

ACTION

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update...

VISTA Conference: Rededication To the Fight Against Poverty

Former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young



Former VISTA Volunteer Si Kahn



U.S. Rep. Barbara Mikulski

Participants Emphasize Community Self-Help

The VISTA 15th Anniversary campaign culminated with a weekend conference that stressed the importance of self-help at the grassroots level and called for a renewed struggle against the continuing scourge of poverty.

This was the peak of the six-month-long campaign during which current and former volunteers, ACTION staff, showbusiness celebrities, supporters and co-workers participated in an intensive effort to promote public awareness of poverty and of VISTA opportunities for voluntary service.

Some 1,300 people from all over the country came to Washington on Friday, June 13 for the three-day conference held at George Washington University. They included low-income people, VISTA volunteers, community leaders and government officials. They were coming to explore the progress that VISTA had made in its 15 years of existence and to develop directions and strategies for dealing with poverty in the 1980s.

In 50 workshops and seminars, participants examined issues relating to the poor, ranging from racism and refugees, to hunger, housing and citizen participation.

Several well-known speakers addressed the conference, including Andrew Young, former Ambassador to the United Nations, Si Kahn, former VISTA volunteer, songwriter and community activist; and U.S. Rep. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), a veteran of neighborhood and community organizing.

Events also included a special performance and awards night, on Friday at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Thirty-two Americans were honored, some of them posthumously, for exceptional service and work in their specialized fields, to end poverty in America. The program was sponsored by Friends of VISTA, a non-profit organization, based in Washington, D.C. Awards were presented in the form of various crafts which were made by the poor in projects begun by VISTA volunteers.

The evening's events were hosted by Sargent Shriver, former director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, under which VISTA was originally housed. A number of celebrities, including Peter, Paul and Mary, John Denver, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and Jane Olivor provided entertainment.

Among the award presenters were Marion Barry,

Mayor of Washington, D.C.; Constance Newman, former director of VISTA; Gloria Steinem, women's rights activist; G. William Miller, Secretary of the Treasury; Bernie Aronson, associate assistant to President Carter; and Renee Pouissant, local TV anchorwoman in Washington, D.C. Actress Ruby Dee and her actor/husband Ossie Davis were award recipients in the arts category.

VISTA Director Margery Tabankin welcomed participants to the conference on Friday morning, noting the vast amount of work remaining to be done to end poverty in the nation. "It is outrageous that in this land of economic abundance, there are still so many people who are poor, uneducated and sick," she said.

In speaking of the work of the volunteers, Tabankin said, "Anyone who says this is a 'me' generation isn't paying attention to the fact that there are tremendous amounts of things being done by people like yourselves to bring about some badly needed changes in this country. It's been a tough fight to make these changes, and we are here to rededicate ourselves to the work that lies before us in the years ahead."

(left) Hyman Bookbinder at racism workshop; (right) Stuart Eizenstat at unemployment workshop.



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Growing Together: Peace Corps and AID

The following article was written by Kay Chernush, a photographer-writer in AID's Office of Public Affairs. She worked in ACTION's public affairs office from 1972-75, and was made an "honorary Peace Corps volunteer" in Upper Volta in 1974 while on assignment in the Sahel. This article originally appeared in the June issue of AID's Agenda magazine.



They were bright, young and idealistic—pioneers on the New Frontier. The State Department gave them orientation and ordinary green passports like ordinary Americans going abroad. The White House, with much fanfare, gave them a send-off, which was only fitting since they were the first contingent in John F. Kennedy's cherished Peace Corps.

When the first volunteers stepped off the plane in Accra, Ghana, in 1961 and sang Ghana's national anthem in Twi, the local language, it marked a departure for American diplomacy. In varying degrees, the young Americans could speak the local language. Intensive training had prepared them to accept different customs. They were ready to live simply, in the same manner as their new friends and co-workers. There would be none of the special privileges—no commissary, no hardship bonuses, no air-conditioned houses—that cushion the diplomats' lot and set them apart from the local culture.

