

Developing Countries - A New Source of Expertise

by Mary Lynn Hanley

The Third World today—specially Sri Lanka with its highly educated personnel is a store-house of knowledge and skills. In fact one of its most difficult problems today is finding employment for this experience. One avenue for this expertise is the brain-drain — discussed in another feature—where Third World personnel often occupy low-rung slots in the skill-hierarchy of the Western World. The author of this article — writing in one of the official U.N. organs—proposes a different strategy which uses Third World skills with dignity. The recent decision of the UNDP's 48-nation Governing Council to make its scope of activities and working methods more responsive to the changing needs and priorities of Third World countries gives official recognition to this requirement.

“... We do not accept any more to continue playing a passive role simply as receiving countries. We are willing to share our experiences and capacities. In this context all developing countries with the support of UNDP's seeding funds and mainly its field offices, should become receiving and donor countries simultaneously.”

Delegate of Brazil to the Twentieth Session of the UNDP Governing Council, June, 1975.

Traditionally, technical assistance, defined as the transfer of knowledge and skills from one country to another, has taken place through exchanges between developed and developing countries. Experts from industrialized nations have been sent to impart their abilities to developing country “counterparts”, or fellows from developing nations have been enrolled for terms of study in developed country institutions. When differences between donor and recipient have been too pronounced, both practices have produced less than ideal results. In the annals of development assistance agencies there are many accounts of well-intentioned experts having been unable to adequately communicate their techniques to local personnel, being physically or psychologically unable to adapt to unfamiliar living conditions, or attempting to transmit technologies which proved too sophisticated or otherwise inappropriate for developing country needs. Similarly, fellowship

students have had to contend with unfamiliar languages and social customs, as well as curricula with little relevance to their countries of origin.

Increased co-operation between countries which are close to each other not only in terms of the stage of development but also in terms of cultural heritage, political traditions and systems, and physical living conditions, could considerably lessen these problems and also greatly expand sources of available expertise.

Against this background, it is more than understandable that the Plan of Action for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, adopted by the UN General Assembly last year, calls for an increase in technical co-operation among developing countries (TCDC).

The Plan recommends specific areas in which developing countries should increase their co-operation with each other. They are asked “to promote and establish effective instruments of co-operation in the fields of industry, science and technology, transport, shipping and mass communication media”. Thus, the sharing of industrial, technological, managerial and legislative experience is urged, along with the co-operative establishment of producers' associations to ensure stable prices for commodities and maritime transport enterprises to promote trade.

The recommendations come at a time when increased numbers of

experts are badly needed. Development progress made over the past few years has, itself, generated the need for more - and more sophisticated - skills. They also come at a time when the developing countries themselves have much to offer.

Pursuant to a 1972 resolution passed by the UN General Assembly, the UNDP convened a special Working Group to study technical co-operation among developing countries. Analysing data submitted by 75 developing countries, the Working Group found that these countries possess a wide range of universities and training and research centres capable of providing instruction in diverse fields ranging from engineering, medicine and home economics to nuclear research for agriculture and satellite communications. More than half of the facilities cited, it noted, had received or were receiving assistance from the UNDP. Increasingly, the Programme has emphasized in its technical assistance activities the building and strengthening of national education and technical institutes and research facilities, which enables developing countries to produce skilled personnel on a continuing basis.

At the same time, however, the Working Group found that the capacities of these facilities were inadequately known and little utilized by other developing countries, due mainly to a widespread communication and information gap and the lack of adequate mechanisms to promote co-operation.

As recommended by the Working Group, UNDP is taking remedial action on two fronts. In its work with developing country governments, it is focusing its activities on strengthening their capacities for identifying “TCDC” opportunities and initiating actual projects for mutual assistance. Within the U.N. system, it is endeavouring to encourage inter-country co-operation in new and existing projects and programmes. A key element in both efforts is the designing and organizing of a new information system for obtaining and distributing data on the capacities and needs existing in developing countries for technical co-operation with other developing countries.

