# Winrock International: Prototype of a Contemporary International Development Organization*

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**Abstract**

The Intercultural Communication Division of ICA (International Communication Association) has recently added "Development" to its title, signaling interest in Third-World development needs. The two decades after World War II saw extensive "foreign aid" activity. Some goals were realized; many were not. The earlier spirit of optimism is now one of subdued realism. Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development is proposed as a prototype for present-day non-government development organizations. It operates in 20 countries, focusing on human resource development, technical cooperation and agricultural policy and planning. In its work, Winrock encounters cross-cultural challenges in language variety, message content, cognitive processing, visual literacy and methods of diffusion. In addition, few countries have a tradition or infrastructure of agricultural research and extension service.

Winrock has made initial contact with several scholarly organizations, including ICA, about the possibilities of mutual cooperation in training, research, and problem solving. A tentative research agenda and other prospects are outlined to conclude the paper.

## The Concept of Development

The term "development" signals a significant, elusive, and sometimes controversial set of concepts, especially for the intercultural scholar. The author of this paper regards development as a relative condition, rather than as a stage reached by some peoples and not by others. Development is a continuous process which forms an essential part of the ongoing dynamic of cultural change and adaptation. But its nature varies with the base from which change is occurring. For some groups, development involves assimilating a new generation of computers; for others, it is creating ways to provide survival-level nutrition or potable water supplies.

Development at the most basic level is a personal concern for millions of the world's

people, confronted daily by problems of nutrition, education, health, housing, overcrowding and ecological decline. Nor is being involved with this level of development a new challenge for the industrialized nations, which have sought for decades to address such problems through government and private programs, both at home and abroad. Conditions in the 1950's and 1960's spawned massive "foreign aid" programs directed by the United States, Japan, Sweden, West Germany, Canada, Switzerland, the Soviet Union and other countries toward Latin American and the new, emerging nations of Africa, Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The humanitarian goals of many of these programs became mixed with political, military and commercial motivations, but at least there was some potential—and often some success—in helping recipients cope with basic survival needs and longer-term improvement. Government-sponsored programs were joined by multilateral agencies affiliated with the United Nations, including the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Health Organization. A variety of private foundations and religious groups—often with focused programs involving literacy, food and agriculture, maternal and child health, education and family planning—also came into being or continued their efforts.

If it were possible to generalize at all across such a varied array of often competing and overlapping international development activities, one such generalization would have featured the spirit of optimism which characterized the endeavors. Whatever the motivation, there was a profound faith that outside intervention, better-prepared national professionals and effectively-diffused information, buttressed by adequate money and material, would change the world for the better—and in a dramatically short time. There were indeed impressive achievements in endemic disease reduction, standardized air-traffic control, grain and livestock production and reduced mortality rates. But progress in many of the development programs—ironically including family planning and population control—was simply buried by population growth (currently about 80 million people per year), by weather and climate cycles, and by a rising tide of political unrest and international meddling. So if there is a prevailing spirit in international development activity today, it is almost certainly one of subdued realism which recognizes more clearly how difficult progress is to achieve and sustain.

Development as a concept still rests on the belief that a combination of human and material resources judiciously introduced into an ongoing system and further adapted within that system has the potential—but not the certainty—of desired change and eventual self-reliance.

**The Establishment of Winrock International**

The purpose of this paper is to describe a "new-old" private, non-profit institution, Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development, and then to suggest possibilities for future contact between the Institute and professional communication associations such as ICA. Winrock is an applied intercultural-development organization

focused on helping those who work with the agricultural producer, as well as aiding producers directly—from the African subsistence tiller or herdsman to the North American market farmer, all engaged in the overall process of converting soil, light and water to food and fiber.

Winrock International was created in July, 1985, through a merger of three veteran international/developmental organizations, all stemming from the philanthropic traditions of the Rockefeller family. The Agricultural Development Council grew out of an organization founded in 1953 by John D. Rockefeller, 3rd. The International Agricultural Development Service was created in 1975 with initial support from the Rockefeller Foundation. Winrock International Livestock Research and Training Center was also established in 1975 in response to Winthrop Rockefeller's wishes for the creation of a "venturesome and innovative" program centered on self-help in agriculture. The merger resulted in a multi-dimensional organization focused on improving agricultural productivity, with projects already in place in 20 countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and the United States.