"We saw ourselves as very different," says Kelley Kammerer, an early volunteer in Colombia, later a Peace Corps staffer in Washington and now AID's deputy general counsel. "It was ingrained in us to avoid all contact with AID people. We were encouraged not to have joint participation and joint programming. There was always the feeling that AID was living high off the hog and not being culturally sensitive."

Paula Goodard, deputy coordinator for AID's Women in Development office, taught African history in Kenya for the Peace Corps about a decade after Kammerer. She remembers having a similar "stereotyped" view. "It was really a holier-than-thou attitude of those of us in the front lines. The way we were living and working made us feel superior."

For their part, AID people largely reciprocated

the feeling—if they thought about it at all. "A bunch of kids," was how they viewed the Peace Corps. "What do a bunch of kids know about development?"

While individual relationships sometimes rose above such sentiments and a certain amount of informal cooperation took place between the two agencies, a "them-and-us" attitude persisted into the 1970s. "Peace Corps people always viewed themselves as pure and undefiled," observes Jim

Peace Corps volunteers continue to respond to the changing needs of the Third World.



Kelly, who was on the first plane-load of volunteers going to Ghana. "AID people saw themselves as wise and having all the technical competence. Let's face it, both views are somewhat short of reality."

Kelly now directs AID's programs for the Sahel and Francophone West Africa. Times change, "the kids" have grown up and nearly 20 years after the Peace Corps' founding, a sizable number of its former volunteers and staff members are working for AID.

A survey of AID's overseas missions and Washington bureaus reveals the extent of the Peace Corps connection. Out of nearly 3,700 AID employees (excluding those hired locally in foreign countries), 462 have had Peace Corps experience, either as volunteers or staff members—or both. In Washington, they are found in nearly every bureau and at all professional levels, from newly recruited interns to the new deputy administrator, Joseph C. Wheeler, who in 1961 helped set up Peace Corps operations in the Near East and South Asia. More than 170 hold such jobs as desk officers, program designers, capital development and loan officers, policy planners, financial and personnel managers, technical experts, lawyers and economists. Three of the Agency's major bureaus are headed by former Peace Corps staffers.

Not surprisingly, given the Peace Corps bias in favor of cross-cultural involvement, an even greater number work overseas—287. In Costa Rica, former Peace Corps people make up 53 percent of the mission staff, including Director Stephen Knaebel and Deputy Mary Kilgour. In Cameroon there are more than 40 percent, in Jamaica 28 percent.

"What do a bunch of kids know about development?"



In addition, an undetermined number of former Peace Corps volunteers served with the International Voluntary Services (IVS), a forerunner of the Peace Corps, and a veritable shadow army of former Peace Corps hands work for AID contractors and voluntary organizations such as CARE, World Education and Save the Children. Says AID Controller Doug Stafford, "The Peace Corps is a better school tie than Harvard."

Stafford joined the Peace Corps during the 1960s, taking a two-year leave of absence from a well-paying job as an IBM marketing representative. As with so many others, the experience radically changed his life. "I was highly successful," he observes with a nonchalant shrug, "and I asked myself—is this all there is to it? I wanted to work in the Peace Corps because it was a noble cause." After helping install a computer system in Peace Corps headquarters, he was asked to be deputy director in Liberia. "Where's that?," he remembers asking. "That's the way this romance started."

Part of the growing Peace Corps connection at AID stems from AID's intern program, which recruits and trains professionals. Nearly half of the interns in recent years have been former

Those former Peace Corps "kids" now work for AID.

Peace Corps volunteers. AID recruiters, in fact, rate Peace Corps experience as a definite plus, particularly when combined with an advanced degree. Others in AID, aware of charges of cultural insensitivity and bureaucratic formalism, believe the "practical feel" and language skills that ex-Peace Corps people bring with them are "the best thing that's happened to AID in years."

