

Perspectives from M. Wayne Adams

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The Board of International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD) and Collaborative Research Support Programs (CRSPs) were authorized in and through the Title XII amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of the U.S. Congress, enacted in 1975. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was designated as the body to provide funding and bureaucratic assistance to the CRSPs. The Bean/Cowpea CRSP is one of several commodity-oriented programs authorized by BIFAD and funded through USAID. Its roots go back to an exploratory trip taken by myself and my department chairman, Dr. Dale Harpstead, to USAID-Washington the summer of 1976. We were interested in securing funding for our bean research program which had been receiving support from the Rockefeller Foundation for the preceding six years. Our visit to USAID came at a most opportune time. At this meeting, we were invited to consider expanding our initial Michigan-oriented focus to embrace research in both beans and cowpeas on a multinational and multi-disciplinary scale, under the auspices and financial support of BIFAD and CRSPs.

In essence, USAID had offered us the opportunity to not only continue our work supportive of U.S. agriculture but also to make that work useful on a worldwide scale. We could not refuse. In accepting, we had to act quickly in order to accomplish three things. First, I had to inform my fellow Rockefeller grant recipient, Dr. Don Wallace of Cornell University, what was afoot and ask him to join me in responding to USAID's offer. Secondly, we had to prepare a paper showing the importance of beans and cowpeas around the world and thereby justifying a place for them on a priority list then being assembled by BIFAD. And thirdly, we had to ascertain the interest of our U.S. bean and cowpea research colleagues in participating in an international collaborative research program. Over the next few months, these steps were accomplished. Then, early in 1977, we were notified that beans/cowpeas had been assigned a high place on BIFAD's priority list and we were invited to submit a proposal for a CRSP planning grant. This proposal, prepared with input from Wallace, Harpstead and Dr. John Yohe of USAID-Washington, was approved and a two year planning grant of \$180,000 was made available.

Dr. Wallace, taking sabbatical leave from Cornell, came to Michigan State University to join me in the planning work. After six months, when Wallace had to return to Cornell, Dr. Pat Barnes-McConnell, on leave from MSU's College of Urban Development, joined the planning team, initially to represent Women in Development (WID), but soon to take an active role in the overall planning process.

The ensuing months saw a beehive of activity in our little corner of Agriculture Hall. We brought researchers from several African, Caribbean and Latin American countries to Michigan State to help us develop a list of major constraints to production and utilization of beans and cowpeas. We made numerous visits to potential Host Countries to determine the feasibility of their participation in the program. We solicited research proposals from our bean/cowpea colleagues in the U.S. And eventually we dealt with the highly sensitive but critically important task of matching U.S. participants with Host Country constraints and potential collaborators. Before finalizing these arrangements, we were able to bring the selected U.S. investigators together with their Host Country counterparts, either in the potential Host Country itself or at regional gatherings, such as the East African Crops Research Workers Conference in Kenya, and the PCCMCA in Guatemala. These get-acquainted meetings, with one or two exceptions, confirmed our initial preliminary pairings, thanks to the professionalism and goodwill of all parties involved.

In the final plan, after nearly four years in the process, we won approval for the participation of many more universities and more Host Countries than had been intended originally by BIFAD-USAID. More importantly, we won approval for the inclusion in many of the individual proposals of a “basic” research component, along with the more applied aspects. We believed this was vitally necessary in order to attract our U.S. colleagues to the CRSP, and important to our long time goal of building a body of fundamental knowledge about the biology and utilization of beans and cowpeas. Somewhat to my surprise, USAID officers raised no objections to this position and, in fact, were quite supportive of it.

To be sure, the major focus of each individual project was to be directed at a constraint previously acknowledged to be important to the Host Country, but also, of course, of sufficient region-wide importance to be of general concern. Only if the CRSP were to offer assistance in solving an important within-country problem could we expect that country to direct a portion of its limited research resources toward a particular CRSP-oriented goal. It was never the intent in the CRSP’s Global Plan for the CRSP project in any given Host Country to become, in effect, the national program in beans or cowpeas. The intent was to supplement the national program, not to replace it or to take up or re-direct scarce national resources toward the specific objective of the CRSP program in that country.

The training of Host Country students, at both a “basic” and an “applied” level, was always meant to be a significant part of every CRSP project. It was understood, however, that each student or trainee would select a thesis topic related to Host Country constraints. Moreover, I hoped that, over time, as more and more students passed through the CRSP experience, they would come to occupy positions of responsibility in their national research programs and continue to build on their personal collegial friendships within the corps of CRSP-trained young people. Thus, they would form a mature group of competent young men and women scientists that could raise the stature of crop research throughout the respective regions of their shared influence.

Furthermore, I hoped that through involvement in CRSP research, travel and experience with international graduate students, there would arise in this country, the U.S., a cadre of senior investigators with solid credentials in addressing international bean or cowpea constraints and, hopefully, with an informed understanding of developing country issues.

I almost overlooked one unique feature of our Global Plan until near the end of the planning process, namely, the inclusion of women as project leaders or as co-investigators. To fail to have done so would have been a fatal flaw, particularly in view of the fact that women do much of the actual handling of beans and cowpeas, especially in Africa. In retrospect, I have often asked myself “How could I have been so blind?”

My original goal of securing supplemental funding for my Michigan-oriented bean work somehow got lost in the larger world of the Bean/Cowpea CRSP. In that larger context, my personal hope from the very beginning was that the Bean/Cowpea CRSP might last for at least 20 years, the minimum time required to have a serious impact on the global constraints identified. I hoped also that the CRSP would be responsible for the development of many improved utilization practices and varieties of beans and cowpeas and, be responsible for the training of many talented young men and women. Further, I hoped for the production and dissemination of new knowledge about the biology of beans and cowpeas, evidence of which would appear in student theses and in peer-reviewed publications both in the U.S. and in Host Country journals. I am happy to have seen so many of those initial hopes and expectations reached although another level of research and training needs looms ahead.

Finally, as I reflect back to the time of CRSP conception and the early days of this particular CRSP, I am conscious of the great debt which I, as a co-founder, owe to the many friends and colleagues, in BIFAD, USAID-Washington, and throughout the U.S. and developing countries, who gave unstintingly of their counsel to steer us toward a workable and successful CRSP. I am especially appreciative of the unfailing support of Dr. John Yohe then of USAID, of Dr. Dale Harpstead of Michigan State University, and of the first director of the Bean/Cowpea CRSP, Dr. Don Isleib, who steadfastly guided this newly launched craft through mostly uncharted waters.