In deciding to concentrate primarily on support systems for the agricultural producer, Winrock has identified five related areas of need shared by all farmers, regardless of the nature or location of their work. The first of these is in generating and using appropriate technology, including the development of new types and combinations of crops and livestock, introduction of improved cropping systems, and the design of new and modified farm practices and equipment.

A second need is for establishing, stabilizing and strengthening the various institutions needed to support a viable agriculture. Agricultural research institutions and workers are needed to generate new knowledge. Extension and other educational systems are needed to help farmers learn about and assess innovations, adapt and use them, and profit from them.

A third need of agricultural producers lies in the prudent use of natural resources. While world food production has doubled in the past decade, some of this increase has been accomplished, both in agriculturally advanced and in developing countries, at the cost of degraded soil, forest and water resources. Demands for more food must be countered by insistence on environmental safeguards, for the exploitation of resources to meet present needs produces a projected downward curve in productivity as the population curve rises.

A fourth dimension involves examining national economic policy. A farmer may decide to clear the forest, put fragile land into production, plant more of a particular crop, or overtax water supplies in response to national agricultural and trade policies. Unsystematic policy can thus contravene progress in longer-term agricultural development.

A fifth challenge in agricultural productivity involves effectively developing human resources. Farmers can be expected to respond to sound use of technology, the prudent use of natural resources, and government agricultural policy only if they have the opportunity to learn about these matters and make informed decisions. This cannot

occur unless there is an adequate base of education, diffusion of research, and contact with agricultural extension resources. Unfortunately, countries with the most difficult agricultural problems tend to be those with the least-developed means of generating and diffusing farm-related information.

Winrock's collective response to this analysis of need has been to create three operational divisions:

1. Human Resources Development—this division has both long-range and short-term concerns. The first is exemplified by efforts to prepare new generations of agricultural scientists, educators, extension specialists, administrators, and policy-makers. Winrock seeks donors to sponsor promising young professionals as students at universities throughout the world. At the same time in developing countries, efforts are being made to expand training and research programs in agriculture and rural development so that eventually these national institutions can themselves supply the needed specialists. Winrock staff works with such institutions and also maintains professional contact with returned trainees to establish a vital sense of continuity and a support network of expertise. Over the past 30 years, more than 900 students from five continents have participated in advanced-degree programs and have become part of this world network.

In terms of more immediate needs, Winrock is also involved in a wide range of non-academic training activities to increase the effectiveness of those who train field personnel or work directly with farm families.

2. Technical Cooperation—this division is directed at institution building and strengthening at both national and regional levels, including research centers and national extension services. These projects encourage institutions to improve their output and develop their own support so that they can eventually sustain themselves.

3. Planning and Analysis—divisional focus here is on systems research and policy analysis. Policy analysis is concerned with long-term plans for management of renewable resources and the analysis of national agricultural plans and projections. The group also studies and evaluates Winrock's own experiences in development activities, and is responsible for U.S. programs conducted by the Institute. With its three-dimensional approach, the current organization of Winrock is thus "comprehensive" in the sense that it ranges from programs dealing with individual farmers through national and regional institutions, and extending forward in time through plans and policies to their effect on practice.

**Winrock Operations**

Winrock is overseen by a 21-member Board of Directors and administered by a President, Robert D. Havener. Its headquarters are on Petit Jean Mountain near Morrilton, Arkansas. Regional offices are maintained in Washington, D.C. and Bangkok, Thailand. Last year, 80 professionals were posted to projects in 20 countries, primarily in Asia and Africa. An additional 50 scientists and development specialists make up the program staff. Winrock also maintains a professional register of 2800 international

specialists who are available for consultation on either short or longer-term assignments.

Most of the Institute's activities are funded by grants and contracts involving private and government sources. There are currently more than 50 sponsors. Public agencies include USAID, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and FAO. National sponsorship examples have included Trinidad-Tobago, Germany, Canada, Switzerland and the United States. Foundation support has come from Ford, John Deere, Skaggs and several of the Rockefeller family foundations. Some corporations and associations that have been involved are Bankers Trust, Castle and Cooke, Chase Manhattan Bank, Control Data, IBM, Kellogg, American Sheep Producers Council and the Society of Japan Food Industry Executives. In addition to these and other funding sources, the Institute has its own endowment, earnings from which are used to develop innovative approaches, launch new initiatives, and create partnerships with other institutions interested in agricultural development. The endowment enables it to proceed with both flexibility and stability.

Conference Programs—In addition to the conferences, workshops and meetings held around the world in connection with field programs, Winrock conducts an extensive conference schedule at its Arkansas headquarters. Facilities include classrooms, seminar rooms, dining, and overnight accommodations. Petit Jean Mountain is the site of conferences, workshops, seminars and consultations related to Winrock programs—including communications. Proceedings and recommendations from these meetings are often made available to technical and political leaders world-wide.

Publication Services—The Institute operates the AGRIBOOKSTORE from the Washington D.C. regional office. It handles publications sales in the developed world of items from international agricultural research centers. Of special interest to Western communication scientists are reports on the role of anthropologists and other social scientists in interdisciplinary food production research teams, social consequences of mechanization, problems of multi-language bulletin publication, diffusion-adoption of new crop varieties, and communication responsibilities of agricultural research centers.

**Winrock as a Practicing Intercultural Laboratory**

Winrock's predecessor organizations collectively represent more than fifty years of cross-cultural experience as respected members of the international agricultural development community. A number of key personnel hold graduate degrees in communication and in agricultural communications. Several have had extensive experience with multi-cultural communication training programs. As a consequence, Winrock can be both a facilitator in applying agricultural science and a culturally-sensitive agent of change. Following is a synthesis of some major concerns related to Winrock's intercultural contact:

1. Language—As a world-wide organization, Winrock confronts at least twenty major languages among government officials and agricultural specialists and a much

larger number of local languages and dialects used by farmers. There is no way in which Winrock can provide printed educational and training materials in all these languages, and many of the local languages spoken by farmers are not written. Consequently, Winrock has standardized on English, Spanish and French as training and publication languages. English is the international language of agricultural science and is the second language of many Winrock contacts.

2. Message Content—While there are common elements, for example, in arid-land cultivation or goat production around the world, the most credible and useful materials will necessarily include reference to local conditions. Winrock faces the dilemma of providing materials general enough to cover most situations, but specific enough to serve local needs. Local information does not often exist, so little can be done about this, unless local institutes undertake studies to adapt the technology. The language problem however is being confronted in two ways. First, Winrock—and most other international agricultural development and research centers—seeks co-publishers of their materials. Often the copublishers will have the information translated into local languages first. The second method is to train extensionists and researchers who can use English and then depend on them to translate and interpret the information to farmers as they work with them.

3. Cognitive Processing—The agricultural extension movement was developed in the United States in the 20th Century to make available the results of research in crops, animal husbandry, soil conservation and agricultural engineering. U.S. extension services have developed and used such techniques as demonstrations, group meetings, short courses, publications of bulletins and reports, and radio and television broadcasting.

Making scientific information available to farmers remains central to agricultural development world-wide. The methods and strategies of diffusion must be modified in many ways to match the ways people receive and process information within their cultural systems. Moreover, in most countries abroad, the extension services, to the extent they exist, are direct instruments of the central or state government. In only a few cases does one find the typical organizational arrangement for research-education-extension as represented by the land-grant, university-affiliated institutions of the United States. While extension-type operations may exist in a ministry of agriculture, the service may operate quite independently from the agricultural research system. In some countries, the extension operation is even located in another ministry.

Winrock has chosen to operate projects in some of the most "difficult" areas, where national agricultural extension programs are least developed. This means that relatively fewer local extension agents and other field personnel are available to conduct face-to-face demonstrations and consultations.

One of the things that Winrock staff have learned about Jamaicans is that rural people there tend to learn aurally. In their limited formal schooling, they have few or no books and blackboards. The teacher recites what the children are to learn. Their task is to memorize and repeat the lessons. With this conditioning, adult farmers should be able to

use educational materials which are adapted for oral presentation. Little is yet known or understood about the systematic use of such an aural approach in agricultural development.

A second finding is that Jamaicans are "story-oriented" in information exchange. Contrasted with the factual, analytical approach to message presentation emphasized in industrialized nations, Jamaicans respond to information cast into stories, in which there are recognizable characters who speak in general terms about life experiences and gradually get to particular problems and how these might be solved. Consequently, radio drama is popular, and its techniques are a promising avenue to agricultural development information. One of the best ways to produce materials like these is through employing native talent to advise, evaluate and test—or even to learn to do the whole production-job.

4. The Information Base—The agricultural extension movement in the United States began with an examination of the day-to-day problems of farmers and a response by agricultural experimentalists. In the post-war era, with the rise of agribusiness and large-scale farming, both research and extension have been accused of moving away from the small farmer. Research is often esoteric and sophisticated, with results of little direct or immediate use to small farmers. Many studies are specific to given locations and conditions, with limited attention to their appropriateness for adaptability to other situations. Meanwhile, extension programs tend to gravitate to farmers who actively seek information and assistance, and who are more likely to be successful.

What has occurred is a widening cultural gap between scientists and small farmers and there is little formal research of potential use to the Third World farmer.

A response of Winrock and others has been to promote an approach known as "Farming Systems Research." FSR examines the farmer's situation in regard to any specific innovation, to see whether or not the new idea or practice actually can and will be used profitably by the farmer. FSR also takes a broader look at the farmer's situation to determine what is needed there—without assuming that any single idea or group of innovations will be universally applicable. In a fully implemented operation, FSR sets up area teams of researchers, extensionists, social scientists (including communication scientists), specialists in education and communication techniques. Farmers and their families are added to this group. Together the team analyzes the farm system, looking at cropping and animal patterns, work habits, labor availability, income sources, nutritional needs, family structure, communication channels, educational needs. The team also examines and describes the larger ecosystem, involving the economic level, marketing system, and other infrastructures such as transportation and storage facilities for products. It looks at national policies related to agriculture.

Out of this description and analysis, the FSR team attempts to determine what technologies look promising for various groupings of farmers within the study area. The innovations are first field-tested and adapted, if necessary. Then appropriate education-information strategy is planned, developed and carried out.

While the basic idea behind Farming Systems Research is sound from a

communication point of view, in practice FSR teams rarely include a communication person and rarely examine communication variables in their survey of the farmer's situation and environment.

Yet there are many levels at which communication is important—between the FSR team and the scientists and administrators above them, among team members, between the farmer and other members of the team. These areas of communication have been essentially ignored by physical and biological scientists—and even other social scientists such as anthropologists and economists—who usually make up FSR teams in agriculture.

Nor are such teams usually interested in exploring such communication artifacts as source, channel, message, effects, and receiver variables. So when the time comes to proceed with information diffusion, the task is handed over and the communicator typically has received little helpful information to guide actions and decisions.

Winrock communicators are attempting to demonstrate to their colleagues in the physical, biological, and social sciences why these variables are important to the success of FSR approach, and should be included in any field research done by FSR teams.

5. Methods of Information Diffusion—The conventional Western diffusion methods of print and broadcast have severe limitations elsewhere, as already noted—although radio schools have been used successfully in many parts of the world to help broadcasters address the needs of rural listeners. Winrock is examining the potential of the new communications technologies as supplemental or direct contributions to the information environment. The rapid development, acceptance and cost decline of audio cassette machines, video cassette players and camcorders now makes it feasible in some areas to consider visual and audio equipment as important new tools.

Of course, video requires a support system—electricity on which it can run, complex equipment that must be repaired and maintained, a possible appetite for materials that the usual Third World country cannot meet, limitations in terms of language and non-verbal elements. So in most parts of the Third World, video is not yet a realistic medium for educational and informational work, except where local conditions make it feasible.

Improvement of scientific information is also a concern of Winrock staff. Scientific journals in many countries are in limited stages of development, if they exist at all. Workshops for Bangladeshi journal editors have helped excite that group about their profession and responsibilities, and shown them betters ways of carrying out their tasks.

**Winrock and the Communication Process**

One way of looking at an international development organization like Winrock is to view it as an information generating, storing, packaging, and dissemination system. The major task is communication: transferring ideas, information, facts, practices from one culture to another in ways that will be helpful, useful, acceptable to the second culture. Winrock also wants to help develop in those cultures the ability to do what its staff currently does. So part of the effort is in training and motivating others to emulate developed—world workers in certain ways. Winrock wants them to be able to analyze

research for themselves and share the information they find through education and training.