"As I look at AID circa 1960 as opposed to 1980, there's a world of difference, not only in what we're doing but in the sensitivity involved," remarks Calvin H. "Hank" Raullerson, who directs AID's cooperative development programs. While AID's mandate is far broader than Peace Corps', encompassing such different aspects of bilateral economic assistance as the Food for Peace program, disaster relief, development loans and balance-of-payment support, there is more emphasis now on technical assistance in agricultural production, rural development, health and education.

Peace Corps also is not a monolith and is continuing to evolve in response to changing conditions and needs in the Third World. Having pioneered a one-on-one, grass-roots approach to de-

velopment, Peace Corps has long had to prove itself as something more than a rewarding cross-cultural experience for Americans. Volunteers are no longer "parachuted" into remote areas and told to "find something useful to do," as sometimes happened in the early days. There is a more rigorous matching of volunteers' skills with host country needs and a recognition that a development assistance program today is acceptable only if it furthers development.

"We have all learned," says Robert MacAlister, whose Peace Corps memories include "being a guinea pig" for volunteer training in Puerto Rico back in 1962. Today, working in AID's Africa Bureau on special development problems like renewable energy and appropriate technology, he finds himself drawing on his Peace Corps background. "The whole appropriate technology thing comes out of Peace Corps experience, what has been learned at the grass-roots level."

Like many others at AID, both with and without a Peace Corps past, MacAlister firmly believes in collaboration between the two agencies and would like to see more of it. "I'm in a position to keep promoting that in project design," he notes. "As new projects evolve, more volunteers will be working in them."

Indeed, despite the old attitudes, there has always been some cooperation between AID and the Peace Corps in the field. MacAlister, for example, while serving as Peace Corps director in Chad in 1968, helped start a joint wells project that continued until growing civil strife forced the evacua-

tion of Americans earlier this year. According to Raullerson, a Peace Corps director in Kenya and later head of the corps' Africa region, there was never any stated policy about not working with AID. But any cooperation tended to result from ad hoc, informal agreements and depended on the type of project and the personalities involved.

"In Kenya, our program lent itself to working

As new AID projects evolve, more Peace Corps volunteers will be working in them.

with AID and we took advantage of that," Raullerson recalls. "We had Peace Corps volunteers who received quite a bit of assistance from AID and that's true of some other countries, too. But the record is probably spotty."

Special funding programs, which were limited to small grants and didn't involve any red tape, were one way AID provided support to Peace Corps in the early years—and still does. During the 1972 budget crunch, AID even came to Peace Corps' rescue with \$2 million for volunteer living allowances. But what troubled many observers was that Peace Corps seemed to have all the people resources and AID had all the money, and there was no mesh between them.

With the convergence of Peace Corps and AID objectives and the changes in attitude, cooperation becomes both logical and necessary. "Particularly at a time with so many limitations and budgetary constraints, we have to find more ways to ensure cooperation," says Alex Shakow, AID program and policy coordination chief. In fact, two years ago the two agencies signed an agreement to do just that. More recently, AID Administrator Douglas J. Bennet Jr. and Peace Corps Director Richard Celeste sent out a joint cable to overseas posts urging renewed efforts at collaboration.

Of course, it's still possible to find some among AID's "old guard" who do not consider Peace Corps a serious development agency. One person, upon learning that Peace Corps would be going into Bangladesh, reportedly sniffed, "It will be fun for the kids but a mess for Bangladesh." Another senior level official while recognizing some of Peace Corps' contributions, said, "Development is more than having a good heart and good will."

Far more common, however, is the view that each agency has something to offer to develop-



"Peace Corps optimizes what the non-specialist can produce."



KUDOS TO:

LILLIAN PFAFF, New York City public information officer, New York Service Center, who has been accepted into the 1980 Summer Institute of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. This summer's Institute will focus on political reporting and will cover the Democratic National Convention to be held in New York City August 11-16. The Institute is limited to practicing journalists, with few exceptions. Pfaff will be one of those exceptions. Her credentials include a BA in political science from Clarion State College in Clarion, Pa., and an MA from the University of Missouri's School of Journalism.

