it this way. When Ramos came to power many years later and put family planning into the Ministry of Health, he made PopCom strictly a policy and advisory group and gave the Ministry of Health full responsibility for family planning services. The program took off. The health ministry had the capacity, in fact, to do a good job of family planning with appropriate levels of political support. Ramos didn't suffer from the problem that Marcos and other previous presidents has, because he, himself, was not a Catholic, so he was prepared to take the church on an this issues and he did. He was in specific conflict with Cardinal Sin. He didn't worry about being excommunicated. It was in retrospect, I think that it wasn't as stark a problem as it was in the subcontinent where there really wasn't a rural health system. You couldn't wait to build a rural health system in the subcontinent. In the Philippines there was a rural health system, and Marcos could have used it. It is true that family planning will get a relatively low priority, if it is viewed among one of several health service responsibilities of the Ministry. But, if it isn't, if it's made clear that it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and that this is a very high priority, as was the case in Thailand, then being in the health ministry is not necessarily a disadvantage. It can have the great advantages of a delivery system that is already in place. I think that combination of having offered family planning services to the Health Ministry and giving much more responsibility to the private sector than happened after Marcos took over would have produced a much better outcome in the Philippines. Today I think contraceptive use in the Philippines is about 4550 percent; so it is still not up to the level of Thailand.

Q: Has the structure of the program changed?

SINDING: It was advertised a lot, and it worked through the Health Ministry. The two key things that needed to happen, did happen. This was after I left. I can claim no contribution or responsibility for any of the good things that happened in the Philippines.

Q: You planted a seed; I'll bet?

SINDING: Well, I talked to people about what I thought; it may be that in a very indirect way I could have had some impact on the next generation of USAID people or even the Filipinos, but I doubt it.

Q: You also mentioned that under your responsibility you had health and nutrition. You had programs in those areas?

SINDING: We had two big pilot projects in health. Both were efforts to operationalize what was the big health theme of the day which was primary health care. One was called PUSH Panay Unified Services for Health which was designed by the late Jake Vanderflugt. It operated on the Island of Panay in the four provinces. And the other was BICOL Integrated Health Services; in Bicol province in the southern tip of Luzon. The PUSH project was very successful in large part because USAID and the central Ministry of Health put a lot of time and effort in working with the local political authorities. Everyone of the governors in the four provinces on Panay Island was committed to PUSH and put real effort into it real political support; talked to the mayors and local political authorities and encouraged them. It was a highly integrated activity that included the training of barangay (village) workers who in addition to providing a certain amount of promotive and preventive health services at the household level, also were responsible for implementing community safe water supply. It was a combined health services and safe water project.

I didn't stay long enough to be there when PUSH was evaluated for health impact. But my understanding is that the evaluation was very positive. Years later when Ramos took over the PUSH model it was not adopted but important components of it became part of the national health policy in the Philippines.

Q: What was our input to the program; what did USAID do?

SINDING: We basically paid all the cost of the training of the Barangay Health workers. Barangay is the Philippine term for village; the village health worker. The Barangay is the lowest administrative unit; it usually refers to a rural municipality or township.

So we paid for the training of the Barangay Health Workers, the technical assistance that went into the preparation of the curriculum for that training. We provided the first round of medical supplies which became subsequently the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. We paid for the engineering work and the pumps that were involved in the community water supply. That was about it. Exiting facilities were used so we did not

construct any. We may have paid for the upgrading of some of the facilities, but that was a minor item. It covered the entire island of Panay. I don't recall the dollar level but it was not an inconsequential program. The Bicol program on the other hand didn't work very well because the political authorities were never behind it. I paid less attention to the Bicol project. I went to Panay countless times; I loved the Panay project and paid a lot of attention to it. We had really good people in the Mission; there was a Philippine doctor named "Dodong" Capul that was his nickname; Rosendo Calpul was the primary project manager under the leadership of Joy RiggsPerla I think she is still the Director of the Office of Health in USAID here in Washington.

Q: These were technical assistance people on the spot?

SINDING: No, they were technical staff in the Mission in Manila but spent a lot of time in Panay. We didn't have anybody full time on the ground. We monitored the project from Manila, that was in part because the local people were so competent; they were really good. The Governor of Iloilo Province whose name I no longer remember was a real driving force. And then his Director of Planning, Alex Umadhay, were real enthusiasts for the PUSH project. And they really put their heart into it. That's what made the difference.

Q: And you didn't have that in Bicol?

SINDING: No the people in Bicol were pretty weak and not really enthusiastic about the project. The Bicol project never really amounted to much.

On the nutrition side, the USAID program in the Philippines was famous. The man who had been there for many, many years was named Butch Engle everybody called him Butch. He was an institution in the Philippines; he had been there for 2030 years. He had been a professor at Penn State; he was a professional nutritionist. He was the inventor of the "NutraBun." the Nutrabun was a concoction of various nutritionally wholesome foods which were first developed as an emergency food supply in typhoon situations where villages were just decimated by typhoons. NutraBuns would be sort of dropped in by helicopters. They provided all of the nutrients that an adult required for a 24 hour period. And they were good; they were very tasty; very dense, sweet. So people really loved NutraBuns; they were sort of famous as an emergency food supply. Out of that came a more serious effort to engage in nutrition planning; to do nutritional surveys; to do weight and height measurement of infants and young children to try to identify the extent of under and malnutrition and try to some up with strategies to deal with it.

Both on the food production side and the compensatory feeding side. We supported the Nutrition Center of the Philippines, called the National Nutrition Center (NNC), colocated with POPCOM in one of these fancy building that Imelda had had built. Beyond that I don't recall much about our assistance in nutrition.

Q: The nutrition program had an ebb and flow in the agency; it started before you came and then on an upswing...

SINDING: Marty Forman was a powerful advocate within the Agency for nutrition. And some Mission Directors in some countries accepted that and started nutrition programs. But nutrition, more than any other subject that the Agency took up, fell between stools. You never knew whether to think of it as part of agriculture or part of health. Some people thought that nutrition really is a subset of the general problem of food availability which, in part, is a production problem and, in part, a distribution and pricing problem. Other people felt that targeted interventions through health systems to deal with cases of severe mal or undernutrition was the right way to go. The Agency never really resolved that problem. So nutrition always was kind of an orphan.

Q: Let's go back a minute to the health program: was the populationfamily planning program connected to the health program at all? I'm trying to think about the interaction of the two programs.

SINDING: I pushed very hard in the three years that I was there was for the people in PUSH to give a high priority to family planning. But always sensed that they were resistant. Filipinos never say no. One of the first things that you learn when you go to Asia is that "yes" has many meanings.

Q: I learned that in Africa, too.

SINDING: And learning to distinguish between when "yes" means "yes" and when "yes" means "no" is a real art. If I ever learned it, it was late in the game. I thought the advocacy I was giving to family planning was enthusiastically received when, in fact, they said what I wanted to hear and really didn't do very much. Panay is a religiously conservative area. They were worried that, if they pushed forward on family planning, it would jeopardize other things that they were trying to accomplish with the health program. They weren't hostile to family planning, but they never gave it the priority. And Dr. Vanderflugt, who designed it, with whom all of the preproject negotiations took place, had never pushed family planning particularly in the context of PUSH. Population and health were absolutely divided in the Mission. There was a Population Officer, who worked with POPCOM, and there was a Health Officer, who did whatever he did. When I got there I tried to bring the two together. In fact, I recall, at one point, having a conversation with people at POPCOM saying you know, in the long run, it really doesn't make sense to have parallel delivery systems. We ought to be thinking now about ways in which we can integrate. And maybe we could use PUSH and Bicol as areas in which we could experiment with integration; let's have the outreach workers work with the Barangay Health Workers, and see if we can come up with a rational approach. The POPCOM people didn't want to hear anything about that; they were adamantly opposed to working with the health people. The tradition of separation was so well established before I got there that there was very little that I could do about. I blame Tom Niblock for that. Tom was the Mission Director when all this was really organized. It was on his watch and the people who worked for him that this rigid separate between population and health happened. It just became very difficult when I was there to undo this; it really didn't happen until the Minister of Health, whose name was Juan Flavier under Ramos,

came into power. Flavier had been the head of the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction in Cavite. It had originally been in Taiwan and moved to the Philippines later on. It was an integrated rural development laboratory. Flavier was head of health and later head of IIRR. He was very much a prointegration person as was Capul, the guy who worked for USAID. And so when Flavier became Minister of Health under Ramos, he basically broke this rigid separation between population and health and began to bring it together. By that time, USAID was more than ready to follow; the Ravenholt days and the days of strict separation in USAID were over as well. It was a different environment.

Q: You mentioned that some of the elements of the work in Panay were picked up in the national policy; what were they?

SINDING: The Barangay local health workers; having a local health worker who was trained in critical set of preventive and basic curative services. That was a very important part of what was carried over. And in the community water supply, the understanding that to sustain good health you had to have a source of clean water. Those both became part of the national health scheme.

Q: For community water supply, were you able create desirable sustainable systems?

SINDING: The engineers always thought it was the maintenance; the communities should take care of the wells. In my experience, we recognized that many of the barangays simply did not have the resources to maintain these system on their own. And so there needed to be a capacity on the part of the health system to repair wells when the pumps broke. That was built into the design of the project. The communities had primary responsibility for the maintenance facilities and had some training in doing that but there was a resource that they could call upon within the health program, within the central health office of PUSH to come and repair wells when things went beyond what they could do themselves. The water supply initiatives of the '80s often fell apart over the maintenance issue, which was, in part, financial and, in part, technical. PUSH was designed by people who recognized that issue. The Philippines was a sufficiently advanced economy so that you really could get the communities - and sufficiently well organized at the community level - so you really could get the communities to take responsibility. The Barangay Health Workers were first and foremost health educators; their responsibility was to help families understand what good health behavior meant. They gave lessons in good nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene and they were able to cope with acute respiratory infections; they gave tetanus toxoid; they did the weightforage charting of children. There were a lot of things that they could do to help families both monitor their own health and take the steps the families could take to ensure their health.

Q: What was the hierarchy of supervision?

SINDING: There was a clinic base of nurses and they were the first line of supervisors of the community workers, and there was a referral system up the line.

Q: Were there community committees for health?

SINDING: The Barangay Health Workers were selected by the communities through some sort of process of community involvement; they were not just people who were hired.

Q: Not like the family planning workers?

SINDING: Just the opposite; they were from the community. They were often young reasonably well educated people but different than family planning; they weren't talking about family planning and contraception. They were talking about things that were not sensitive. Whether there was a health committee to which they were responsible in the classic WHO model I don't recall, I don't think so.

Q: Well, how about your experience in the Philippines generally. How did you find working there and working with the people?

SINDING: It was my least favorite post.

Q: Why was that?

SINDING: Because of the corruption. James Fallows wrote a book a few years ago in which he called the Philippines a "damaged culture." It was a very controversial book and certainly a controversial term. But there is some truth to what he was saying. The combination of 300 years of Spanish colonialism and 50 years of Hollywood, produced a very strange kind of culture. It was a culture that was not genuinely Asian in some senses. It was heavy influenced by European culture and heavily influenced by North American culture. The Filipinos, in an important sense, didn't know who they were. In addition to that the Marcos regime was so thoroughly corrupt and the U.S. relationship to that regime was so complicated because of our strategic interests that I found it an uncomfortable place to work. I didn't find my counterparts, with some important exceptions, a particularly able or motivated group. I thought that a lot of what we were doing in the Philippines we would not have done had there not been strategic considerations. Certainly the aid levels would not have been as high; the dialogue would have been different. The U.S. was very cosy with Marcos and certainly overlooked human rights abuses and widespread corruption and mismanagement because Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base were so important to us; good relations with the government were important to us. That is not an environment in which it is comfortable to be an aid worker.

Q: Were we pushing hard on the government and people on what we were trying to get done?

SINDING: Yes, it had been. Mission Directors before Schwarzwalder were much more willing to be heavy handed; that wasn't Tony's style. He was much more deferential and wanted to have a genuine dialogue; he didn't want to push the Filipinos around. Also the Ambassador during the time we were there was Dick Murphy, who was a consummate professional and whose style also was a more sophisticated nuanced style. I actually

thought that the leadership on the U.S. side was pretty good given the circumstances. But the circumstances were that it was one of the last battle grounds of the Cold War. We desperately wanted to maintain those military bases. There were very powerful indigenous forces in the Philippines that wanted us out. _Marcos was willing to work with us and to allow us to stay. So we were prepared to do whatever it took to maintain a good relationship with that government to avoid the sort of regime that would have probably kicked us out. Eventually it happened, but we only let it happen when it no longer really mattered to us.

