



## **PKSOI Book Review**

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Review of Two Ears of Corn: A Guide to People - Centered Agricultural Improvement  
by Roland Bunch

World Neighbors 1982

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Review by LTC Jeff Madison

Chief, Stability Operations

Fires Center of Excellence

### **Introduction**

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17

I have found a piece of literature that could fundamentally change the mindset of individuals assigned as advisors in counterinsurgency, stability, reconstruction, and development. That book is, *Two Ears of Corn: A Guide to People-Centered Agricultural Improvement*, by Roland Bunch, World Neighbors\*, 1982.

### **Review**

You may be thinking, “How can an old book about agriculture development help me as a counterinsurgent?”

Although written for folks doing agricultural development, discerning readers will recognize the timeless principles of advising that cut across all lines of effort to include security, governance, and economic development. If agriculture development is your lane, then the theme of this book is an added bonus.

Like “population-centric” counterinsurgency theory, this book is about “people-centered” improvement. The author emphasizes that lasting impact comes from understanding the local people and the things that are important to them.

In today's contemporary operating environment many of us have or will find ourselves serving as advisors to foreign security forces, host nation governments and local civil society or private institutions. I've personally served as a senior military advisor in Afghanistan as well as a governance, economic and agriculture development advisor on a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Iraq. In all cases the training I received did little to prepare me for my role as an advisor. My training included shoot, move, communicate, and medicate, but nothing specifically on how to advise or what I like to call, the "the Art of Advising." The art of advising is something that if not done properly can lead to frustration, wasted resources, lost time, and ultimately mission failure. Had I read this book in advance, my outlook and approach as an advisor would have been significantly different, and the results of my efforts would likely have been more effective.

From my experiences and from digging into this subject of advising over the last couple of years I have determined that there are roughly four categories of people when it comes to being an advisor: 1. Those who intuitively get it; 2. Those who require some enlightenment before they get it; 3. Those who will never get it. 4. Those who say they get it, but their actions don't reflect it. Category 4 is the worst type. At least with category 3 you know where you stand. Which category are you?

Roland Bunch is clearly category 1. "The program is not there to provide a service, but rather to help them learn how to provide that service for themselves." Roland Bunch penned that in 1982 based on his own extensive development experience and from observations shared by numerous other international development programs. For most people who are uncertain as to their role as an advisor by the time they finish studying *Two Ears of Corn* they will likely move from category 2 to category 1.

*Two Ears of Corn* is a handbook of observations, insights, and lessons. It's a book about mindset. The author talks about the importance of including villagers when developing program goals with an objective to turn the process over to them as quickly as possible. Developing goals is useless if the villagers don't have the enthusiasm to participate in the program. When selecting a program area Bunch describes a process for seeing things the

way the locals see them and conducting the development within the proper cultural context. He describes the pitfalls of give-a-ways and simply doing things for people—what he calls paternalism.

Some contemporary advisors talk about the need for “quick hit projects” or the need to exploit “low hanging fruit,” but Roland Bunch encourages advisors to start small ensuring that participating villagers experience rapid, easily identifiable results from their own efforts. The author provides advice on the utilization of locally hired staff, the difference between program monitoring and evaluation, and the importance of planning for program phase-out. In the final section titled, “Expansion and Consolidation,” Bunch describes the multiplying impacts of an effective program and how critical it is to integrate programs with other programs and activities in the area.

Perhaps you’ve heard some of these principles from the myriad writings about counterinsurgency, stability, reconstruction, and development, or perhaps you’ve learned some of them through your own personal experience. The same was true for me. However, this book tells the whole story like none other. Bunch weaves examples of successful and unsuccessful advisory efforts throughout the book tying them directly to the principles he advocates.

Roland Bunch says, “Having already the means and the manpower, we are now learning the method.” Nothing could be truer of our efforts in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Africa. We have committed massive amounts of resources to this mission. What we must now do is improve our method on a similarly massive scale. It all starts with the mindset of our advisors and decision makers. We need to change our mindset and our approach if we want to have truly sustainable impact. The great intergalactic advisor Yoda said it best, “You must unlearn what you have learned.”

Two Ears of Corn has been translated into eight languages and is used by people in government, non-government organizations, and universities all over the world.

\*World Neighbors is a US-based NGO working in integrated rural

development work in some 25 nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

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### **Authors Biography**

▣ LTC Jeff Madison is the Chief, Stability Operations, at the Fires Center of Excellence, Joint and Combined Integration Directorate, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He has been a routine guest speaker and panel member for the Department of State Foreign Service Institute's Afghanistan and Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Team training courses. He has deployed on multiple mobile training team missions to Afghanistan, and has been influential in integrating information and advisor mindset training into Afghanistan PRT and Agribusiness Development Team training at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. He has led a Department of State Satellite Provincial Reconstruction Team in two southern districts of Salah ad Din, Iraq, and was awarded the Department of State Superior Honor Award for his work in governance capacity building, economic development, and civil society organization development. He was the senior military advisor to the Afghanistan National Army Recruiting Command and the first Chief of Current Operations, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan.