

Edmond C. Hutchinson Oral History Interview – JFK#2 05/31/1966
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Edmond C. Hutchinson was the Assistant Administrator for Africa and Europe, Agency for International Development (1961-1966). This interview focuses on the Africa Program, the relationship of the Agency for International Development with European countries, and specific involvement of the Agency for International Development with African countries, among other things.

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Second Oral History Interview

With

EDMOND C. HUTCHINSON

May 31, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: What was the relationship between the civil rights movement and the African AID program?

HUTCHINSON: Well, I have a feeling that the important relation between the civil rights movement and the African program was really in the opposite direction; that the race relations activities of the United States government, and particularly of the Kennedy Administration, had an extremely important impact upon the attitudes of the African leaders and African governments towards the United States. This was repeatedly testified to by African leaders such as Banda [Hastings Kamuzu Banda], such as Sekou Toure, such as Nyerere [Julius Nyerere].

I'm sure that the interest of some of the civil rights leaders in the United States in Africa may have had some impact on the Administration's position on Africa and aid to Africa. I have a feeling, however, that the interest of the Administration would have been there even without the interest of the civil rights leaders, and I think that it would be fair to say that, while there have been a number of conferences of the civil rights leaders on Africa on the program to Africa, except for a general sympathy with Africa which was transferred to the Administration, they've not been very influential in the determining of the size and content and direction of the program.

O'CONNOR: Okay, we can switch then to what I consider more practical aspects of the questioning. Really my first question is what things, if any, stand out in your mind, in the years '62 and '63 particularly? Are there any particular problems or subjects that you would care to comment on?

HUTCHINSON: Well, those were years of reappraisal and redirection and reorganization. I think if you would take a look at my testimony before both the substantive committees and the appropriations committees, you'd see that these points were made. We were involved, insofar as the African program is concerned, with, one, trying to reorient it from what had been by and large a supporting assistance type activity related to strategic considerations, bases and that sort of thing, in Morocco and Tunisia and Libya and Ethiopia to a developmentally oriented program. This was one of the real problems we were faced with, of how we got out of supporting assistance and into developmentally oriented programs. We haven't quite solved those problems in, say, Morocco, for example, even yet.

Secondly, we were involved in a reappraisal of the quite sprawling technical assistance program which had been built up over the years in an attempt to get it much more concentrated and much more manageable and much more specifically focused. And then we were involved in the practical problems of trying to hook together two agencies insofar as administrative practices, administrative tradition are concerned, particularly the ICA and the Development Loan Fund. The ICA tradition was one of operating by manual order under detailed instructions with few deviations and with a philosophy of doing as much of the aid work yourself as you could; the DLF tradition was one of operating with practically no written orders and formalized procedures and a tradition of having the host country and contractors do as much of the work as possible with general oversight. There was a real administrative problem trying to bring those two traditions together, bring personnel into more harmonious working relations than existed in the past between the two agencies.

I think these were the three basic problems that we were faced with, well, throughout the agency, in fact, but they had particular applicability to the African Bureau insofar as the supporting assistance role as opposed to the developmental role is concerned.

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O'CONNOR: You mentioned Tunisia and Morocco. I wonder if you can be more specific in telling me how this problem was solved, in telling me some of the difficulties in solving these problems. Who, for example, pushed for development programs as opposed to military programs? And what was the reaction on the part of the government involved?

HUTCHINSON: Well, in the Moroccan case the push came fundamentally from the Moroccans insofar as the base is concerned. There had been an agreement by President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] with the present king's father that we would evacuate the base. The present king continued to push this very strongly for his own internal political reasons. The Kennedy Administration accepted the agreement that had been made. So the initiative for getting out of the base came from the Moroccans.

Since we were getting out of the base, then there was a clear desire on our part to stop, in effect, paying a base rental in the form of an annual amount of what amounted to a cash payment to be used for imports. So we began aggressively to reduce that amount of assistance. And we did that even though we didn't have developmental activities to move into. But there was a strong feeling that Morocco's position in Africa and its location, as well as the general U.S. interest in development of the underdeveloped countries generally, required us to provide developmentally oriented assistance to them.

They, however, had been used to receiving an annual amount of money which they could spend anywhere for almost anything they wanted. So a shift from this to deciding that their priorities really were for the development of projects was a very severe wrench and did cause some dislocations in their economy. It caused irritations when projects that they would like to go forward with really hadn't been engineered, or the economic aspects hadn't been appraised. And so it was quite frustrating to them and us. These were the two forces that were operating.

We have not yet really solved this fundamental problem because the Moroccans still find it very difficult to get projects ready. It will probably only be in the fiscal year following this one, fiscal year '67, that we'll really be able to get into a developmentally oriented program there because of the difficulties in actual project development and implementation.