Q: Did you feel any pressure directly or indirectly from the Embassy in terms of what you were trying to do that might have had a political consequence, that might cause concern pushing family planning, for example?

SINDING: No, the Embassy was pretty good actually. John Maisto was the head of the political section; I think he is very high up in the State Department; he was a sophisticated guy. The Ambassador was very good and supportive. Murphy was replaced by Michael Armacost who was also good to work with. I do recall that there was one point at which the Embassy asked us to become much more actively involved in reporting on our conversations with counterparts. We refused to do it. Tony communicated in whatever way he did, the unwillingness of the USAID staff to participate in intelligence gathering. That's the only instance that I recall of the Embassy asking us to do anything or behave in a way we regarded as inappropriate.

Q: Even in the family planning area which was difficult and sensitive?

SINDING: The people in the Embassy recognized how important the population issue was.

They were prepared for USAID to be involved in something controversial because it was an important thing to do.

Q: Ok; you ended up in the Philippines in what year?

SINDING: January 1983. Not quite three years; we went out in late summer of 1980 and left in the early part of 1983. Monica stayed on until later in the Spring; she actually worked on the ESF program; she worked very closely with the first lady and her people. Marcos had put Imelda and her people in charge of ESF program. She was the Minister of Local Government and something else. A man named Jolly Benitez was her principal lieutenant, and the main counterpart with the Mission. Dennis Barrett, who was the Deputy Mission Director, was the principal guy on the USAID side working on the ESF program. Monica was working mainly on schools; a big school building program.

Q: Where did you go after the Philippines?

Assignment as Director of the USAID's Office of Population - 1983-1986

SINDING: I was called back to Washington by Charlie Greenleaf and Rocky Staples to head Asia/TR. I actually was reluctant to leave before the end of my second tour so early into the second tour, but this was a career opportunity that was hard to pass up. They wanted me to head up the principal office in Washington, an Office Directorship on the track to a Mission Directorship. It was the director of the office in which I had been a division chief. I had been feeling for a long time that I wanted the opportunity to move beyond population work; I wanted to work more broadly on development issues. It wasn't necessarily that I had the aspiration to become a Mission Director. I hadn't really trained to become a population officer; I came into the Agency to work on it. By now I had become a career Foreign Service Officer and was interested in development much more broadly, and so when the opportunity came along to head the technical office of the Asia Bureau I thought that this was the right job at the right time, a good career move to extend my horizons. I had all of the technical divisions - agriculture, rural development, health, population, environment. There was separate office for capital projects. There was a Technical Resources office (TR) and a Project Development office (PD) one of the three main offices of the Bureau. So I was part of the Bureau's senior staff. But I was only in that job for ten weeks when I got a call one day from a fellow named George Curlin. George was the Director of the Office of Health. He said to me that my colleagues in what was then the Science and Technology (S&T) Bureau asked him to call to see whether I would be willing to consider being the Director of the Office of Population. My initial response was "no", but as I began to understand the situation I felt more and more that I had a responsibility to do this. The situation was that Joe Speidel, who had been Acting Director for a number of years was being forced out of that role, because it was discovered that he had coauthored a book in which abortion was mentioned. And now we get into the population politics of the Reagan era.

Q: This is 1983?

SINDING: It is the Spring 1983. This must have been mid to late March. The Communications Review Board had been established by the new administration, and one of its jobs was to take a look at everything that USAID did - published, directly or sponsored, to make sure that we were not publishing things or permitting things to be published that were contrary to Agency policy. And they were particularly vigilant on population questions, because there was in the White House and, in to some degree, in the Agency a group of people who had come in with Reagan who were determined to undo what USAID had been involved in for many years on the population front, and who were convinced that we were basically supporting the abortion industry around the world. And so when Speidel was implicated with the abortion movement, Peter McPherson, who was, of course, the Administrator then, came under tremendous pressure to get rid of him. Joe had been told by Nyle Brady, the Assistant Administrator for S&T Bureau, that he needed to find something else to do. The fear was that, if they could not find a career person to take over that job, the White House would find a political appointee. So the Agency with McPherson's very strong support and Brady, in particular, was desperate to find somebody who was not in any way on the wrong side of the abortion issue, but who could be counted on not to sell the program down the river. And I guess my name was one of those that came up.

Q: That was a very interesting position for the Administrator not to give in that much to the other forces.

SINDING: Peter proved, in my view, to be a hero in protecting the population program from the real wishes of many of the political people around Reagan. I can recall that in 1981 attending a meeting of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population the highest professional international organization in population studies. They were holding their quadrennial meeting in Manila. While that meeting was going on, the first effort on the part of the new administration to defund the population programs was announced. It created an uproar in the Philippines.

One part of the story in the Philippines that I didn't think of was that we got a Minister of Planning while I was there named Placido Mapa, who was card carrying member of Opus Dei, the right wing Catholic lay organization. And he tried his damndest to destroy the population program, because POPCOM came under the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) of which Mapa was minister. Mapa had been the Philippine Executive Director of the World Bank, came back to the Philippines as a very esteemed economist and a real catch as far as Marcos was concerned. But he was just death on family planning as a devote Catholic and really tried to kill the program - unsuccessfully, fortunately. He was unable to carry the Cabinet with him, but he did a lot of damage during the time he was there. Mapa came into the Philippines in the early '80s, and Reagan and the very, very, strong antifamily planning Catholic group around him created a lot of problems for me personally in the Philippines and then back in Washington.

There were several people in USAID who were part of that group, including the chair of the Communications Review Board, whose name I have forgotten - she was just determined - and Frank Ruddy, who was the Assistant Administrator for Africa was part of that crowd. He was violently opposed to anything having to do with population and family planning. There was a McCarthy kind of environment; real witch hunt atmosphere. You didn't know who to talk to; what you could say to people on family planning. It was a terrible time.

Anyway I felt that, if I didn't take the job, they might very well put somebody in there who was kind of a Trojan horse for the antiabortion, for the antifamily planning forces. So I took the job with great reluctance. I had a long conversation with Greenleaf and Staples before I did it and in the end they both understood that, even though I had been in TR for a very short time and, I think, very happy with my performance in that short period of time. The Agency's interests were best served if went over. So Bob Simpson came and took over the TR job and did a very good job. Undoubtedly, there were other people around who could have done the job at the Population Office, but, all things considered, it was probably a better use of personnel for me to go back to population at that moment.

Q: You were not caught in any way in having any relationship to the abortion question?

SINDING: They never found it out. In fact, when I was a graduate student in North Carolina I had done a study we talked about that on the passage of the North Carolina abortion law. If anyone had really wanted to go after me, they could have found that and used it against me. Joe Speidel never wrote anything that was advocatory about abortion. So someone could have said," he was writing about abortion when he was at North Carolina, so forget about him." Either they didn't find it, or somebody protected me. And otherwise, I certainly am not someone who was identifiably proabortion or an advocate for abortion. You know very few of us were. But they also wanted somebody who had a reputation for independence, independence from Ravenholt, from the old population side. I think the real reason they came to me was that I had that reputation. People were not going to say, " Oh, he is just Ravenholt in another guise."

Q: Moving somewhat more to ...

SINDING: a sort of a development orientation; more of a development orientation rather than a hard driving family planning orientation.

Q: which was more satisfactory to the administration...

SINDING: I think so. But I know that when I took over it was not at all clear that McPherson saw population as anything but a problem for him. There was no evidence that he thought that what the Agency was doing in population was either important or valuable. So one of my first priorities was to try to do briefings for the Administrator on what we were actually doing. I thought it was really important for him to understand what the program was all about so that he could defend us more effectively when, inevitably, questions arose about our program. There was a lot of misunderstanding of what was going on. You remember Kate Semmerad she was Head of Public Relations; she was one of those people who had come in as a political appointee and who had all kinds of misconceptions about what the population program in USAID was all about. And once she understood what it was about, she became a great ally. Jay Morris, the Deputy Administrator, was the same way. So I asked Nyle Brady whether he would arrange with Peter for a briefing. What we decided to do was a series of briefings on Saturday morning, when Peter wasn't being called to the telephone and to meetings all the time. He really had some time to sit and talk; I think we did two or three of these Saturday morning sessions where I would bring always Duff Gillepsie, who was my deputy and, depending on the subject matter, one or two other people from the office. We did a half hour of basic factual background - giving Peter facts about the program - and, then, we would just talk with questions; these went on twothree hours. And at the end of that I felt that not only did he really understand what we were about but he supported it. He believed that this was in fact a very viable program. I don't think he had any idea how big a player USAID was on the global population assistance scene. He certainly didn't have an understanding of how much of our program was based on science and research; he had no idea how much work we were doing on demographic date collection and analysis and the service that this was providing globally; the relationships that we had with the UN Population Program and with the Population Council and with the other big players in the field. He came to understand over the course of those briefings what a central role

USAID played in the global population game. So I thought that was one of the most important things that I did. Looking back on it, Duff said not too many months ago, that he thought of all the things that happened during my brief tenure as Director of the Office of Population, winning over McPherson was the most important. And given the sensitivity of population and its high profile within the administration that was probably true. If the Administrator had not understood and become an ally and defender of the program, it would have very likely been dismantled.

Q: Were there other people engaged in those meetings, some of the other people who were more hostile?

SINDING: Dick Derham, who was head of PPC, and, who was very much a right wing ideologue. I never trusted Derham. I think that started when John Bolton was head of PPC. The Regional AAs were not there. Tom Rollis, he was the management guy, and Peter trusted him; he may have been there for one or two of the sessions.

Q: Anything about their reactions?

SINDING: I particularly remember that Kate Semmerad came around. Jay Morris sat in on some of them. You remember Peter created that Councelor job, and it was always a senior career person. Whoever was the Councelor was part of the conversations. Nyle Brady (AA/S&T) was always there.

Q: Did you get a great deal of questioning from them or did they hold back?

SINDING: No, it was Peter's show; they held back. But they learned a lot; they absorbed it. Another thing I remember doing, maybe a year later: there was a lot of skepticism, particularly on the part of some of the budget people about all the money that we were putting into social science research: why not put the money directly into services; why not put the money out to the Missions? I organized a briefing where the President of the Population Council, George Zeidenstein; Peter Mauldin the Rockefeller Foundation; Professor Ronald Freedman, Professor of Sociology and Demography at the University of Michigan,- major names in the field - they came and did a halfday briefing for Brady. McPherson came for some of it, and all of the AAs. It was on the contribution of USAID's support of social science research to international population programs. Again it was one of those learning experiences where it built support within the Agency for the program, and what we were doing. In retrospect, it was another important event.

I don't know whether I talked last time about how much I learned from Joe Wheeler about management. Another thing I did at the Office of Population, something I learned from Joe Wheeler in the Pakistan Mission, was to institute as a management technique a weekly meeting with each of the divisions. The agenda was set by the division chief and his or her staff. The meetings were held on their turf. The idea was that it was their hour a week with the Director to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about. In the Pakistan Mission I was impressed with how important it was to me as a young officer to have access to the Mission Director on a weekly basis, to hear what was on his mind, to have

the opportunity to tell him what was on mine. I thought to myself that was a really important thing for management to do in those kinds of settings. Joe called them a minicaucus, which I thought was a highfalutin' term so I just I called them weekly staff meetings with the Director's office. Duff came to most of them, and later on we had an Associate Director who came. But mainly it was my opportunity oneonone to meet, and I told the Division Chiefs, as Joe had done in the Pakistan Mission, that if on a given week they wanted to meet with me alone that was fine; we could do it that way, or we could meet with the whole staff. I would say 90% of the time or more it was the whole staff.

Q: What were the staff and divisions you are talking about?

SINDING: There were six divisions in the office: demography; policy; research; family planning services; commodities and logistics; and information, education, and training.

Q: How many people involved?

SINDING: I think we had a full time staff of about 70. It was big office; we were running a budget of $150 million a year and a big portfolio of projects. Unlike the rest of USAID's sectors, population really was divided about 5050 between centrally managed and field managed activities. A big central bureau program. We were not just a central technical assistance office; we were really running big programs of field support and services.