To some degree, the UNDP has always applied the "TCDC" principle to its work. During 1974, for example, 3,011 of the 9,809 experts who served in the field under its auspices were from developing countries, as were 38 per cent of the U.N. volunteers who worked on UNDP supported projects. In addition, 2,551 of 6,834 fellowships it awarded were for study in 110 developing countries and territories.

Through assistance to regional inter-regional and global projects, too, UNDP has fostered co-operation among developing countries. Under many such projects approved for assistance, developing countries have worked together to develop shared land, water and mineral resources, build transportation and communications facilities and control common plagues such as the debilitating disease of River Blindness and the crop-devastating desert locust pest.

At the present time, the Programme is placing its emphasis on multi-country projects in the critical areas of food and trade. International agricultural research institutes in all parts of the world are receiving its support, as are regional institutions such as the West African Rice Development Association (WARDA), which has its headquarters in Liberia. This enterprise involves thirteen countries in research, demonstration, training and data processing activities geared to increasing rice production through the use of varieties suited to individual growing conditions.

In Asia, a regional project is training officials, from Bangladesh, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in methods for initiating trade negotiations under the framework of the Asian Trade Expansion Programme.

At the Arab Institute for Economic and Social Planning in Kuwait officials from countries in the Middle East are also being trained to carry out multilateral trade negotiations, and to facilitate trade procedures, with a view towards liberating trade and eliminating tariff barriers.

DECISION

UNDP's 48-nation Governing Council met in Geneva recently to discuss and debate some "New Dimensions" in UNDP technical co-operation as proposed by Administrator Rodolph A. Peterson.

In its decision on the proposed New Dimensions, the Governing Council requested the UNDP Administrator to introduce more flexibility in the Programme and to make its scope of activities and working methods more responsive to the changing needs and priorities of the developing countries. Using the New Dimensions documents as a basis for action, the Council then adopted the following set of guidelines for the future orientation of UNDP's role:

- (i) The basic purposes of technical co-operation should be the promotion of self-reliance in developing countries by building up, *inter alia*, their productive capability and their indigenous resources — by increasing the availability of the managerial, technical, administrative and research capabilities required in the development process;
- (ii) The selection of priority areas in which to seek UNDP assistance should remain the exclusive responsibility of the Governments of the recipient countries. In this context, UNDP should respond favourably to requests for meeting the most urgent and critical needs of each developing country, taking into account the importance of reaching the poorest and most vulnerable sections of their societies and enhancing the quality of their life;
- (iii) Technical co-operation should be seen in terms of output or the results to be achieved, rather than in terms of input;
- (iv) So long as projects are for the basic purpose of technical co-operation, UNDP should provide, where appropriate, equipment and material resources, adopt a more liberal policy towards local cost-financing and be flexible in requirements for counterpart personnel;
- (v) UNDP should diversify the sources of its supply from countries, to enable it to mobilize in a prompt and efficient manner all available human and material resources for technical co-operation, including particularly those from developing countries;
- (vi) UNDP should give increased support to programmes of technical co-operation among developing countries and should procure as much equipment and services as possible on a preferential basis, in accordance with United Nations practice, from the local sources, or from other developing countries;
- (vii) Governments and institutions in recipient countries should be increasingly entrusted with the responsibility for executing UNDP-assisted projects.

In Latin America, fifty per cent of all UNDP funds allocated for regional projects are consigned directly or indirectly to integration activities. In the Central American subregion, for example, the Programme works closely with the Central American Integration Treaty (SIECA), and a recent joint review of SIECA's plans and needs indicates that UNDP will be giving its support to multi-national co-operative efforts for the development of productive enterprises. It is also expected to assist these countries in the formation of a Regional Committee for the conservation of their natural and cultural heritage.

As the UNDP's Deputy Administrator, I.G. Patel pointed out to the organisation's Governing Council earlier this year, however, "...UNDP's programme, however substantially oriented, cannot encompass more than a small proportion of the resources which developing countries can make available to each other. The bulk of the future, and hopefully expanding flow of such resources will take place outside the U.N. system both bilaterally and multi-laterally. And the scale at which it takes place will depend primarily upon the initiative and effort of the developing countries themselves."