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O'CONNOR: Did you run into any problems or any opposition on the part of the State Department in this wrench from a military program or a defense program, in a sense, to a developmental program?

HUTCHINSON: We didn't run into any problems with them on the question of getting out of the base because they recognized this as a commitment too. We did run into quite severe problems with them in terms of the amount of supporting assistance that should be provided and the rapidity with which we should get out of that aspect of the program and into a developmentally oriented program. They felt we were moving much too rapidly, that Morocco's political orientation required a higher level of assistance than we were providing. This was a strong difference between AID and State.

O'CONNOR: Is there anyone whom I might talk to about this particular problem?

HUTCHINSON: Most of the people who worked on that problem in State are now no longer here in the states. The one that comes to mind most specifically is Dave Newsom [David D. Newsom] who was the office Director for North Africa and is now Ambassador to Libya.

O'CONNOR: Alright, how about the problem of Tunisia? You mentioned that also. Is that just another problem similar, or

HUTCHINSON: It was a similar problem. We didn't have a base in Tunisia, but the Bizerte incident, which was in a sense a security type problem, did cause us to

provide Tunisia with a significant volume of supporting assistance, again as we'd been doing in Morocco.

O'CONNOR: Well, that was not our base though?

HUTCHINSON: That was not our base. That was French. That's right. But the problems that developed as a result of the Bizerte instance caused the United States to move in with a significant volume of supporting assistance to Tunisia. I guess even in '61 we began consideration of a long term commitment and a reorientation towards development

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effort there which has been accomplished. We are totally out of the supporting assistance activity and have a development effort going.

The problems that were encountered here had to do with whether or not you could wean Tunisia away from a high level of generalized commodity imports to a program which involved specific capital projects and which particularly involved U.S. procurement. This has been reasonably well-accomplished, and our program now is a development program there. They've been able to meet and deal with their development problem a good bit better than Morocco has. So while we've had problems, they've not been of the severity they have been in Morocco.

O'CONNOR: Well, did you not have any conflicts or perhaps strong cooperation with the French in regard to this specific problem? Were the French involved at all?

HUTCHINSON: No, the French basically were not involved with us in this problem. The French had held us pretty much at arm's length insofar as all our AID relations with them were concerned.

O'CONNOR: That was one of the questions I was going to ask you--if there had been much cooperation on the part of European countries.

HUTCHINSON: There has been very considerable cooperation with the British; there's been increasing cooperation with the Germans; and there have been incidents of cooperation with the French. But there has not been the full and free exchange and cooperative approaches to a country or to the specific projects with the French that there's been with the other countries. This has been one of the difficulties of the program in Africa--this, at best, stand-offish attitude on the part of the French.

You get evidences that the French in Paris, by and large, would like some closer relations so far as the French bureaucracy is concerned. But they have their higher problem. And then we have had more difficulties with the French in the countries who have tended to be suspicious of the U.S. motives, that there was an idea of displacing them and that sort of

thing which, of course, is the farthest thing from our mind.

O'CONNOR: I was specifically thinking, of course, of the French in Paris, our problems with the French government. The reason I asked you about the attitude of the State Department, the opposition or cooperation of the State Department, of our foreign policy without AID policy, is that the problem sometimes arises where the United States is accused, justly or unjustly, of using aid as bait for specific foreign policy objectives. And I should think this would be particularly acute in Africa, or at least the temptation toward this would be particularly acute in Africa. I wonder if you could talk about this at all? I'm specifically concerned, of course, with the years '62 and '63--problems in the north of Africa, problems in the Congo, for example, or problems in South Africa where it might also have come into a concern.

HUTCHINSON: This is a problem that is always difficult to deal with. It hasn't, by and large, found its expression in Africa in terms of using aid for the accomplishment of specific short term political ends at a specific time. It has not been so crass as to say, "Alright, let's give X country Y million dollars worth of assistance in order to try to influence the specific position they take on a specific issue in the U.N." or "Let's give them a particular amount of assistance at a particular point in time to get them to not recognize the Chinese."

It's found its expression more in the generalized sense of "Well, the Chinese constitute a threat in this particular country, therefore, let's increase the amount of aid that we're giving them in general terms," or "The Russians are likely to come into the sensitive area of the police, or the sensitive area of the Army, so let's have a public safety program, or let's have a military program to preclude." And it so found its expression in terms of the unhappiness of the Department as to the volume of aid that is flowing into the continent as a whole, for that matter, and in particular flowing into particular countries, and their feeling that we ought to go into particular areas because somebody else might go into them. And it's found its expression in terms such as "Since we feel that the amount of aid ought to be larger, let's don't take so much time, let's don't go through the procedures of detailed economic and technical

analysis, let's just provide the aid quicker without the analysis and free of some of the strings such as U.S. procurement, let's don't be quite so concerned about financing of local cost and the possible implications on the U.S. balance of payments."