Q: What were you trying to do with the program; were you trying to change anything or just carrying it forward or what?

SINDING: I did not come in with the idea of making wholesale change. For one thing, I thought it was fundamentally a strong program. So I wanted to change incrementally. An important change that I wanted to make was in the style of the office. Ravenholt had ridden roughshod over contractors and grantees. He was a bully; he was domineering. USAID's relationships with its contractors and grantees was anything but a partnership. It was very much a patronclient relationship. And I wanted to change that, particularly with organizations which were in their own right prominent institutions in the field like the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the Pathfinder Fund, the Population Council. I didn't want to treat them like USAID contractors. So one of the things I did was to change the terminology from "intermediary" to what we called "cooperating agencies," which symbolically was important. And I really impressed on the staff the importance of treating these organizations with respect and trying to develop a mutuality, as opposed to a ustothem topdown, relationship. That is not an easy thing to do, because there is a natural instinct on the part of people who manage money to want to tell those who received the money what to do with it. And that was highly accentuated in the way Ravenholt ran the Office of Population.

So getting people to change mentalities and think differently about these relationships was not easy. Another thing I did: the Sector Councils had been established a few years earlier; I thought it was very important in consultation with the Sector Council to plan the

allocation of central resources,

Q: What was the Sector Council?

SINDING: The Sector Councils were interbureau units of technical staff, chaired by the head of the technical office of that sector in the S&T Bureau, but they had on them the representatives of the technical divisions of each of the Regional Bureaus as well as the PPC Bureau. So you had four or five Regional Bureau people, the Office of Population in my case. And the purpose was to get Agencywide consensus on key technical questions. It was Brady's brainchild; it was intended, in part, to increase the power of the technical staff, but also to debate important substantive questions, to create a forum for discussion and debate. The Sector Council reviewed and signed off on projects, on central projects not regional projects. A project could not go forward without Sector Council approval, so the Sector Councils had some teeth. But they were also a place where you could bring issues of the day for discussion and debate. I thought it actually was a very good idea. It created a forum that had not previously existed for the central bureau and the regional bureaus to find common ground and to work together as a team. And it did increase the power of the technical groups within the Agency visàvis offices, which I felt was important, as the pendulum had swung too far away from technical towards the program side.

Using the mechanism of the Sector Council, I developed something called a resource allocation plan which was an effort systematically to allocate central office resources in a way that responded to field needs as they were articulated by the Regional Bureaus. It was based on a bottomup planning process; not zerobased budgeting, but a system that required each of the technical offices of the Office of Population to justify their budget in terms of demand from the Missions and from the Regional Bureaus. In that sense, it sort of anticipated the kinds of changes that came with Brian Atwood of putting much more of the resources out into the field by buying into the central projects. The resource allocation process was something I instituted; it carries forward to this day. I think it was an important innovation in management by objectives and rational resource planning within the office.

I gave high priority to identifying and preparing the next generation of population officers in Washington and internationally. We developed two projects: the Michigan internship program, which was a program to give practical experience to recent graduates of public health schools and demography programs; it wasn't just summer internships; it was two year assignments to existing programs around the world; and a family planning management training project, which was an effort to identify and give technical training to the next generation of people from developing countries to assume leadership positions in population and family planning work.

The World Fertility Survey was coming to an end and under my leadership it evolved into the Demographic and Health Surveys program. I had felt for several years that other parts of the Agency had a great deal to learn from the way the population program had systematically collected data on a global basis to demonstrate impact. We were collecting

information that was not only useful for program planning and implementation; we were also collecting information that enabled us to go to the Hill on an annual basis and report on progress: what was actually happening to fertility around the world. I thought that, if other sectors of the Agency could do the same thing, they might be able to build the same kind of political support that we were able to build in population. I thought there was a close relationship between our being able to tell a credible story of accomplishments and the ongoing political support that the program received. This was particularly true when the Administration was hostile and Congressional support was critical to sustaining the program. So that was another programmatic innovation. The reason I called it Demographic and Health Surveys was to try to get the Office of Health to buy into it. And at least to get our sister sector to begin to collect the same kind of information on the health side that we were collecting on the demographic side, to both analyze health needs around the world and to objectify the health situation, but also then, to have a baseline against which to measure change as programs were mounted. So that was another important thing. I have to say that the vast majority of my time was taken up fighting fires, political fires. It was just one thing after another.

Q: Such as?

SINDING: The first was an effort on the part of a woman named, Mercedes Wilson in Louisiana, to get USAID to fund her natural family planning, the Billings Method program. She was part of the virulent antifamily planning and right to life movement. She regarded it as an absolute right to get money from the Agency to support the effort for natural family planning. The Office of Population had for two years stonewalled her on the technical grounds that natural family planning doesn't work, that it is not a method that most people want, etc. She had powerful political connections; she got both to George Bush, who was VicePresident at the time, and George Schultz, the Secretary of State. Somebody from Schultz's office and somebody from Bush's office called McPherson, and McPherson called me up and said give her some money. So we turned ourselves inside out to create a contract that would not be a total embarrassment; but it took hours and hours; very high profile politically; all of the political actors got involved in this. I had to spend many unappetizing hours negotiating with Mercedes Wilson over this project. That was one episode.

Q: What did you think about it?

SINDING: It was a terrible idea; I supported my staff, but, in the end, we didn't have any choice. So we tried to create a project that would minimize the damage; in fact, it didn't do much damage. But you know when you have a zealot as a contractor, there was only a certain amount that you could do to control what she does; she did a lot of stuff that we certainly would not, didn't like, but couldn't prevent, including a lot of bad mouthing of other methods. The main thing we wanted to be sure of was that, if she promoted the Billings Method, she didn't do at the expense of other things. But we couldn't prevent her from doing that. For one thing, it was deep within her own belief system; that is why we didn't want to give her money in the first place; we knew that she was going to go out and do that. So that happened. That was minor relatively speaking.

What was huge, was the Mexico City Conference. In May of 1984, Richard Benedick, who was the Population Coordinator for the State Department with the rank of Ambassador, began to pull together an interagency committee to begin the process of preparing the U.S. position for the International Conference on Population, which was a decennial conference to be held in Mexico City in July of 1984. In fact, it may have been earlier in March or April, but in May, one day I got a call from the Administrator's Office saying that we just got a paper from the White House which we would like you to take a look at. What it was was a wholesale change in U.S. policy - the famous Mexico City policy. The statement began by saying that population was neither a positive nor negative factor but was neutral; that abortion was an abomination, and the U.S. will not support any organization that is engaged in abortion, and that we will defund all governments, NGOs, foreign and domestic, that engaged in abortion. The first thing I said to McPherson: "to say that population is a neutral factor is to completely disregard 20 years of U.S. policy, which is that rapid population growth is a development problem and one that the U.S. is committed to helping countries deal with." And secondly I said, "I believe that the antiabortion statement not only violates the sovereignty of countries and is inconsistent with our own policy which, at that point, was Roe vs Wade and still is and made abortion legal in the United States, but it also violates the first amendment rights of the American NGOs. How can you tell them that they can't use their own money to engage in abortion promotion and advocacy?" The USAID and State lawyers did wade in and persuade the While House to change that aspect so that it only applied to the foreign NGOs, who were not in a position to defend themselves and had no protection under U.S. law. But that was all that we could change. We couldn't change the statement that population was neither a positive nor a negative factor; that stayed in there. Benedick was required to resign. James Buckley, the brother of William Buckley, by now a Federal judge and former Senator from New York, was named head of the delegation. The delegation was packed with male right wingers; there wasn't a single woman on it; either people who were antifamily planning and antiabortion or people who were kind of economic cornucopias like Julian Simon, who didn't really believe that population was a development problem. It was just a horrible delegation; Peter McPherson was a member of the delegation and I went to Mexico City as his advisor. Peter was himself a protégé of Ed Meese. He worked with Ed to soften the statement to the extent it could be softened. But the Mexico City policy statement was written by a former Helms staffer named Carl Anderson, who had come over from the Senate to the Reagan White House and kind of had the international family planning brief as part of his responsibilities. We know now from a book by Carl Bernstein that the Reagan Administration made a deal with the Vatican to oppose international population and family planning efforts in return for the Vatican's support for what we were trying to do in Poland and other Eastern European countries to promote anticommunists and antiSoviet movements. There was an explicit quidproquo there that Reagan was essentially delivering on his commitment to the Vatican and to the Catholic right in the U.S. It was part of a political strategy to win over American Catholics to the Republican party. So that was that. The Mexico City policy basically changed the USAID population policy explicitly for the first time, and that policy change, articulated in 1984, stayed in force until Clinton came in the 1992, so it was a 12year period.

Q: What was its impact on the program, in fact?

SINDING: It was significant. We had to put into every grant and contract a clause under which the recipient of the funds certified that they would not use the USAID funds or any other funds at their disposal to promote or perform abortions as a method of family planning, or which would encourage people to undergo abortion. Most of the organizations with which we worked, including all of the erstwhile intermediaries and cooperating agencies, ultimately agreed to sign the clause. There were two major groups that didn't the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA); they lost their funding as a consequence; USAID terminated support. PPFA was the largest single grantee its Family Planning International Assistance unit. And IPPF was also a very large grantee. So together the cutting off of funds to those two organizations represented a very substantial impact on programs because these were the two largest cooperating agencies supporting family planning services in developing countries.

Much of the USAID money that IPPF lost was made up by contributions by other donors Europeans, Canadians, Japanese. But FPIA was unable to find other resources to compensate for what they lost. I worked in close collaboration and consultation with the UNFPA and other organizations to have them support local affiliates of these organizations in countries where abortion was legal, so that USAID funds could flow to their local affiliates. So we tried in a variety of ways to ameliorate the effect of the policy, but it had an unmistakenly chilling effect. It definitely discouraged these organizations from doing anything in the grey areas such as postabortion family planning and research on the consequences of illegal abortion. There were a lot of things that the policy was not intended to curtail which were curtailed, because organizations erred on the side of caution. Guidelines that we put out subsequently helped a bit to indicate what they could and could not do. It had a chilling effect on the international movement; and it had a real chilling effect on the spread of a liberalization of abortion, which many of us in the program believed - the Helms amendment notwithstanding - was very important thing to be done, particularly in cases of widespread illegal abortions, which was one of the largest killers of mothers and women generally around the world. It was unpleasant. And, of course, the signal that the administration was sending was not only its opposition to abortion, but also that it really didn't think family planning and population were very important - "neither a positive nor a negative but a neutral factor." It was a very major change in the U.S. posture on population as a development issue or even an international issue.

Q: Did that follow over into funding and programs?

SINDING: No, on the contrary. Congress was so enraged by what the administration had done - and it was dominated by Democrats - that they bent over backwards to make sure that the program got more money. We got the largest single year increase in budget between 1984 and 1985 that we had ever received since the very early years when the program was rapidly being built up. From 1974 onwards the trajectory was really quite

flat until 1985, and all of sudden it flipped up as the only way Congress could signal its dissatisfaction and anger with the position the administration had taken. There was not a single Congressional member on the U.S. Delegation, which was sort of unheard of. Several members of Congress went to Mexico City on their own and held press conferences to express their disagreement with the administration's position.

So the United States was portraying itself as a country divided on this question. And, in fact, it was with the 1984 statement that population for the first time became an explicitly partisan issue. Population like much else in foreign policy had been more or less bipartisan and, in fact, much of the leadership for a population program in USAID came from Republicans in the early years, and much of the support had been from the Republican side. It was sort of a conservative issue in some ways. Keeping down the populations of the people "over there" was part of the motivation for the population program. But it was only with the Reagan Administration taking up this very antipopulation position that a partisan division occurred, and it was been with us ever since.

So these were very dark days. It made it very difficult for me to focus my own attention on program innovations and improvements because I was constantly fighting fires. I spent a great deal of time on the Hill answering questions with the Administrator, offtherecord, on the record, or backgrounds with the press and with a host of the external groups, trying to reassure them, trying to explain the policy, trying to explain where the Agency stood. Peter was very good; he fought as hard as he could while the policy was being hammered out. I was not privy to those conversations; I don't know what he said or what he was able to accomplish in those conversations. But once the policy was in place he was very clear that it has to be implemented properly. He would not brook any monkeybusiness, trying to fiddle at the edges; he was quite firm in making sure that organizations were defunded that would not sign the clause and make it precisely what policy indicated they should do.

