This article deals with a project sponsored by the US Agency for International Development that was designed to transfer American adult-education techniques to the developing nation of Lesotho in southern Africa. The goal of the transfer was to improve the quality of education in Lesotho at the primary-school level by creating a nation-wide program to improve teacher skills. Intensive, after-hours, in-country, college-level training was offered to the country’s teachers. Although this approach is common in developed countries, it was a first-time innovative technique for Lesotho. More than 400 primary school teachers participated in the program. The transfer was initially difficult to implement because of a lack of institutional and governmental interest and a “gap” between project implementation requirements and the Ministry of Education’s management capacity. A contingency approach was developed that partially bypassed local institutions. In the short term, the project has succeeded in producing 334 “graduates” and in raising the level of local interest.

The primary-school-age population in Africa is one of the fastest growing in the world. African governments are finding it difficult to provide facilities, supplies, trained teachers, and other necessities to meet the demand. Inadequate financial support for primary schools can reduce the growth potential of these countries. Heyneman’s research findings indicate that in developing countries the return to society for every dollar invested in primary education is significantly higher than returns from educational investments at other levels. His research further indicates that improving teacher quality has a stronger impact on learning than simply providing spaces for all potential students. Some African countries are shifting their emphasis away from providing costly spaces for universal primary education and shifting towards improving the quality of learning.

USAID’s initiatives included projects to strengthen Lesotho’s teacher-training college, grants for revising the primary-school curriculum to include practical skills, and aid to the Ministry of Education for developing a new management system to support teachers throughout the country. Funds for training were directed towards a small number of participants at the teacher-training college and at the central office of the ministry. They were used to train personnel overseas at the masters level and to support local, short-term workshops.

After reviewing the training effort, project personnel concluded that a re-direction of training was necessary in order to achieve a greater impact on the quality of learning in the Lesotho’s classrooms. This resulted in a shift toward strengthen-
ing the teaching and management skills of the large number of ministry employees engaged as primary-school teachers and head teachers. This new project, which began in August 1987, provided intensive college-level courses for primary-school teachers and school managers and is the subject of this paper.

BACKGROUND
Lesotho, which is about the size of Maryland, has a population of 1.5 million and is entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. It is one of the poorest countries in the world with a per-capita income under $500 dollars. Both the political and economic environments in the country are influenced strongly by South African interests, an unstable military junta, and International Monetary Fund constraints. All long-term planning by the government has been curtailed and the ability to sustain projects is limited.

The education budget of Lesotho has traditionally given the lion’s share of funds to higher education. These funds have been restricted to a limited few who attend classes full-time at the country’s two institutions of higher education, the National Teachers Training College (NTTC) and the National University of Lesotho (NUL).(5)

At the time the USAID project began, the structure of higher education in Lesotho had no provision for the development of college-level training programs for the improvement and growth of primary-school teachers. A need existed for a convenient, part-time, comprehensive program to support this clientele.

Lesotho has an extensive primary-school system that is strained by many logistical and administrative difficulties, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional facilities, and a lack of basic materials. For example, 40% of primary-school students have neither a desk nor a chair and 30% of the first-grade students are taught outdoors. The student-teacher ratio is 82 to 1 and classrooms are generally dark and poorly ventilated. Only 12 district education officers currently monitor 1,170 primary schools, 156 secondary schools, and 6,000 primary-school teachers.(6) Therefore, ministry support is not available to plan or implement a teacher-training program, even though the ministry initially agreed to participate in the USAID project.

PROJECT PLANNING
Within this environment, USAID went ahead with a plan to develop self-improvement courses for teachers and administrators. An American advisor was employed on a contract that covered the two-year life of the project. The advisor soon discovered that ministry officials were either unaware of the project or not interested in it. Since funds were scarce, some officials were apprehensive about the impact of additional teacher training. They feared that teacher expectations would rise for certification and salary increases.

Officials from the teacher’s-training college originally felt that, before beginning a program, an extensive needs assessment should be conducted. They felt that fewer members of their faculty would receive masters-level grants for overseas study since project-training funds would now be spent for in-country education courses. Given their low involvement in initial planning, faculty and administrators from the National University were concerned that the training courses might alter plans to offer certificate programs and refresher courses for teachers. Neither school was interested in granting college credit to teachers who successfully completed the program.

The Sustainability Criterion
Sustainability is a traditional criterion used by USAID to evaluate development projects. It discourages, for example, independent operations by a sub-contractor within the host country. In the current case, a combination of local institutions such as the NTTC, the School of Education at NUL, and the ministry were expected to plan and implement the proposed training program. There was reason to believe that the program would, if successful, be continued after project funds were spent. However, these institutions were not prepared to participate within the time frame allowed. Serious implementation problems were created when disagreements arose over the expectations of major project stakeholders (i.e., ministry officials, primary school teachers, USAID, and American sub-contractors).

Addressing the sustainability criterion, Rondinelli (7) says the primary determinants affecting management strategy are the level of innovation in project tasks, the degree of uncertainty in the socio-economic environment, and the value orientation of the participants. Projects should be stopped, he says, when insurmountable gaps occur between project management requirements and the managerial capacity of local institutions. Highly stable socio-economic environments combined with innovative and participative local management processes are the most receptive to implementation.

The Ministry of Education is operating in an