This has been a fairly difficult problem. I think, though, that the most difficult problem of the Department of State has been the question of whether we're going to concentrate our aid in the relatively few countries where we get the greatest economic return, leaving the French, for example, as the primary aid providers in the most of French West Africa, and whether or not, in the countries in which it does contribute, the U.S. ought to

move in with programs of significance, programs that will really have an effect on economic development in those countries because their size is large enough.

This has been a sharp difference of position within the United States government from the beginning of the African program. And it remains. It's in a sense an unresolved problem. Decisions clearly have been made that the U.S. will concentrate its program and will have only token programs in the small countries, leaving to the ex-metropole the primary responsibility. But the African Bureau of State continues to be very unhappy with that policy.

O'CONNOR: Well, where do you stand on that particular problem?

HUTCHINSON: Oh, I stand clearly that it's beyond the U.S. ability to be all things to all men and that it has to concentrate its efforts. There has been a strain of thought that we shouldn't have any program in most of these countries at all. I have felt that some token programs were in the U.S. interest for straight political reasons and have supported them.

But to undertake major efforts in those countries is in my judgment a mistake on at least three grounds. One, it's beyond the U.S. ability to mount programs in so many countries not only for fiscal reasons--this is minor--but basically for manpower reasons and for management reasons because we have very severe restrictions on our ability to recruit. Secondly, because it is really the responsibility of the ex-metropole, and they're better able to discharge it than we. And thirdly, the prospects in these countries are so very poor as not to justify the investment anyhow.

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O'CONNOR: When you're talking about the African Bureau in the State, you're talking about G. Mennen Williams and Wayne Fredericks, or are you talking about people farther down the line?

HUTCHINSON: I'm talking about all of them, I guess. I think this is a fairly universally held position within the African Bureau of State.

O'CONNOR: Well, why is this position held? For political reasons strictly?

HUTCHINSON: For political reasons, and the pressures that bear upon them are short term political considerations. And so they tend to respond to them. This is, I think, to be expected sitting where they are with the pressures that bear upon them. And also I think it's fair to say that they and the ambassadors are asked to go to all African countries without distinction and ask for support of U.S. positions, and then when we provide aid on a discriminating basis--I started to say discriminatory; I don't mean it in any insulting sense, but it's certainly a discriminating aid program, we do make distinctions--they find it very hard to explain why the distinctions are made.

O'CONNOR: You said this problem has been particularly acute in certain areas. Can you tell me some of the areas? For example, I was thinking of the area of

Kenya might be a specific instance where we would have this kind of

HUTCHINSON: Well, our Kenya policy has been kind of halfway between. We've had a few countries of very major concentration, such as Nigeria and Tunisia; we've had countries where we were providing very small aid on very token basis and leaving it almost exclusively to the ex-metropole; and then we've had countries in which we were in a more median position, and Kenya falls into that category. I would say that insofar as Kenya's concerned, we haven't had too many problems in terms of our position there. We have a program of some size. The British are still playing the leadership role, but we're coming in in a significant way; and I think AF [African Bureau]

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has been reasonably satisfied with the policy. Its dissatisfaction finds its expression primarily in the French West African countries, a country like Sierra Leone, the high commission territories, and to a more limited extent, Rwanda and Burundi.

O'CONNOR: This is entirely off the subject that we've been talking about, but I thought you might be able to add something to it. One of the problems that you must have faced was the whole question of the Volta River Dam, the Ghana problem, and the apparent difficulties in decision making--whether or not we should go ahead with that project or not.

HUTCHINSON: Those decisions had been made shortly before I came in.

O'CONNOR: I did not know that.

HUTCHINSON: So I was not faced with those problems. One of the first jobs I had was to take a look at the documents and that sort of thing and see that they were in order, and actually my signature appears on all of them. But the decisions were made before I came in, and so I can't comment with any real knowledge about those difficulties.

O'CONNOR: Well, one other thing that struck me, I've heard comments that later on there were expressions of regret on the part of John Kennedy or on the part of others, and the problem was then since reconsidered because of, well, let's say the distance to the left that Ghana had traveled.

HUTCHINSON: I could not testify that there were any expressions of regret for having made the decision. There were on a number of occasions requests for consideration of what could be done with respect to the agreements previously made as a result of the drift of Ghana to the left and Nkrumah's irresponsible policies and so on. There were two or three times at which we reviewed the nature of the agreements and what recourse the United States had in the event it was determined to be desirable to cancel the undertakings.

But I never heard any expression of regret for having made the decisions in the first instance.

O'CONNOR: One other specific problem is the problem, of course, of the Congo. And you were involved in that--I don't know quite to what degree, but I do know you were involved in some of the White House meetings that were held on the Congo.