Then came China, hard on the heels of Mexico City. In the winter of 1985, a two part series appeared in the Washington Post on China's one child policy and the human rights abuses that were attendant on the implementation of that policy, including some real horror stories about people's houses being knocked down and forced abortions and all kinds of other things. It had an immediate and very powerful effect on U.S. policy. It led directly to the KempKasten amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act which said that the United States would immediately defund any organization which "participates in the management of a program of coerced sterilization and coerced abortion." It left to the Secretary of State to determine whether a recipient of U.S. funds was participating in the management of such programs. But it was clearly intended to defund the UN Population Program, which was very substantially involved in supporting the Chinese program. McPherson was then faced with the question whether he should advise the Secretary of State to certify the UNFPA was participating in the management of China's coercive one child policy. McPherson tried very hard to find a way to advise that the UNFPA was not substantially involved in the management. But, in the end, whether it was because of political pressure within the administration and from the Hill, or because he believed it,

he concluded that UNFPA was substantially involved in the management of that program. We defunded UNFPA under the KempKasten amendment in 1985.

The right to lifers through the Reagan Administration succeeded now to do precisely what they said they wanted to do, as laid out in an earlier publication of the Heritage Foundation in 1980, namely, defunding the left, in this case defunding the planned parenthood movement and the UN population program (UNFPA). They had specifically said that those two groups were the ones they wanted defunded, and they had succeeded. That happened in 1985, and again I remember working very closely with UNFPA, after the defunding, to see whether we could identify programs that they were funding that we could pick up through the cooperating agencies, or just to make sure that important programs other than the ones in China would not be significantly adversely affected. Because the money that didn't go to UNFPA was available for reprogramming. At that time the UNFPA contribution came through the population budget of USAID. Since that time it has been transferred over to the State Department, so we no longer have the reprogramming authority. What I was able to arrange was to make sure that USAID funds flowed to support programs that would otherwise have suffered. UNFPA identified for defunding those things which we were able to qualify as eligible for our support, and so we were able basically to provide compensatory financing that really didn't disrupt programs. But it was symbolically and politically a severe blow against the program. That was more or less the situation at the time I went to Kenya.

Q: With all of the turmoil of the issues you've cited, what was, in fact, the impact on the program on the ground? You talked about the budget going way up and shifting things around so that you were able to keep things going; did the population program come to a halt? Did it accelerate? What happened on the ground?

SINDING: Because population had this unusual history in USAID, from the very beginning, of being out of the main stream, a certain bunker mentality had developed among population staff throughout the agency; we were always under assault for one thing or another from somebody. The assault from the Reagan Administration was unlike anything we had experienced before; everything else paled by comparison. If anything, it brought the population community closer together and it raised morale; we were embattled; but we were in it fighting to the death. There was a sense of common purpose and comradeship both in the Office of Population and across the agency. It was really quite strong. I worked hard to foster that; I worked very hard to keep peoples' spirits up, to say look we are in this fight together; we do have the support of Congress; we have a lot of money, let's use it well and do what we are committed to do. I was something of a cheer leader for the program within the agency as Chairman of the Sector Council and all of that.

I think programs actually flourished during that period. I think we spent the extra money well and relations with the Missions were good. I was the only foreign service officer who served as Director of Population until last year. I had a very good relationship with the Regional Bureaus which, for most of the office's history, the Pop Office had not had. So there was sense of unity of purpose Agencywide that hadn't been as strong before, I

think, and was conducive to good programming and very good relations between the central office and the Regions and Missions. There was a real complementarity and community of interest. I felt very good about the job that we as a group did. When I left the office in 1986, I felt as if I was leaving a fundamentally strong program - politically embattled, yes, but in very good shape programmatically. I got a hero's send off.

Q: I'm sure you did. What was the impact of the U.S. policy turmoil visàvis the countries themselves as recipients of the family planning programs? Did you get a sense that it galvanized them to do more or no difference at all?

SINDING: To answer that question, I need to go back to the Mexico City Conference itself and the dynamics and explain what had happened in the population movement generally. At the first Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974, the United States, leading the industrialized group of countries, pushed very hard for demographic targets and population policies and the developing world, led by China, with the support of the Soviets, pushed back very hard, saying no way, you can't push us into demographic policies that we don't think are in our interest. By 1984, the situation changed completely, even Africa had held the famous Arusha Conference in the Spring of 1984, and the vast majority of African Heads of State, at that time, had come to support population policies. So the developing world (and this was in part the result of the good work of the UNFPA and others including us to encourage developing countries to think rationally about the issue of population growth) decided to mount family planning programs, not on ideological grounds but in terms of their own immediate interest. So, by 1984, the vast majority of developing countries were onboard with family planning and population as a legitimate sphere of public action. When the United States came out with its completely unanticipated and shocking statement, it had the effect of reinforcing in the developing world their commitment to do the opposite of what the U.S. was saying. Just as we were the odd man out at Bucharest, we were the odd man out at Mexico City, but this time instead of pushing the developing countries away from demographic policies we were sort of encouraging them to go the other way. I think that the United States position actually reinforced the commitment of the developing countries to work in this area, directly contrary, of course, to the Administration's intentions. In the developing world, I think, most of the population officers, once they got past explaining this peculiar policy and explaining the fact that their own government was divided on the question, found an environment in which they could work quite well, quite effectively and the programs really grew. The period following 1984, the latter part of the '80s, was the period of the most robust growth and impact of population programs in the history of the movement. We saw more fertility decline, more rapid decline, more political commitment on the part of the developing countries following the Mexico City conference, than in any other period probably.

Q: What was the specific conclusion of the Mexico Conference?

SINDING: The purpose of the Mexico Conference was to review the 1974 World Population Plan of Action and to recommend improvements and changes. So it was not to develop a new international consensus but rather to take stock of progress and make

recommendations. What it basically did was to reinforce a few central ideas: one of which was every couple had the right to freely determine the number and spacing of their children and have access to information they needed to do so. So it was to reinforce basically family planning as a human right; secondly, to encourage governments to think about population policy in comprehensive terms not just family planning and health services but in terms of women's education, in terms of employment, and empowerment, and so on; third, to reinforce the notion of volunteerism and individual freedom and the lack state intervention in reproductive decisions.

Q: ...the lack of coercive sterilization and that kind of thing?

SINDING: Yes. Those were the main outcomes, and, I think, strongly to reinforce the notion that the primary mechanism of population policy implementation was through high quality family planning services in the context of health.

Q: Was abortion touched on?

SINDING: Only in the negative sense. The conference said that abortion should in no case be regarded as a method of family planning. It didn't say that abortion couldn't be legal, but that it shouldn't be a method of family planning. That would have been the case whether the United States brought the subject up or not. But the big fights at Mexico City were, as they always are at UN conferences, about things that didn't have much to do with the subject at hand, such as the ArabIsraeli conflict.

Q: Well, that is excellent. Is there any thing more?

SINDING: No, I could talk endlessly about those years; the work we did; the kind of things with the Population Crisis Committee, which was the principal lobby to reinforce the views in Congress; speeches I made at the Population Association meetings in New York, talks with other governments and the principal agencies to explain the U.S. position. There was a huge amount going on; I never worked so hard in my life, long, long hours. I really enjoyed the relationship with Administrator Peter McPherson; that was a very important part of the whole thing. And Nyle Brady was extremely generous in not trying to block our working together; he didn't try to interpose himself as long as I kept him informed as to what was going on and didn't try to do end runs. He was perfectly willing to let me work directly with Peter, and he didn't insist on being in every meeting. In some ways, I think, he actually appreciated it, being kept out of it. It was a difficult, trying, enervating time, but it was also, in many respects, exhilarating. I thought I was doing something that really mattered.

Q: Were there any particular projects in the central program that stood out in your mind?

SINDING: I mentioned some of them: the demographic surveys, the management training, Michigan fellowships...

Q: Those all had good results and impact?

SINDING: Yes, and all of them still exist. They were all refunded and refunded. Actually, after I left the agency, I served as a chair of the advisory committee for some of these projects in their later lives.

One area that we haven't talked about was the support that USAID gave to biomedical research; the search for improved contraceptives. I haven't talked about it because there is not much to say. I think it was an important and worthwhile area to invest in; and I still think so. But it is hard to claim any very major impact or success.

Q: and new contraceptives?

SINDING: Well Norplant. It was a Population Council program, but USAID very substantially contributed to it. That is the only new method that has emerged (other then RU486, the abortion pill, which we didn't get involved in) in the last two decades. An awful lot of leads that we invested in have yet to pan out, although some of them are still alive. But, I think, that we, in retrospect, probably invested too much effort and hope in a public sector contraceptive development effort. If anything, it demonstrated that if you don't have the private sector involved, it is very hard to do anything.

Q: USAID had a big supply program of contraceptives?

SINDING: We continued to do that. We bought and delivered a hell of a lot of contraceptives. During the time I was there, we drove the price, the unit costs of both pills and condoms even lower that they had been before. At the lowest, we got down to 17 cents a cycle and even today it is only 2122 cents a cycle. The unified procurement and the methodology that was used to do global estimates to aggregate orders of these enormous quantities was a real accomplishment of the program. That was done during Ravenholt's time.

Q: We were the principal world supplier?

SINDING: Yes, during the Ravenholt years we were; by the time I got there we were still the world's biggest single supplier but no longer the dominant source. Today USAID is still important, but less a factor. UNFPA has become, on behalf of the community of donors, the largest single source of supplies of contraceptives around the world, and that is as it should be. It is not really right for the U.S. Government to be the primary source. Also as time went on, more and more of the developing countries purchased them themselves.

Q: I think that covers it pretty well but we can come back to it if you want to add something.

SINDING: Maybe as we go on, other things will occur to me. But there was one other area which is actually a good way to lead to Kenya. In 1984, I took my first trip to Africa,

and I went to Sierra Leone and Kenya (actually my first trip was in 1974 when I first met you when Bud Prince was there.) I took this second trip later when I was director of the office in 1984, and I visited among other countries, Kenya. And, in Kenya, I saw a private sector family planning program that I really thought was terrific; it was an employerbased family planning program with a USAID contractor. USAID was working with private employers in Kenya to get them to introduce family planning as part of the health services that they provided to their employees. I thought that was a terrific idea; to undertake the analytical work that would persuade employers that it was in their interest from a costbenefit standpoint to provide family planning services, and then to help them set up the delivery system to do it, which was, in many cases, simply adding contraception to other health services that they already provided. Another project that I developed in the Office of Population, before I left, was a global effort to basically replicate the little program I had seen in Kenya - to develop a capacity to assist private employers around the world to provide family planning as part of the health service that they otherwise provided.

Q: Has it caught on?

SINDING: Of the projects I have mentioned, or the program innovations that I tried to introduce that was probably the least successful. Its lack of success was due less to the concept than the execution; I think we didn't get a particularly good organization to do it. It was a failure of implementation not a failure of concept.

Q: You said you completed your assignment in Washington and left for Kenya; when?

New assignment as USAID Director in Kenya - 1996-1990

SINDING: I arrived in Kenya in July 1986. The Assistant Administrator for the Africa Bureau at the time was Mark Edelman, who had been a classmate of mine in college. We were never particularly close friends. Mark called me up one day and said, "How would like to be the Deputy Director in Kenya." I went home and talked to Monica about it. We realized among other things that Kenya was the only country in the world where we could both be assigned and not be in a direct supervisory relationship with one another. So I went back to Mark and said, "if there were a job for Monica in REDSO that might be quite interesting." Frankly, I didn't view the deputy directorship in Kenya as a particularly attractive alternative to what I was doing, but I also recognized that, as a foreign service officer, it was inevitable that we would have to go back to the field. Kenya seemed like the best opportunity. So I actually called McPherson and said that Mark called me and that we wanted to do it. And he said, "Well, I can't afford not to have you where you are. I recognize that you are foreign service person and have to do this; now is not a good time unless you can come up with a replacement that I can trust." So we had a long conversation, he, Brady and I about Duff and whether Duff could handle the job and I said I thought he could. So ultimately both Brady and McPherson were convinced. But McPherson said, "Do you really want to go out as the deputy?" And I said. "Well, yes, if I had stayed in Asia/TR, I would have felt that at the end of a three year Washington rotation that I would know enough to go out as a mission director. To

be perfectly honest I haven't had exposure to the broad range of things that USAID does. So it would probably be a good thing for me to go out. What I really would hope would be that when Chuck Gladson, who was the Director, leaves I could be considered to become the director." Mark said, "That sounds like a good idea, a good arrangement to me; I will commit to that."