MARY KING, Deputy Director of ACTION; and PERDITA HUSTON, Director of the NANEAP Region, who were among the 37 women selected to the U.S. Delegation to the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, 1980. The Conference, which convenes in Copenhagen this month was set up to examine the problems of women in areas of employment education and health. Vivian Lowery Derryck is serving as director of the U.S. Secretariat for the Conference. She is the wife of Dennis Derryck, Director of the Office of Policy and Planning.

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ment. "Peace Corps optimizes what the non-specialist can produce," observes Paula Goodard. "At AID, knowledge is deeper but narrower. Both approaches are appropriate for their particular mandates, but both suffer the lack of the other."

The general feeling seems to be that despite real difficulties in meshing different styles and program requirements, the two agencies share a common purpose and the strengths of one complement the strengths of the other. Jim Kelly sums it up when he says, "We have to focus on how we should come together to speed the development process rather than on differences of approach and differences of instruments used."

Perhaps because AID is so much bigger, it bears the onus as a cumbersome, unfeeling, inflexible, paper-logged bureaucracy while Peace Corps manages as creative and flexible. But, in dozens of interviews, former Peace Corps people working at AID have overwhelmingly praised the professionalism they find there. Quite a few concede that their earlier perceptions of AID had been "negative and uninformed." Desk officer Celeste Robertson, who served as a volunteer in the Ivory Coast, finds "just as much commitment in both agencies, and in both institutions the paperwork can get you down."

Many suggest that Peace Corps' main contribution may ultimately lie in the cultural sensitivity and broader world view that former volunteers and staff bring with them to future careers, particularly in a place like AID. In fact, this view is embodied in one of the Peace Corps' goals—namely, to promote better understanding on the part of Americans of the peoples of the developing world. At AID, while they can and do differ on specific policies and programs, the Peace Corps people tend to share similar values, a people-oriented approach to development problems and a view of the world shaped by their experience among its poorest and most deprived citizens.

A certain amount of tension and poking fun between the two agencies may be inevitable and even beneficial, in that it furthers an esprit de corps. This was certainly true of the Peace Corps during the early days, when people were afraid of being swallowed up by AID. Now, however, attitudes are shifting. As one AID staffer puts it, "Development is so hard, so complicated, there's room for more than one approach."

Issues, Strategies for The '80s Explored At DO Conference

A recently held Domestic Operations programming conference provided the first opportunity for field and headquarters staff from across the country to share ideas, issues and strategies for the future, according to Region X Director John Keller.

Some 200 DO senior staff members attended the conference, which was held June 9-12 in Hampton, Va., to discuss long-range DO priorities and ways of implementing them.

"The United States, like the rest of the world, has changed considerably since the mid-sixties when the first anti-poverty programs were established," said conference coordinator Dennis Wilt, Alaska state program director. "This long overdue conference set the stage for a continuing dialogue between headquarters and field staff about the mission of ACTION. It provided a unique opportunity to examine, together, ACTION's role in a changing American society."

A variety of workshops and discussions enabled participants to examine over 40 different agency issues including the following: inter-agency agreements, cost-sharing, refugees, increasing minority involvement, national service, decentralization, domestic violence, non-traditional use of RSVPs, determination of program sponsors, office management, field/headquarters relationships and ACTION's relations with Congress.

"Particularly important was a discussion of role definition of various officers at the state and regional levels - state program directors and officers, program operation officers and others," Wilt said. "This conference provided program operations officers the first opportunity to describe their job to us."

Craig Warner, a state program officer (SPO) in Tennessee, added "there is a greater variety of programming and strategy ideas than I realized among the other SPOs. We had a chance to share those ideas."

Several recommendations emerged from the conference, including the following:

- Review of programming in response to the recent influx of refugees.
- Consideration of job rotation and intern assignments between field and headquarters.
- Establishment of a system of sharing programming priorities between field and headquarters.
- Concentration of resources on programs with the greatest potential impact.
- Greater involvement of VISTA sponsors in organizing and advocating for VISTA programming directions.
- Increased dissemination capability of technical assistance at the national level.