HUTCHINSON: I wasn't at least.... I remember only one meeting that I was involved in on the Congo specifically, decisions on the type of support the U.S. would give militarily, which was not my concern, but the way in which the U.S. could shore up some communications activities and some of the economic activities. So my involvement there has been entirely in terms of the kind of program that was necessary to try to stabilize the economic situation in the country under the very, very trying circumstances, to put it very mildly, that the internal security situation was creating. So my participation there has been entirely in terms of the development of an internal stabilization program, the provision of commodity support, the use of the local currencies for their internal situation, the question of fiscal controls, the question of devaluation of the currency and the type of devaluation which should be involved and the extent of it.

O'CONNOR: In these problems, by the way, I had you marked down for several meetings. The appointment book has you listed for several meetings.

HUTCHINSON: Well, it could be. The one I remember specifically is the one in which George McGhee was making some recommendations with respect to the military activity. Now it is true I did attend a luncheon with Adoula [Cyrille Adoula], and I guess I was here when Adoula came over and talked to the President. He talked to him about his economic problems. I guess it's true I was there two or three times.

O'CONNOR: Well, in talking about these economic problems or in considering them, were you considering only those economic problems of the non-Katanga Congo? Or were you considering the economic problems of both, in effect, both countries, almost, it was at one time?

HUTCHINSON: Well, we were really considering the economic problems of the Congo as a whole. I was not involved in any questions of the specific copper or Union Miniere or Tshombe [Moise Tshombe] economic problems of Katanga. We were concerned only with the questions of the central government's financial position and the kind of fiscal policies that it as a central government should be following, the kind of safe-position measures that make sense.

O'CONNOR: Well, one of the most important arguments for unification of the Congo was that the rest of the Congo could not survive economically without Katanga. I wanted to know what influence, if any, your participation in the Congo problem had on the decision as to whether or not the rest of the Congo could survive without Katanga. I should think estimates or things of this sort that the AID people would have to make would influence. . . .

HUTCHINSON: I think this would be the only influence at all. We would be responsible for making estimates of what the Congo's foreign exchange earnings would be and the extent to which she was dependent upon Katangese exports in order to have a viable economy for the country as a whole. And that was the full extent of our participation there. This didn't require any very detailed work because it was almost self evident that without those exports that the Congo as a whole would not be viable as an economic entity. It was almost self evident.

O'CONNOR: Okay, there are only a few other things that I had in mind at all. I thought perhaps you could mention something about the PL-480 program for Algeria, or perhaps also of conflicts you might have had with foreign governments or with other officials in this government, such as the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency].

HUTCHINSON: So far as the PL-480 program in Algeria is concerned this appeared to be the most appropriate type of assistance that could be provided following on the cessation of the military activities. The dislocations of the war destroyed their productive capacity in foods; there was widespread unemployment; there was, also, however, uncertainty as to the stability of the government and its future

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political orientation. So that food under PL-480 could be provided addressed to their very immediate problem and yet could also be justified on humanitarian grounds without necessarily having any implications with respect to our acceptance of their political position. So it seemed ideally suited to their situation, particularly when it was tied into work programs for rehabilitation.

O'CONNOR: Well, this apparently was an entirely apolitical program.

HUTCHINSON: It was entirely apolitical, a humanitarian program. We justified it almost exclusively on humanitarian grounds, putting people to work, feeding them, avoiding starvation and severe malnutrition, and this is still the primary justification of the program. While the wait and see attitude on their political posture was taken, this was the justification. Now so far as the CIA is concerned, our relations with them have really been quite good. It's been different from what I had expected. They take up with us in any questions that they have, and if we have objections, we voice them. And I

found them quite agreeable to taking our point of view into account. So I haven't had any problem with the CIA. We've had problems with the African countries' phobias on the CIA.

O'CONNOR: Well, I wondered whether or not you would have any problems at all, or have much to do with them, because of the police programs that we have undertaken in Africa and the simple fact of the matter that the CIA is often better equipped for training or for contributing to this sort of program.

HUTCHINSON: Well, on our police programs--most of them have been quite small. Basically, usually directing towards providing a more mobile force and providing them with a communications facility has been our usual type of program which we have found possible to run in the normal manner. Now it's quite probable, in fact it certainly is the case, that we sometimes recruit people with police experience from the CIA. This is certainly true. But they have in a sense been a resource for programs of that sort rather than a problem.

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O'CONNOR: Rather than their using you, you use them.

HUTCHINSON: This has, by and large, been the case. We have followed a specific policy of not creating programs and activities in order to satisfy the CIA.

O'CONNOR: Alright, I think that covers it.

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[END OF INTERVIEW – JFK #2, 5/31/1966]