So we were all set to go out, and then one day Peter calls up and says, "How would you like to go out as Mission Director?" "Well, if you put it like that. I would like to do that." He said. " I think we need Gladson back here; so that is what we are going to do." He was bringing Gladson back to be head of the Private Enterprise Bureau, and that cleared the way for me to go out to Kenya as Director. Within the Africa Bureau, Ray Love (Deputy Assistant Administrator) knew me, and I think he thought I was good, and he knew Monica and her work. But, I think, generally speaking there was a lot resentment in the Africa Bureau about somebody who had never worked in the region coming in as director in one of the plum posts, maybe the most sought after post on the continent. There was a big surprise in the Kenya Mission about this guy they had never heard of except as a distant population person. So I think I had a lot to prove when I got to Kenya. The expectation was that McPherson was making a political payoff; and people understood that, but what business did I have being a mission director in Africa? A reasonable question, I might say. I don't blame anybody that held that view. But it turned out okay.

For one thing, I did not have a tough act to follow; Gladson had established such an adversary relationship with the Kenyan government that there was no where to go but up. And while I think, he was respected by people in the mission, he wasn't loved. So somebody who would come in and pay attention to the staff and be supportive and spend time and listen was a welcome change, especially among the Kenyan staff. So it didn't take me long to win the support of the Kenyan mission, in part because I did again the same thing that I had done in the Office of Population that Joe Wheeler had taught me, which was to establish a management style that made you as much a listener as leader. And, particularly in the first year or two, that approach served me very, very well; it is a great way to learn. If you say I am coming to meet with you and it is your agenda, and then you sit and listen to what people are telling you about their program, it is a wonderful way. Of course, what they will also bring you is their problems. In addition to what is going well and what they want you to know about, they would also say we need your help to meet with the Minister.

So one of the early things I did was - after I arrived in July 1986 - to go to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, Harris Mule who was a great man. And I said, "I really want to establish a different kind of relationships with you than you had with my predecessor. You will not hear any speeches from me about what Kenya should do. I want to very much conduct our negotiations as a dialogue; to be responsive to your needs, to make suggestions where I think it is appropriate, but basically to understand Kenya's development has to be under Kenyan control, that our role here is to help." All the things we believe but often don't do. And Harris said to me, "that's music to my ears." I believe that I conducted the policy dialogue with the Kenyans that way. I had very strong support from the Embassy, at least from the Ambassadors with whom I served - there were three

of them. With a couple of exceptions, the mission staff was supportive. Some of the Gladson holdovers really supported the Gladson approach which was hard nosed, stick it to them, never trust the Kenyans. And I have to say that the Kenyans gave you every reason not to trust them. But you know when you are a guest in somebody else's country - even if you are providing assistance - you still have to be deferential to sovereignty. You can't go in there and tell people what to do, even if what you think they ought to do was right. In a four year tour there are four relationships that are really important to a mission director: the relationship with the Ambassador, the relationship with the host country, the relationship with one's staff, and the relationship with USAID/Washington. Those are the four. So in a four year tour there are sixteen possibilities for things going wrong. And, I have to say, in my four years in Kenya I was fifteen for sixteen I had fifteen wins and one loss. My one loss was in my third year with USAID/Washington; I had a rough year with Larry Saiers. But, other then that, for four years I had a exemplary relationship with the government. A superb relationship with all three Ambassadors and a love affair with my staff and in three of the four years a good relationship with Washington. I look back on the four years in Kenya as the highlight of my career.

Q: What were you trying to do programmatically?

SINDING: Having made negative comments about Gladson in terms of his operating style, programmatically I had no quarrel with what he was trying to do. It was a very sensible program strategy. So I changed very little. In some ways, I suppose, like the Office of Population, I believed that I had inherited a fundamentally strong program. My job was to try to implement it properly. And where I thought it was not doing the right thing, to make some changes.

Before I get to what we did, there is one thing I did do that having made the speech to Mule. (And, of course, a speech like that to the Permanent Secretary very quickly gets repeated throughout the bureaucracy - "hey, this new Aid Director is someone we can work with." It doesn't take long for that word to get around.) Having made that speech, one of my first acts as director was to suspend disbursements under the population program, because the Government of Kenya was reneging on its budgetary commitments. Not long after I got there, Gary Merritt, who was the Population Officer, came to me and said under the Family Planning Services and Support project. (It was biggest bilateral program in Africa and the beginning of what proved to be a dramatically effective assistance program in Kenya.), the Kenyans in the second year were supposed to put up 25% of the funding of salaries and local costs, and it was in the budget - I can't remember the term that was used - but in the first articulation of the 1986 budget, the Kenyans had committed to a certain amount money for salaries and recurrent costs. In the final form of that budget that money had disappeared and became a Finland funded hospital in Kakamega District, or at least so we thought. So I went to Mule, and asked him, where was the counterpart? And he said we couldn't do that, so I said then well we can't do it, and I am going to suspend disbursements on this project until you come up with the money to meet the Kenya commitment in our agreement. We were at an impasse for about three months. In the end the people from the Ministry of Health and the population program screamed loudly enough that Mule found the money. So I established both

credibility as a partner who wanted to work with them but also someone who was prepared to be tough. I did both of those things early enough on that they knew who they were dealing. It also gave me enormous credibility in the Mission to have done those two things. And, that I had such a great relationship with the Ambassador didn't hurt.

The other thing that happened was in my second year, Saiers came out as part of an evaluation team. They were doing these Missionwide assessments of program effectiveness, and we got just unbelievably high ratings from that team. I was feeling pretty good about my ability to be a Mission Director.

What were we trying to do? We had a program with Edgerton University to help it evolve from what had been basically a training program for white farmers into an agricultural university for East Africa by fostering a partnership between Edgerton and the University of Illinois. That was a very successful project. I spent a lot of time working with the ViceChancellor at Edgerton and with the Illinois people. We had a very able Agricultural Development Officer, Dave Lundberg who was succeeded by Jim Gingerich. The both of them were just terrific.

I think the capstone of the Kenya program during my time was the population program. We saw fertility in Kenya drop by the most rapid rate on record from the highest level on record. Kenyan fertility dropped from eight children to five during the time I was in Kenya. It was a marvelous program. It was, in part, effective because of President Moi; Moi really cared about it; he provided the kind of leadership and advocacy and a sense of direction to the bureaucracy that Marcos hadn't provided in the Philippines. I alluded earlier to my experience in Kenya. I think that political leadership in these kinds of situations is crucial, particularly in fairly authoritarian regimes. What the head of state says makes such a huge difference to what people down the system actually respond to, how they spend their time, and how they allocate their resources, and their influence. And Moi made it clear that population was a very, very top priority. He did that in part because the first Ambassador I worked under, Gerald Thomas, was just a fanatic on the subject, the only thing he talked to the Kenyan Government about. He was not a particularly effective Ambassador not particularly well liked, but he really got through to Moi on the population issue.

Generally speaking, the Kenyans under Kenyatta, who had resisted population planning and family planning, came to a realization that, if they didn't do something about this... First of all, they were embarrassed by having the highest population growth in the world. And secondly, they came to recognize that, if they didn't do something about this, the whole place was going to fall apart, as it has. I wouldn't argue that population was the primary cause of that, but it didn't help. Mwai Kibaki, who was the Vice President and the head of the Ministry of Home Affairs, who was an LSEtrained economist, was the primary internal force pressing Moi to work on this issue. But we were there with precisely the right kinds of resources at the right time. We had been supporting two or three private organizations with operations research which proved beyond a doubt that there was a demand for family planning, in large parts of the country, particularly in the central and eastern provinces and in the Rift Valley. That information was extremely

reassuring to the Kenyans at the point that they made the commitment of government resources to the program. At the same time, we had helped to build up private service delivery organizations that could work in a complementary relationship with the public sector. Kenya had by far the best rural health service delivery system in subSaharan Africa, except for South Africa. And so there was a system in place into which you could put family planning. It was a combination of a service delivery system in place, high level commitment by the President, a strong complementary NGO sector, and a population that was frankly ready to accept the idea of voluntary fertility control.

Q: What about the Ministry of Health role?

SINDING: The Ministry of Health had the lead role. We didn't have the problem that we had in Asia of divided responsibilities. There was a National Population Council in Kenya which had policy and coordinating responsibilities. But implementation responsibility was in the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health; they were pretty good; they weren't great, but by African standards they were pretty competent and quite committed. So the program went well. We went from a prevalence of contraceptives use of 7% in 1978 to about 14% in 1984, and during the time I was there it jumped up to 3638%. And the total fertility rate dropped from eight children per woman to about 5.15.2 between '78 and '89. (I left in 1990.) It has continued along same trajectory since I left. So I think programmatically that has to be regarded as one of our big successes.

Q: You had some sort of multidonor coordinating arrangement?.

SINDING: Yes, we did. The World Bank, the UNFPA, U.S., U.K., Sweden, Denmark were the principal donors. It was ok; I wouldn't say it was great. We coordinated better in some other sectors and worse in others. Agriculture was a disaster because we believed very strongly that subsidized grain storage and government controlled grain movement, maize in particular, was a bad idea. We wanted the private sector to take over those functions. And the Europeans kept building grain storage facilities and reinforcing the government's tendency to control the movement of grain in the country. That was an area in which we simply couldn't coordinate. In population, we coordinated pretty well. We had terrific coordination on the private sector side where we were supporting a policy regime of liberalization in coordination with the World Bank. We were doing some project assistance that went along with their policy dialogue. They were doing basically policy based structural adjustment disbursements, balance of payments support. And we were providing project assistance to provide technical assistance in the creation of capital markets. We helped create a commercial bankbased small and medium enterprise development program to demonstrate that commercial banks could make money lending to African firms. We did that with Barclay's and Standard Banks. The Kenya rural enterprise program, which was a microcredit program, was really the first microcredit program success in Africa. We did the first health care financing reform project in Africa. That was policy, programbased rather than projectbased assistance with the Ministry of Health. We disbursed against a change in the way the Ministry financed health services, including user payments for certain elective procedures and so on. A gradual shifting

from 100% free health care to crosssubsidized health care in which the middle class, which was in a position to pay for certain curative and elective procedures, would provide resources that could then be used to subsidize preventive and promotive health care for the poor. It got off to a rocky start because we didn't make adequate provision for technical assistance in the initial grant, and because a really gungho Permanent Secretary of Health jumped the gun on the reforms and alienated all of the politicians in the country when their constituents came screaming about unanticipated user charges. But, in the end, it proved to be a really very successful and, in Africa, the first successful effort at health sector financing.

So we did a lot of useful things in Kenya, but in an atmosphere of such thorough corruption and deteriorating public administration that it was swimming upstream. The population impact was lasting. I'm not sure that there was much lasting in the impact of the other things we did; they were swept away in the tide of corruption and declining economic performance.

Q: What would be the difference between the ones that worked the ones that didn't? Was there something inherent in the program?

SINDING: I think when fertility starts to decline it is irreversible. It had gotten sufficiently embedded in the social structure so that even incompetence on the part of the Kenyan government wasn't going to stop it. Whereas a lot of the policybased things - capital markets development, health care financing reform, although that, I think, has stuck; some of the things we tried to do on fertilizer subsidies and imports, on grain marketing, and on the whole question of cash crops versus subsistence crops. A really interesting question in Kenya, which was never really satisfactorily resolved, was whether Kenya has sufficient comparative advantage in export agriculture that they ought to stop producing subsistence crops and move toward exportbased agriculture. They have a very limited area of arable land, and the land that is arable is highly productive. The best soil in Africa. They probably ought to be, from a strict economic rationality standpoint, producing high value crops - coffee, tea, export vegetables, flowers - that sort of thing, and using the money to import grain. But that is risky business. There are political considerations that obviously intervened between what would be economically optimal and what...

Q: How do you judge your experience as a mission director?

SINDING: I thought I was a pretty good Mission Director. I got enough feedback from those who evaluated my performance to think that was justified - the selfevaluation was justified. There was, of course, still a lot substantively that I had to learn.

Q: Were you involved in economic supporting assistance, commodity aid at that time?

SINDING: Yes, the fertilizer program was commodity aid, and we had some PL480 tied to policy reform. And the money in the health sector was tied to policy reform. And I believed in program assistance and policybased lending. So yes, there was quite a lot of

that we were doing.

I think that I would have been a better mission director, if I had had better training in macroeconomics. I had some real battles with the Embassy economic staff over macro questions where the roles were sort of reversed. They we taking a hard nosed, hard line approach, which is usually what USAID does with the Embassy usually wanting to just give them the money. And I think I would have been better equipped both to engage in the discussions and perhaps to make good judgements if I had had better training as an economist. I had three very good economists on the staff. Joe Stepanek was the Program Officer and Mission Economist when I got there and Kiert Toh, who is now the Mission Director, was his number two. There was another guy who now works for the IMF his name I've forgotten who was in between the two who was also a really good economist. So I had very good support on the macroeconomic side, but, I think, the lack of training. I learned an awful lot on the job. If I had gone to another post as Mission Director I would have been stronger on some dimensions of policy dialogue than I was. I would have been able to make better judgments and better decisions about what USAID should be doing than I was able to make in Kenya. But I think my management style, my openness, my willingness to listen, my ability to recruit the best people - we had the best mission staff in Africa by general acclaim, my diplomatic skills in being able to work with the host country - when you take all those things together, I was a good mission director.

Q: You ended up in Kenya in what year?

SINDING: 1990.

After USAID positions - 1990-1999

Q: You decided to retire at that point; what led you to that conclusion?

SINDING: Monica and I sort of knew that, if we were going to continue in USAID beyond Kenya, we would either have to stay in Washington or serve in separate posts overseas. We weren't going to find another situation where we could go, because both of us from now on were going to be mission directors wherever we went. We couldn't both be mission directors in the same country or even a director and deputy. We were sort of agonizing about what we were going to do. I had kind of hoped - I thought I had done a good enough job in Kenya - that I should be a candidate for a Deputy Assistant Administrator job in Washington. But there weren't any forthcoming. I was offered the directorship of Development Planning (AFR/DP) in USAID's Africa Bureau, which is a terrific job which I was happy to be offered, and I was actually assigned to that job. But then I got an offer to go the World Bank as senior population adviser. Monica and I talked about that and decided that would be the ideal solution for her to come back to a position in USAID, to defer for another 34 years the question of what we do when she next had to go out. But she had an office directorship one of the offices in the Asia/Near East Bureau, and I could go to the Bank. I asked USAID for a nonreimbursable detail, a special arrangement under the law that people who work for U.S. Government agencies can work for an international agency and accept pay from that organization at the

organization's scale, but still be on the rolls of the U.S. Government. As long as I paid into the retirement system to keep my retirement contributions active, I could become a World Bank employee. So that is what happened, and I became Senior Population Advisor in the Bank at a very high pay - more than I had ever gotten as a government employee. I did that for a year. Then the Rockefeller Foundation offered me a directorship, and, at the same time, Monica was offered a job with the Population Council in New York. She was very unhappy in USAID/Washington; she didn't like the job or the people she was working for. So she left the Agency; she didn't have enough years to formally retire. So we went to New York. She was the Corporate Secretary and Head of External Affairs in the Population Council, and I was the Director of Population Sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation. When I went to Rockefeller, I went on leavewithoutpay and stayed in that status until I reached my 50th birthday, and that is when I retired. I was Director of Population Sciences until June, 1999. And then left Rockefeller to become a member of the faculty of Columbia, and I have been there for the last two years.

Working as the Senior Population Advisor at the World Bank - 1990-1991

Q: You spent a year working at the World Bank after retiring from USAID. What was your position, what were your responsibilities, what were you trying to promote in the World Bank's approach to population, were their particular policies, strategies or programs that stand out positively or negatively; how would you compare or contrast the pros and cons of the Bank's work in the population field with USAID's?

SINDING: I joined the Bank in July of 1990 on a detail from USAID and remained for exactly one year. I was Senior Population Advisor to the Bank which made me the senior population person at the Bank, advising management and staff on population program issues. I was the principal spokesman for the Bank on population matters. I was hired by a woman by the name of Ann Hamilton who was Director of the Department of Population, Health, Nutrition and Education in the policy and research part of the Bank. Ann was a long time Bank employee, a very engaging woman, very intelligent with experience on both the operations side and the policy and research side of the Bank, although her heart was really in operations.

We agreed during my first month or so at the Bank that the number one priority was to prepare a new strategy for the Bank in the population field. Ann felt, and I agreed, that the Bank had been somewhat adrift in population since the 1987 reorganization which had abolished the old Population, Health and Nutrition Department and sent the population function to each of the regions where there was little leadership and not a clear understanding of what to do. I had been out of population for four years when I joined the Bank and, in retrospect, I think it would have been a good idea for me to have spent as least a part of the first year reacquainting myself with major trends in the field, scientific, programmatic, intellectual, and political, before taking on the strategy paper. But in the event, I felt under considerable pressure from Ann to produce the paper. The Bank didn't have anything like what USAID called its Sector Councils, but as Population Advisor it was my responsibility to try pull the technical people in the Bank together for periodic discussions around issues of common interest. So I was to serve both as a source

of scientific and intellectual leadership in the Bank on population and to provide strategic direction. I had just returned from four years in Kenya where I had seen a highly successful family planning program succeed in an environment in which many people believed that family planning could not work because of low levels of social and economic development. A poor "social setting" was widely assumed to make interest in fertility control on the part of most of the population quite low. I was also mindful of the fact that over the same period of time there had been a major breakthrough in Bangladesh, a country which was even less favored by development circumstance to have a major breakthrough in family planning. And both the Kenya experience and the knowledge of Bangladesh had solidified my gradual transition from a skeptic about family planning to a strong supporter of family planning programs in a wide variety of social settings. I still believed that the social setting was a conditioning factor that set broad parameters around how much fertility decline could occur, but I was now much more optimistic and sanguine about what family planning could accomplish even in adverse social settings than had been the case ten years earlier, say, going back to my time in Pakistan or even the Asia Bureau.

So I felt it was my responsibility at the Bank to bring this information to the attention of managers at all levels within the Bank and to suggest that the Bank ought to substantially increase its lending for family planning and give a higher priority to family planning in its over all programs.

I wrote a strategy paper beginning in the fall of 1990 and carrying through into the winter and spring in which I tried to educate the Bank as to the changes in thinking that these breakthroughs in family planning represented, and also to strongly encourage the Bank to take much more of a leadership role in policy dialogue on population matters. I felt the Bank, given its access to senior political officials in all of its member countries, was in a unique position to advocate strong population policies and family planning programs. I thought, indeed, that the Bank's comparative advantage was more in policy dialogue than in lending operations in the population field, because, I thought, that many countries were still reluctant to borrow for population and health programs, particularly population programs, but they would be responsive to macroeconomic arguments on the part of the Bank in favor of smaller families and reduced population growth.

I encountered two intense forms of opposition to the message I was putting forth. One was from economists in the Bank who seriously doubted two aspects of my argument: first, they doubted that population growth was a sufficient and important economic variable to justify high priority or visibility in macroeconomic policy dialogue. In other words, they just didn't think population an important enough issue to be high on the agenda. Taking the view of many economists historically, the population issue had been overstated or overblown by demographic enthusiasts in terms of its economic and developmental importance. Secondly, many of them were highly skeptical of the demand for family planning services and, in its most extreme form, this group of economists in the Bank argued that, if people were highly motivated to limit their fertility, they would find ways to do so and didn't really require publicly subsidized contraceptive services to do so. And the fact that fertility was still high was to them evidence of high demand for

children rather than a market failure or a lack of access to information and means to limit fertility. In other words, they believed that high fertility was what people wanted. When people didn't want high fertility any more, they would do something about. A program specifically aimed at reducing fertility was not likely to be effective in that framework. So I had a real problem with the economists of the World Bank and the leader of the opposition I was getting was Larry Summers, the Bank's Chief Economist, who later became Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, and then Secretary of the Treasury in the Clinton Administration. Summers was a formidable adversary, and one who carried considerable weight in the Bank, although his prestige and influence were certainly far less at that point than they would have been at a later point in his career. Summers was still a bright but, many considered, a brash young academic economist who had just recently come from Harvard and had as yet to establish his bona fides at the Bank.

The other major source of opposition to my paper was from a group that I had just not anticipated would take the point of view that they did, reflecting the time that I had spent out in the field. Because in the four years between my stepping down as the Director of the Office Population in USAID/Washington and my coming to the World Bank from Kenya, there had been a major intellectual and political change in the population field. Women's health advocates had gained considerable influence in the political environment of donor agencies and governments and particularly NGOs. They argued that far too much influence had been given to fertility regulation and family planning and far too little attention had been given to broader health, particularly health interventions that affected women's lives. They believed that women had been instruments of demographic policies rather than beneficiaries of broader reproductive health programs, and the emphasis had been too much on population control and not enough on improving women's lives. So there was a backlash that had developed considerable force in policy and political circles that caught me quite by surprise but which was manifest in a quite strong negative reaction to my paper as being overly demographic and insufficiently attentive to the health needs and health linkages of family planning programs, the health needs of women and the linkages of family planning to broader health interventions.

This latter point of view was, of course, to gain considerably more momentum and eventually dominate thinking at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. In 1990, it was beginning to develop a head of steam, and I was caught completely unaware of it in my policy paper. In retrospect, had I spent a bit more time getting caught up on currents in the field before I wrote the paper I would have managed to avoid that pitfall, because I was, in fact, quite sympathetic with all but the most extreme versions of the women's health advocacy position. The most extreme version said that there should be no such a thing as demographic policies or population policies; that they were inherently at odds with women's interests and particularly the interest of women's health. Therefore, all family planning should be advocated only in the context of women's health status, not in the context of improving overall economic conditions.

About the time that the fights were really emerging in earnest about my paper, I was already being courted by the Rockefeller Foundation to move to New York. That

conversation began in February and, by the middle of March, I had made the decision to leave the Bank and accept the Rockefeller offer. That decision was highly influenced by David Hopper. David had been a Rockefeller field officer in India, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation and also recently retired as Senior VicePresident of the World Bank. He had been in charge of programs in South Asia and, in his last job at the Bank, had been in charge of the new policy department of which my unit was a part. I asked Hopper, given the option of staying at the Bank or moving to the Foundation, what he would do and, without hesitating, he said go to the Foundation. "You can have far more influence and make much more of a difference from a Foundation base than you can at the World Bank," where he correctly pointed out, I had no budget or staff, no real resources other than my own persuasiveness. And since I was having serious doubts about how persuasive I was actually being at the Bank given the reactions to the strategy paper, I had decided to take the Rockefeller job. So the last couple of months at the Bank, I was thinking more about my next job than my current job, I did work hard to complete the paper.

In my last month at the Bank, shortly before I was to leave, there was, in fact, a meeting at the level the President's Council; I can't remember exactly what the phrase was but it was the Bank's senior management all the vicepresidents of the Bank who got together to discuss key strategic and policy questions. There was a discussion in the President's office at the time Barber Conable. The first agenda item in the policy council or President's Council was my paper, and Summers was there and all of the vicepresidents. There was quite an active discussion of the paper, and, I would say, the balance of opinion was very much on my side and not on the Summers side. Summers scored some points, but, generally speaking, the senior management of the Bank, not the economists but the people at the next level up, were prepared to take on faith my argument that population remained an important development issue and that family planning programs, if not the only way to address population growth, were certainly one of most costeffective interventions, and that the Bank ought, in fact, to do more. Because I was leaving and Summers was staying and population was not high on the agenda, I wasn't in a position to follow up on what I viewed as a sympathetic reception to the paper. I did leave the Bank exactly a year after I had joined it with my strategy paper in a state of limbo. It took the Bank another year to recruit another senior population advisor, and in that time, the whole issue had been caught up in the rapidly accelerating debates that led to the Cairo consensus. So, in many respects, my paper was overtaken by events. I think it was widely regarded as a example of the older and more traditional way of thinking about population questions which the Cairo Conference did much to move beyond. So I would not say, on reflection, that I had a distinguished career, or that I had very much impact at the World Bank. It was a somewhat frustrating time. I certainly felt isolated. The section of the Bank that I was in, because it was a policy and research unit in an institution where all the power lay in the operating regions, was kind of a Siberia within the World Bank. I didn't leave the Bank because I felt I couldn't be effective; I left rather because of the draw of the Foundation. I can't say that my year at the World Bank was a happy one.