Winrock International's communications staff has taken the lead in identifying more than 600 persons in the Third World who have agricultural communications responsibilities. An UPDATE newsletter to this group every two months is the beginning link binding all these people together. The newsletter describes communications activities being carried on in various countries, announces new positions in the international area, lists training opportunities, reports on applicable communications research, and in general tries to diffuse helpful information to these professionals.

In most countries, agricultural communications does not exist as a profession. There are no academic programs to train agricultural communicators; there is no demonstrated awareness on the part of those in power and influence that such positions are needed and should exist. Yet as agricultural research becomes established in these countries, and some form of informal education program is put in place, the need for professional agricultural communicators becomes more and more evident. Neither the scientists nor the extensionists can be effective without the professional aid of communicators to help deal with cross-cultural and intracultural communication variables, to plan communications programs and strategies, and then help produce and carry out communications activities.

What often happens is that the need for a library, or for publications, or for audio-visuals, is recognized. Since there are few or no professionals in those areas, an animal scientist or a soils technician will be tapped to be in charge, usually in addition to regular duties. Thus the communications job from the beginning is defined as a low status position, occupied by persons without appropriate preparation. Not surprisingly, many programs fail to materialize. Training programs are one source of help for persons unexpectedly caught up in this career change.

Another approach is longer-term, hands-on training for the appointees. Winrock brings trainees to the Petit Jean headquarters for several months of close contact with its communications staff. This teaching-learning includes communication concepts, principles, and hands-on experience with the planning, development, and production of appropriate communications materials. It also can include sessions on topics such as how to organize and staff an agricultural communications department, and how to work with scientists, extensionists and farmers.

Again, differences from Western communication styles are crucial. The U.S. style stresses direct statements, clarity and simplicity of language and presentation. An educational slide-tape script introduces the subject, gives an overview of what is to be learned, and then proceeds through the teaching/learning process step by step in a "logical" Western order. But in many countries—Indonesia and Japan, for example—that is not the approach to which farmers and others are accustomed. Their cultures value a less direct, less analytic presentation. So if Winrock trains an Indonesian in Western ways or producing slide-tape scripts, without also pointing out and attempting to understand with him how to meet Indonesian needs for information processing, he is likely to fail

when he returns to his country as an expert on slide-tape production.

A growing body of literature now deals with visual-literacy research. Although arguments continue over whether people universally "know" certain visual symbols and understand them innately, the need for more research in cross-cultural symbol reading is evident. Thus, Winrock, in developing educational and information materials of use throughout the world, attempts to understand the complexity of visual literacy. One approach is to field-test visual materials with samples of the prospective audience. Winrock can only do this occasionally.

There is evidence that even when people are unused to viewing visual messages, if they receive some help in understanding such symbols as arrows or numbered steps and interpreting their meaning on a diagram, they soon become "visually literate" as persons long experienced in dealing with this kind of presentation. Since urban as well as rural people may be visually illiterate teaching how to read visuals will benefit many people in Third World countries. An audience that has trouble with words, or lacks a written language, may or may not prove to be unsophisticated in the interpretation of visual, non-verbal materials.

Abstract visuals and those showing complex ideas are generally less successful than more literal ones. Also, visuals are more successful and accepted if the clothing, plants, animals, structures — even those presented in line drawings —resemble those known by the audience. For example, U.S. artists would obviously draw a goat with external ears because these are the only goats they know. But some goats do not have external ears, and persons living in those countries with such goats would reject a visual showing an eared goat.

**Communication in the Extension Organization**

Discussion to this point has tended to focus on communication from knowledge-generating or extension systems to farmers and other elements of the public. Such information transfer is a critical component of most agricultural research and extension projects in which Winrock becomes engaged. But it soon becomes apparent that in most situations it is necessary to focus attention on information flows within the systems, between the system and its clients, and between cooperating and collaborating organizations. Such emphasis also facilitates management.

Effective management of an organization depends, to a great extent, upon the efficiency of the organization's overall communication system. This efficiency, in turn, depends upon management's assumptions and philosophy about communication and the level of information skills (or opportunity to learn them) of staff at every level. Staff must know how and be encouraged to prepare, process, circulate, store, and retrieve information, both substantive and administrative.