More important than the resulting recommendations, according to Region II Director Nestor Llamas was the fact that "the conference provided an excellent setting and opportunity for a free exchange of ideas. It became more and more obvious that we all share the same goals."

Keller added "People in the field sometimes sense a lack of concern on the part of headquarters staff. This feeling was entirely dissipated at the conference. We all want to work together."



DO conference workshop

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Tabankin then introduced Sam Brown who addressed the conference. "We need to recognize that self-help programs, rather than programs that foster dependency are the best hope for the future," Brown said.

He added that VISTA is "putting down new roots to an old idea" about how poor people should be helped. "We know that the best ideas are coming from the grassroots level," he said. "The lesson of the past 15 years is that those ideas which come from community groups may be as good as any that come from the experts, and that they may be better.

"By encouraging people to help themselves," Brown continued, "we will not only help them with specific tasks, but convey to them a new way to tackle other problems."

Brown mentioned examples of people using self-help methods to meet their energy needs.

"I have seen countless examples of how poor people, working as neighbors, have come to grips with a critical problem, energy, and done it cheaply, efficiently, and gained by their efforts, a measure of dignity that comes from the recognition that they, and not the government, carried the burden," Brown said.

In an address to the conference on Saturday, Kahn declared that poverty, joblessness and poor housing are more prevalent today than they were in the 1960s at the dawn of the Great Society.

"We have not eliminated poverty when the cost of energy is beyond the means of most families, when millions of people who want to work cannot find jobs at any pay, when housing is bulldozed in our central cities to make way for shopping centers," Kahn said.

On Friday afternoon, First Lady Rosalynn Carter sponsored a reception for pre-registered participants on the White House Lawn. "As I have traveled around our country, visiting small towns and cities, I have seen more and more people involved in self-help," she told her guests. "Among those who have done the most to inspire thousands of neighborhood self-help efforts are VISTA volunteers. The President and I are proud of your work. Your personal commitment to making ours a more caring society means so much."

Mrs. Carter continued, "For every VISTA volunteer, there are dozens of community people you have enlisted working on neighborhood revitalization, community energy conservation, health advocacy, cooperatives, settlement of refugees, legal rights and senior citizens projects."

In a late afternoon address, on Friday, Ambassador Young called the volunteers "the lovers of mankind - of humankind.

"Everything and anything that ever happened to me, happened because somebody cared," Young told the group. "I am here to address you, because in a very real sense, you are people who care. You are serving in a 'caring' capacity, not because you are required to, but because you really and truly believe in it."

Young spoke of the work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in breaking down the barriers and hostility of racism in the nation. "It was out of the period when Rev. King did his work, that we got the kind of conscience that put forward poverty programs and equal opportunity programs," Young said. "I have been involved in this movement of Dr. King, which continues essentially through the spirit of volunteerism that includes almost every aspect of American life.

"We would be so much weaker as a nation, we



Rosalynn Carter addresses VISTA volunteers as Brown, King, Tabankin and former DO Director John Lewis look on.

Entertainers



*(above) Sweet Honey in the Rock
(Left) John Denver
(below) Peter, Paul and Mary*



VISTA Award Winners

ECONOMIC AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Charles Bannerman

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Marion Wright Edelman

Ernesto Galarza

Antonia Pantoja

JOURNALISM

Tom Gish

VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Walter Baker

ARTS

Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee

Bobbie Jean McKiddy

SPECIAL AWARDS

Saul Alinsky

Michael Harrington

Congressman Carl D. Perkins

Woody Guthrie

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Phil Ochs

A. Phillip Randolph

Walter Reuther

George Wiley

Pablo Eisenburg

Sargent Shriver

Peter Yarrow

FORMER VISTA VOLUNTEER

Bessie Bourgeois

Josie Montoya

BUSINESS

E. Cabell Brand

LABOR

Delores Huerta

Ray Rogers

Bill Worthington

PUBLIC SERVICE

Congressman Robert Drinan

CITIZEN ACTIVIST

Nationally Known-John Lewis

Locally Known -Lupe Anguiano

Gale Cincotta

Ruby Duncan

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would have so much less to be proud of, we would be insignificant, were it not for people like you who care," Young said. "The work of people like yourselves is what essentially civilizes our lives and makes it possible for us to live together as brothers and sisters."