Q: How would you compare and contrast the pros and cons of the Bank's work in the population field with USAID's?

SINDING: Having learned a lot about the Bank during my year there, having observed the Bank at close quarters during all my years overseas with USAID, and having had the opportunity in the decades since I left the Bank to continue to watch its operations, I've drawn some pretty strong conclusions about the Bank's and USAID's comparative advantages. The Bank's comparative advantage clearly lies, if it chooses to exercise it, in policy dialogue; where the Bank chooses to speak out strongly and forcefully on behalf of population policies and the responsibilities of governments to take action in this field, it can have an enormous influence. Governments pay far more attention to Bank than to any other single source of advice outside their borders. And when the Bank speaks, particularly where it speaks persuasively rather than coercively, governments have the tendency to listen and to pay close attention. I think this comparative advantage of the Bank's has rarely been utilized on population matters and almost never since the years when Bob McNamara was President of the Bank, but it is where the Bank has its strongest influence, if it chooses to use it. The Bank is not strong and never has been strong in financing operations in the population field. Governments are, for the most part, reluctant to borrow for the things that matter most in family planning programs, which are recurrent costs. And the Bank is reluctant to lend for recurrent costs, but it is people and services that matter not infrastructure facilities, and the Bank is at its best when it is lending for the latter, and at its worst when it tries to work in the former. I think this is generally true in the social sectors.

USAID is both potentially and, in many cases, actually more effective than the World Bank because of its field presence, its ability to fine tune, its ability to grant finance, to support recurrent costs where those matter, and to build a transition from external funding to the internalization within the budget of these recurrent costs of its programs and projects. The Bank has a much harder time doing those things, although it does do them from time to time. The Bank also, because it manages its programs from Washington, and because it operates like a bank depending upon the borrower to actually implement a program and taking a very hands off attitude vis à vis the implementation, is not in the position that USAID is in to work in partnership with a country in moving initiatives forward. The Bank's hands off attitude is fine for turnkey and infrastructure kinds of programs, the kinds of things the Bank was established to do in the first place. But the more you get into organic programs, particularly in the social sectors whether it is family planning or education, the more important it is to have people on the ground, to have a collaborative rather than an arms length lending relationship, to try to work through problems together as you encounter them. Technical assistance is terribly important in these programs and governments are reluctant to borrow for technical assistance. So I think the Bank does not have a comparative advantage in the financing of programs and USAID does. And I think the record over the last thirty years very clearly demonstrates that. The Bank has few successes in population lending to point to; USAID has many. The Bank has a few successes in population program policy advocacy as does USAID. I think in a perfect world, a division of responsibilities in which the Bank kind of sets the stage for programs by engaging in advocacy on family planning and population and USAID and other bilateral donors follow though with program support would be ideal. The world doesn't work that way.

The Bank will continue, I suppose, to lend for reproductive health in the context of broader health lending. And, I have to say, that where the Bank has successfully lent for health in helping to establish rural health services delivery systems often by financing the bricks and mortar and the equipment, it does put in place a system within which it is a lot easier to deliver reproductive health services than where such facilities do not exist. For years the Bank lent for population in Kenya and the Kenyans took the money and built a rural health system and did no family planning at all. But when Kenya finally had a change of heart and adopted a real population strategy, it was extremely helpful to have in place the facilities and the institutions that the Bank had helped to establish through its earlier lending. And I think this argument could be made in a number of other countries where in an indirect way the Bank's lending in this sector did set the stage for more effective field programs than would have been possible in the absence of the infrastructure that the Bank put in place.

Eight years at the Rockefeller Foundation as Director of Population Sciences - 1991-1999

Q: Now turning to the Rockefeller Foundation, how would you respond to the same questions I outlined for your World Bank experience?

SINDING: There is much more of a story to tell at Rockefeller because I was there eight years and not one. But I can't go on at comparable or proportionally greater length for my Rockefeller experience, so I will try to telescope what I say about that into a few key points. David Hopper was right. Rockefeller was a much better place to be than the Bank in a number of ways. First of all, there was on the part of the trustees and the officers of the Foundation much more of a willingness to accept my basic point of view towards population.

What I essentially was arguing was that the great need in the world by the early 1990s was no longer to invent approaches to effectively reduce fertility; those has been developed through the previous twenty years by intense effort and international cooperation. What was really needed was the mobilization of resources to do what we had learned to do. So resource mobilization to meet the unmet need for family planning, the demand for family planning and thus, to complete the demographic transition was the strategy that I advocated, and that was accepted at the Rockefeller Foundation.

This is still 1991; it was three years before Cairo. Some would say today that it was still an old fashioned way of thinking about population, because, while our programs strongly embraced and supported the reproductive health approach and, particularly, some of the more politically difficult and controversial aspects of that approach - namely, working with adolescents and dealing with the issue of unsafe abortions, there was still very much a demographic thrust to the program. I believed then, and I believe now, that the best demographic policy is one which is also the best women's reproductive health policy; that is, to the extent that programs really cater to the needs of women and to the protection of their health, they will also have the greatest impact on birth rates and

population growth rates. I don't see the two as being in conflict; in fact, I see these being very strong positive, reinforcing effects between the demographic and the health sides of population and reproductive health program.

One of the most important things I did at the time I was at the Rockefeller Foundation was to prepare an analysis of the relationships between demographic policies and the demand at the grass roots for family planning. There had been so much argument on the part of women's health advocates that demographic policies were inherently coercive and disrespectful of women and damaging to the cause of women's health that I thought it was really important to look at the question of how much demand there actually was for these services and whether it could legitimately be argued that services had to be forced on populations in order to be demographically effective and successful.

So I did an analysis in 1992, in which I looked at the unmet need for family planning in countries around the world, by which one means the number of women who are having more children than they want, or whose last birth was unwanted, or whose current pregnancy was mistimed or unwanted, that is, the gap between the number of children that women ideally would really like to have and the number they actually are having in developing countries. Technically, the definition of unmet need is women who know about contraception and want no more children or want to space the next birth and are not using contraception, either because they don't have access to it, or they are afraid, or because some factor external to them is intervening between their desire to use contraceptives and their ability to actually do so like husbands, or mothersinlaw, or community elders. I looked at the level of unmet need around the world and, then in countries for which we had the data, I looked at the demographic targets that were in place. And I compared what demographic policies called for as against what would happen if the unmet need were actually satisfied. What I found was that in all but a couple of the seventeen countries I looked at, if unmet need were fully satisfied, the birth rate would be lower than the demographic targets the countries had set for themselves.

So what I said in a speech first at the fortieth anniversary of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in New Delhi, and, subsequently in an article was that, if we worried less about targets and more about meeting unmet demand, we could simultaneously satisfy what women want and presumably what governments want in demographic policy. In other words, we could do away with explicit population policy goals simply by meeting the unmet demand for contraception. That argument, while it was disputed in some quarters on technical or even on political grounds, was widely embraced by the political establishment, and particularly embraced by the political establishment in the United States and Europe. The paper was widely read and widely circulated. And I know for a fact that it had a profound impact on the thinking of several of the Scandinavian countries, Holland, Germany, and the United Kingdom. It had real impact on the thinking of Tim Wirth, who had become the Undersecretary of State for Global Issues and was really the point person in the Clinton Administration for international population policy and on the U.S. position at the Cairo Conference that occurred two years later in 1994.

The unmet need argument that I put forward really in may ways became the bridge that closed the gap between the traditional population forces and newly emerging women's reproductive health and health advocacy groups, because up to that point they had really been at loggerheads and it seemed impossible to find a way to reconcile population policy objectives with women's health advocacy. There had been bitter fights. One of the things that stimulated me to write this paper was an extremely angry exchange that I witnessed at a meeting at the Ford Foundation in late 1991 where women's health advocates were saying the most negative and angry and spiteful things about USAID population programs. As a veteran of that program and as a defender of it, I was certainly identified with the old establishment. But the paper I wrote in which I called for dropping demographic targets and embracing the women's health agenda really made a big difference and, I think as I say, built a bridge between the two communities. With all due modesty, I think, it had an important impact on the Cairo Consensus, and, the fact, that there was a consensus at Cairo and a real breakthrough in commitment and in policy.

Well, my program at Rockefeller I only had a budget initially of $14.0 million which grew to $17.0 million a year was divided into three parts. One part was a traditional Foundation commitment to trying to improve contraceptive technologies. I hired Dr. Mahmoud Fathalla, an eminent Egyptian OB/GYN who had been the director of the World Health Organization's Human Reproduction Program and was a really distinguished global leader on contraceptive research and development. Fathalla led that effort and really under his leadership the Foundation became, I think, the guiding force of new contraceptive research, focusing it on three priorities: postconceptive methods, microbicides and spermicides that would simultaneously protect women against sexually transmitted infection including HIV and against unwanted pregnancies, and research for improve male methods. These were all priorities of the women's health movement, and they made good sense to us also on technical and scientific grounds. Under Fathalla's leadership, the Foundation really did provide a focal point for a renewed effort of R&D in this field. It is today bearing fruit.

A second major area was resource mobilization. We created a number of institutions including a southsouth partnership - developing countries who became advocates for more resources in the field. We supported a lot of policy research which reinforced the importance of population as a development issue. We also made grants to advocacy groups in the United States and in Europe, and really substantially strengthened advocacy for reproductive health and population outside of the U.S. among the other donor countries.

The third area was action research in a number of developing countries on these most difficult and sensitive of reproductive health interventions, namely, how to get services to the most important neglected group, adolescents, and how to deal with issues of sexually transmitted diseases and infections and abortion - all areas that are inherently difficult for governments to work on because of their sensitivity and where private foundations have an ability to support work that otherwise might not be done.

Rockefeller emerged, I think, in those years as a real leadership organization in the

population field. Many people, including Tim Wirth, felt that Rockefeller was bringing together people to talk about issues and was providing the kind of leadership through its convening power and its leverage that basically proved David Hopper's point that a small foundation with flexibility and some imagination can really make a big difference in the how the world thinks about important issues. With a staff that included Sara Seims, a USAID veteran who is now President of the Allan Guttmacher Institute, and Jane Hughes, who led the reproductive health action research program and who is now the Population Council's representative in Vietnam, and Cheikh Mbacké, an African demographer, who now heads Rockefeller's operations throughout Africa, we had just a stellar group of program officers. I am very proud of the quality of the program that we managed there.

Unfortunately, in 19981999 new leadership came in at Rockefeller, a leadership that just didn't feel that population was any longer a key issue. The population program was significantly downgraded under Gordon Conway, the new President and Lincoln Chen, the vice president, to the point where I felt that I no longer really wanted to be associated with it. So in the spring of 1999 I tendered my resignation, and the population program basically withered away after that. Sara went AGI, Fathalla retired, Jane Hughes went to Vietnam and nobody was hired to replace any of these people. So the population program at the Rockefeller Foundation eventually ended around 1999/2000. There are still vestiges of it; some grants are still alive and being played out and the Foundation continues to talk as if population remains an interest, although not a core program objective.

If one looks at how the Foundation actually spends its money, it is very difficult to say that the Rockefeller Foundation has a population program any longer. I think you can take two points of view on that: one is it is too bad that Rockefeller, which had been a leader in the field for thirty years, had decided to abandoned it; but one could also argue that as a famous Senator once said about Vietnam: "Let's just declare victory and withdraw." And I think for the Foundation, which likes to be in the vanguard, population was a field in which most of the important discoveries had been made and where it really was the responsibility of governments and much larger organizations to carry through to conclusion the successful start that had been made. It was a legitimate point. I don't gainsay Conway's view that there were more important problems for the Foundation to be focused on in the 21st Century than population and his decision to downgrade population in the overall scheme of things. So I had mixed feelings: some regrets that it all ended rather abruptly, but also an appreciation that in someway the end of the population program at Rockefeller was a sign of the success of the movement, and an indication that the time had come to move to problems that were more pressing than population was in the '60s and '70s when it was one of the most important problems.