In most developing countries, the top agricultural administrators frequently divert communication advisors to concentrate on producing materials for donors and legislators. It takes even greater effort to gain support for and permission to undertake

research which would generate a flow of information into the organization.

The situation is further complicated by the failure of administrators and assistance agency personnel to distinguish among the abilities required to operate successfully in each of the various domains. Individuals employed to work, for example, in editing research manuscripts also are expected to be able to design and write colorful brochures. Or, as frequently happens, a librarian is assumed to be capable of designing and carrying out a survey of the information needs of a farming community. Few professional communicators are prepared either academically or by experience to perform adequately across the array of domains.

**Winrock and the Community of Communication Scholars**

Earlier in this paper, the author indicated two purposes: to describe Winrock, and to examine possibilities for future contact between the Institute and professional communiction associations. It should be clear that a potential symbiotic relationship of considerable mutual benefit might be generated at both the individual and organizational level if proper beginnings can be made. A research agenda drawn from the previous Winrock description would include the following:

1. Uses and effects of orally-presented development messages, especially those using radio drama techniques, whether broadcast or presented on audio cassettes in community settings.

2. Uses and effects of narrated filmstrips and other visual presentations of steps and stages in farming practices. This examination of visual literacy could lead to new theoretic development of culture-bound and universal dimensions of visual receptivity to messages.

3. Further cross-cultural investigation of cognitive processing theory. Present theoretic views of this matter lean to the position that Western thought is basically linear, causal and analytic and that in some other areas of the world, thought may be less time-bound, more intuitive and processbased. This may indeed be the case. Many strategies and practices for improvement of agricultural productivity are based on Western science. It may be that farmers in other countries can readily adapt to and practice the sequential, causal, and often experimental approaches necessary for scientific agriculture. Some anecdotal accounts from the Winrock experience indicate that this is so. Research is needed on how the transformation takes place and whether intervention can aid in the process.

4. Investigation of interpersonal and social processes within the Farming System Research teams earlier described. This essentially Western concept of involving people who have a wide range of social status, education and perspective in a common effort at problem-solving is very appealing. How well does it work? Is there theory and research from intercultural, interpersonal and small group communication literature that could facilitate it?

5. Investigation of appropriate organizational models for the agricultural research and extension organizations which exist or are being planned in some countries. The

success of Winrock's efforts at long-range institution building is related to the establishment by national governments of culturally-appropriate and functional entities for agricultural research and information dissemination.

6. Ongoing investigation of a range of teaching-learning strategies in environments with limited technological capacity for mass diffusion, low levels of rural literacy, and stark shortages of specialists to serve as primary sources of information and influence.

Communication scholars may also be able to identify with other problems encountered by Winrock, including the following:

1. A general lack of awareness among colleagues, both in the sciences and social sciences, about what students of human communication do and the contributions they might make in such practical matters as agricultural development. The Farming Systems Research experience again illustrates this. The role of communication is now apparently seen as a dissemination of messages about what the specialist teams have decided to do. This is in part a linguistic problem. "Communication" as a social process does not translate well into other languages and is often equated with "communications" as a technological system including telephones, telegraph, the postal system and broadcasting. Academics may ruefully identify with this problem, but with limited capacity to suggest solutions.

2. The relative absence or limited development in the Third World of academic curricula addressed to any aspect of communication skills, agricultural communications, mass media skills, or research and theory related to communication. This means that as previously noted, when agricultural extension and communications positions become available, they are often filled by agricultural scientists or others with no formal preparation for the work. Resources for higher education are so scarce that new departments and institutes of communication would appropriately be built around "Communication for Development" themes leading to careers in family planning communication, agricultural extension, public health and the like.

**Conclusion**

This paper is one of Winrock's first opportunities to describe its activities to a group of academics with a focused interest in intercultural research and theory. It appears that scholars and practitioners share many common interests in this area. At such an early stage of contact, it is difficult to determine whether or in what ways Winrock and the scholarly communication community might interact for the mutual benefit of all. But the ultimate goal is worthwhile—a stable and available supply of locally-produced food and fiber in the Third World.