He urged VISTA volunteers to continue building a national grassroots movement so that the 1980s will offer "good wages, an end of powerlessness, political favoritism and destruction of natural resources."

Workshops were held on all three days of the conference, some to overflowing audiences. Latecomers stood in halls near the doors where they did their best to hear speakers and panelists.

At a workshop on racism, held before a packed audience, Hyman Bookbinder, Washington, D.C. representative of the American Jewish Committee, said that although there are laws on the books to

guard against racist policies, some glaring examples of racism continue.

"There are two statistics," said Bookbinder, "that painfully indicate minorities are on as low an end of the economic ladder as they were 30 years ago."

He said that average income for blacks remains at about 60 percent as that of whites, adding that minority unemployment, particularly among blacks, runs at nearly twice the level of white unemployment.

"You can be reasonably sure that when the national unemployment figure is around seven percent, unemployment for blacks will be around 13 or 14 percent," Bookbinder said.

LaDonna Harris, president of Americans for Indian Opportunity, Albuquerque, N.M., herself a Native American, said "racism is often very subtle, especially when it involves Indian people." She re-

Awards

(top) Recipient Dr. Antonia Pantoja at left, and LaDonna Harris. (mid-left) Bill Worthington displays award he received for his work with miners. (mid-right) Newscaster Renee Pouissant congratulates journalist Tom Gish. (bottom left) Marjorie Guthrie, widow of folksinger Woody Guthrie, receives award in his honor from Mary King. (bottom right) Actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee express their thanks.



ferred to a federally funded study which concluded that Native Americans have good hand-eye coordination. "You know, like blacks are supposed to have natural rhythm." She said the inference is clear. "It means that while we have these special skills, we are not on the same intellectual level as others."

The unemployment workshop focused on the problems of those hardcore unemployed youth who cannot find work even when the unemployment rate is low.

Stuart Eizenstat, Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs and Policy, discussed the possibility of giving tax credit to employers who provide job training to those 18-24 year olds living below the poverty level.

Providing a tax credit to these employers, Eizenstat said, makes it worth their while to train these youth. He said the Carter administration is recommending this approach.

In a workshop on refugees and undocumented aliens, resource workers from state and private organizations reported on the current situation of immigrants to this country.

Jackie Bong-Wright of the Indochinese Refugees Assistance Program in Washington, D.C. said there are 15,000 Indochinese immigrants in the Washington area.

"Conditions under which these refugees live are not good," she said, adding that there has been little coordination among self-help groups that were organized to aid the immigrants.

"I think it would be a good idea for a local task force to be organized to coordinate the work of the groups," Wright said.

David Ho, director of the Chinese Economic Development Council in New York City, which serves Asians and other new arrivals, said that many of these people are undocumented aliens.

"Contrary to what many people think, refugees are highly motivated people. They are good, dependable workers," Ho said.

Rep. Mikulski climaxed the conference on Sunday with a warning:

"Too many people are acting as if the war on poverty is over," she said. "I'm not sure if that means we won it or it was a tie. Unfortunately, nobody's gotten around to telling the poor people this good news"

Mikulski said she strongly believes that the only real solutions to community problems are those in which the community is fully involved. "I believe that no one knows as much about the needs of a neighborhood as the people who live there," she said.



At the Kennedy Center on Friday evening were (l. to r.) Effie Barry, wife of the D.C. Mayor; Malcolm Wall, of Mississippi Action for Community Education; John Lewis; and D.C. Mayor Marion Barry.