Observations and Reflections on a Career in International Development

Q: Looking back over the years of work with USAID and others and your extraordinarily rich experience and contributions, what are the key lessons about policy, strategy, project design and implementation of population programs in developing countries?

What guidance would you pass on those who are planning new programs in this field about what works, and what doesn't work? What's been the impact? You cited some these already so this part can be in the form of a summary or any additional thoughts that you have?

SINDING: It is true that I have gone on at some length about these things. I think the most important thing that I have learned is that those who doubted the efficacy of family planning programs in the 1960s and early 1970s while they had very good reasons to question whether people would be interested in reducing their fertility if contraceptive services were available were fundamentally wrong, and that, in fact, the demographers and social scientists of that day underestimated the demand on the part of women to have fewer children. I think, in fact, the field was in those years a very male oriented field; it looked at the value of children from the perspective of a male headed household, not from the perspective of women who desperately wanted to avoid having the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth child. So we underestimated the demand for family planning. One of the reasons that the programs have been so dramatically effective is because there was, in fact, a very powerful demand on the part of women when they could exercise control over their fertility to do so.

I think that along with the Green Revolution, population assistance has been the greatest success that USAID has had over the last thirty or forty years, and that these two are among, maybe, the three or four of the greatest successes in international development cooperation. Agricultural research leading to increased food production, family planning, and child survival are among the most successful things that have happened in the development field. I am very pleased to have been a part of it.

I think I have also learned that policy and political commitment are crucial, and the weaker the social setting the more important they are. In Latin America, where women's status and education levels, and urbanization all got to fairly high levels, all government had to do step aside and acquiesce in the provision of family planning; much of it was done by the private sector and NGOs and fertility would take care of itself. In much of Asia, on the other hand, where the social setting was much less conducive and, certainly in Africa, political will and political commitment are terribly important. And even the advocacy role, the teaching role, the leadership role of the head of state is important in desensitizing a sensitive topic, in sending a signal to the bureaucracy that this is a program of high priority, in letting people know it is ok to practice contraception, and particularly in empowering women to address this issue with their husbands, who often are resistant to the notion of family planning and fertility control. So the role of political leadership and a political commitment is very important in much of the world and will remain a very important feature in Africa. It is therefore very important for agencies like USAID to continue to keep this issue on the agenda for policy dialogue and not to reduce population merely to a technical program issue, because it is hardly that.

I think that I have learned that human resources are the most important dimension of social programs, including family planning, and that leadership training, technical training, and technical assistance remain the heart of effective programs.

And, finally, I think today the most important need is for the resources to see through what has been so successfully started. Between 1970 and 2000, contraceptive use in the developing world rose from around 1015% to close to 60% of women of reproductive age. At the same time, actual fertility dropped from around six to three children per woman on average in the developing world. The desired fertility has declined even further to about two and half children, and, in many countries, to two children. There are now twenty five countries in the developing world which are at or below replacement fertility - slightly over two children per woman, which is a fact that almost nobody would have predicted in 1965. I think that very few people realize what an astoundingly effective field of endeavor population has been, nor what enormously important leadership USAID provided. For much of this history USAID represented in the neighborhood of 50 per cent of all international resources that were available for population and family planning, far in excess of any other bilateral or international source of funding. And even today USAID probably represents on the order of 3540 per cent of all funding in this field, USAID has been an enormously important player. USAID was also very controversial early on because of the strong focus on the supplyside, but I think that that focus has stood the test of time and, while, as I said in earlier parts of this oral history, USAID's supplyside position was often overstated to the point of being a caricature. In the broad scheme of things, if one had to err on one side or the other side, the supply side was the right side to emphasize.

A very interesting question that arises about the future has less to do with what new discoveries we can make about how to reduce population growth. It has to do with what happens at the other end of the demographic transition precisely because we have been so successful - developing countries have been so successful - in reducing fertility. Many developing countries have now gone through the demographic transition at a much faster pace than any of today's industrialized countries with the result that their age structures will change much more rapidly than has happened in the West or in Japan. In other words, the faster you go through the transition - the faster you go from high birth rates to low births rates - the faster your population ages and the less time you have to adjust from being an essentially young country to being essentially an old country. Thailand went from being a very young country to being a middle aged country in one generation, and it will be an old country in one more generation. China has gone even faster than that, and one can name a number of other cases: Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, Indonesia, even Bangladesh. With their extraordinarily rapid fertility declines, they are going to face strains at the other end of the transition that make our's pale by comparison; such strains as where to find the resources for old age security systems and pensions systems, where to find the labor force as they suddenly go from a young age dependent to an old age dependent population with very few people in the working ages in between.

I think the really interesting population questions now have less to do with persistent high fertility than with the pace of the transition and the consequences of a rapid transition for social and economic progress. So I think an area for international donors to begin making some intellectual investment is in examining these questions in detail and trying to help developing countries both anticipate and cope with the consequences of their own success

in fertility regulation, fertility control.

Q: What distinguishes the population field from other sectors in U.S. foreign assistance?

SINDING: I would argue two things. The first is the scale of the resources available. We simply, relative to the need, have committed far more resources for population programs than we have had to any other sector of development over the last quarter to half a century. When one agency - USAID - represents fifty percent of the money in a field, it really sets it apart from any of the other development sectors in which we have been involved. That made a big difference: the willingness on the part of the American taxpayers to commit resources that were sufficient to the task at hand.

The second is, in the crucial years of the population program, it was centrally administered. In other words, because the Office of Population had veto power over field projects and an immense influence over the deployment of the population officers, it had a very significant impact on the allocation of resources not by political but by developmental need; it had a big impact on the rationality with which resources were spent; and the ability to bring a truly global perspective to the effort. It is the example that has led me to argue that, in a postCold War world that we should organize the agency around effectively directing resources toward the resolution of global issues rather than sustaining particular levels of assistance to particular countries. The latter becomes much less important with political alliances no longer as compelling as they were during the Cold War. And the former becomes a much more rational way to address global development problems than the way the agency traditionally has allocated resources. So those are the two ways scale of resources available, and the fact that one could take a global perspective on their deployment that sets population apart from the other sectors.

Q: How would you characterize the contribution of foreign assistance generally? Are there lessons that you would consider sort of universals that apply to other sector not just population? How about your work with public health, nutrition and your work in Kenya?

SINDING: How to answer that without platitudes and cliches? I think that development assistance can help in two crucial ways. First, if it is effectively applied to the identification of constraints, it can help countries identify priorities and help them allocate their own scarce resources in ways that can break the bonds of tradition or low level equilibrium, as it once was called. It can break through to higher levels of development; removing constraints through careful analysis and good research and the strategic application of technical assistance and research resources can make a big difference at the initial stages of development.

I also think that development assistance can help governments that are already committed to doing the right thing to accelerate the process. What development assistance cannot do is overcome bad policies. I think that one thing that we have learned over the last fifty years is that where the policy environment is bad, or where political commitment is lacking, or where corruption is rife, development assistance is simply throwing good money after bad. Local commitment, vision, wisdom, leadership are absolutely crucial.

Where they exist foreign assistance can help; where they are absent foreign assistance almost never can help, except as a palliative. Sometimes foreign assistance can make the lives of the poorest somewhat less miserable by substituting for what governments themselves should be doing. But it can never, or almost never, reverse a bad policy. I guess the best example of this that I can think of maybe the best positive example is Asia and the socalled "Tigers," and the way in which foreign assistance helped them to train the first generation of development thinkers and leaders, who, subsequently, put in place policies and programs that enabled those countries to break through to high levels of development. Foreign assistance was really important in Taiwan and Korea and Thailand in preparing the first generation and then in helping to finance their schemes and programs. It didn't produce development; except perhaps in Korea, where the scale of assistance was very high. For the most part this money is risk capital that helps establish the conditions for economic takeoff and social development. On the other side, I think of the vast amounts of money that were poured into hopeless causes, I think of Moi's Kenya, Marcos' Philippines, the Shah's Iran, Mobutu's Zaire where no amount of well intentioned money could overcome corrupt regimes and bad policies. Those are, of course, the most extreme examples, but there are many around the world where the failure of governments to provide enlightened leadership made it impossible for foreign assistance to make a difference.

Some other lessons. I think partnerships. I mentioned, in talking about the World Bank, how important, in the social sectors, partnerships between the donor and the host country are. Working together to identify constraints and overcome constraints, making midcourse corrections as you see things that are not working, and the strategic application of technical assistance and training to overcome local constraints, these are the things that foreign assistance can do when it is well applied. I think that a field presence is absolutely crucial, and the U.S. is the only country and USAID is the only agency, at its best, that has the kind of field presence that permits that sort of partnership to play itself out. Some of the Europeans, in some countries, do it sometimes, but the U.S. is the only donor that has consistently had on the ground the capacity to perform in that partnership role in a way that really made a substantial and lasting difference.

Finally, I think that from my Foundation experience I have come to have a much deeper appreciation of the catalytic role of external actors rather than their fundamental assistance role. I think that, at its best, the development agency goes out and finds the best institutions and resources available and creatively engages them in the development process. That USAID ought to increasingly serve as a catalytic force rather than delivering packages of assistance. It should help in forging partnerships, public/private, interinstitutional academic and otherwise, to bring the best resources to bear on a development problem. Aid for too long has been seen as resource transfer where the resource in primarily money. I think, at its best, it is intellectual transfer and the forging of long term partnerships and alliances that to go to the heart of the development enterprise, which is the building of institutions and human capacities. Sustainable development can only occur where there are local institutions and people who have the capacity to plan and carry out development. And the role of foreign assistance serves that best where it enables that to happen rather than financing large scale programs which are

not sustainable, in many instances, and where the money would have been better spent on building the local capacities to generate wealth and resources.

Q: How would sum up your personal experience and career with U. S. foreign assistance?

SINDING: I would begin by saying my happiest years professionally were the years that I spent at USAID as Director of the Office of Population, as a field officer in Kenya and the Philippines and Pakistan. Having the privilege to live and work overseas, it was and has been a marvelous career. To be privileged enough to live in other countries, to be exposed to the enormous opportunity for learning and the richness of cultural experiences that overseas living provides, to be able to raise a family in those exciting and educational environments is a rare privilege. I often found myself waking up in the morning saying I can't believe that people are paying me to do this.

Also, it is hard to think of other careers in which you really change jobs every three or four or five years but within the security of a single agency. Because every time you change countries or change sectors or positions within USAID, it is really is like starting a new job and yet you have tenure and job security and a pension and all of the things, that by the time you reach almost sixty as I am now, loom as pretty important. I wouldn't trade a single year of the twenty years that I had with USAID; it was really only the realization that we had reached the end of the road professionally in terms of overseas work that led my wife and me to finish at the age fifty; also the fact that our children were now starting college, and we wanted to continue to be close to them; they were going to be in the States.

So we left after twenty years but in many ways I wished it could have been longer, because, as I look back on it, they were the happiest professional years that I have had. I worry a lot about whether the current generation of USAID people will be able to say the same thing, and I worry even more about whether the next generation will be able to say it, because I think, in many ways, USAID is no longer nearly as good a place to work as it was when I was there. First of all the resources become less and less as time goes on; you practically never have enough money to do anything really meaningful; second, missions have become so small that this great comparative advantage of the United States is being lost, of being able to forge real partnerships on the ground. Finally, I think that the bureaucratic tangle of rules and regulations has become so onerous that much of the fun and intellectual excitement of foreign assistance has been overwhelmed by the bureaucratic paperwork, managing for results, accountability, managing contracts, the procurement process all of that has taken a great deal of fun out of the business and I think that unless there are really serious thoroughgoing reforms of USAID and a renewed political commitment to international development assistance that the whole thing is in danger of just drying up. I hope I am wrong, or alternatively, I hope that the things that need to happen will happen. But I feel very privileged to have been a part of USAID when I think it made a big difference in a lot of countries, for all of its imperfections and for all of the difficulty trying to do development in the context of the cold war foreign policy. That is about all I have to say.

Q: Thanks Steve. This has been a fascinating and important oral history. It is an excellent recording of one of the major dimensions of U.S. involvement in the international development arena and your unique contribution.

End of interview