

Economic Progress Through UN—

The Technical Assistance Programme of the United Nations

H. L. Keenleyside

THE technical assistance programme of the United Nations has its foundation in the Charter of the Organization. Those who drafted the Charter recognized that a just and stable peace could only be based on reasonable levels of economic and social welfare for the populations of all countries. Efforts to establish such conditions are an implementation of Article 55 of the Charter in which the signatory Nations pledged themselves to promote "higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development."

The technical assistance programme is designed to contribute to this effort by establishing a mechanism for the systematic exchange of the knowledge essential to economic and social progress and development. The purpose of this article is to outline some of the methods employed in this programme and some of the problems confronted.

In general, technical assistance will be concentrated in those countries that have the farthest to go to achieve decent standards of living. But however great and apparent the need may be, the United Nations can only provide assistance on the expressed desire of governments for help in national development. The technical assistance programme is based solely and directly on *requests* for aid.

Governments or public or private agencies may request that experts or teams of experts be sent for weeks, months or even years to advise them on their problems. Opportunities for study abroad may be

provided to help in building up a corps of trained technicians within a country. This is but the outline within which the details will be sketched later in this article.

Canada is in a particularly fortunate position to contribute to this programme of technical assistance to the less-developed countries. On one hand, Canada has achieved a high standard of living for its people reflected in advanced industrial, agricultural and technical development. As a result it has a substantial corps of scientists, engineers, economists, administrators and other skilled professionals who are acquainted with the latest developments in the techniques of their respective fields. Moreover, Canada is almost unique among the more advanced countries in the variety and extent of its unexploited resources. Its technicians in many fields are, therefore, familiar with the methods of applying knowledge and techniques in new circumstances and under frontier conditions. The pioneering spirit of its people is not daunted by the vast perspectives of work to be done under the programme of technical assistance.

II

DURING the past two or three centuries, the rate of progress in different geographical areas has varied widely. In some countries there has been a fairly steady rise in productivity and in the living standards of the populations. In many others, the application of modern

methods has been slow and uneven. Moreover, the gap between the most and the least developed countries has tended to increase since the progress and prosperity of the former make it easier for them to accumulate capital and to train managers, technicians and skilled workers for still further development.

Today two-thirds of the world population live in economically under-developed areas where poverty, deficiencies in technical skills and lack of capital hinder the efforts of the people to realize their full human capabilities and to utilize the natural resources of their lands.

One of the means to achieve a more balanced world economy is for the countries of the world to share their knowledge of methods that can be adopted to secure higher standards of living. People of the economically under-developed areas can be thus assisted in their own efforts to develop their human and natural resources and to increase their productive capacities. Technical advice and technological information given by the more advanced countries to less-developed areas may therefore be of major significance for the balanced economic development of the world.

Such technical assistance is provided through many channels. Historically private action has been the principal means for the international transfer of technical skills and it will continue to play an important role. Universities, foundations and research institutions also contribute particularly in the fields of scientific training and research. Migration from the relatively advanced countries to those less developed but sparsely populated continues to be an important means also for the transfer of technical knowledge. Technical assistance for the economic development of colonial territories has been greatly expanded by metropolitan powers in recent years. In addition, technical assistance programmes worked out on a bilateral basis between governments have grown considerably in scope and magnitude, especially in the United States.

INTERNATIONAL action in this field, however, has also been increasingly important. The League of Nations and

the International Labour Office provided certain types of technical assistance before the Second World War. Since the family of the United Nations organizations has been created, aid to under-developed countries has progressively assumed greater importance. The Third Session of the General Assembly, meeting at the end of 1948, laid the ground work for international action in the field of economic development through its Resolution 200 (III).

While Resolution 200 (III) deals exclusively with the economic aspect of development, assistance in the fields of social welfare and public administration has been provided for under two separate Resolutions, 58 (I) and 246 (III), passed by the General Assembly in 1946 and 1948 respectively. Although assistance granted under these two resolutions is not limited to under-developed countries and does not aim at the promotion of economic development as such, its object is to raise standards of living throughout the world. Assistance in the fields of social welfare and public administration, when granted to under-developed countries, can be considered as complementary to the aid given in the economic fields.

In 1949 the Economic and Social Council recommended, and the General Assembly decided, by adopting Resolution 305 (IV), on an expansion of technical assistance activities far beyond the limits that had heretofore marked the work of the United Nations in this field. This Expanded Programme will make available for expenditure in 1951 almost four times as much money as that appropriated for the regular programme of technical assistance of the United Nations.

Under the Expanded Programme, technical assistance is rendered on a co-operative basis by the United Nations and several specialized agencies. Each agency is an independent organization with its own constitution and membership. However, they are all linked by common support for the aims of the United Nations. The specialized agencies participating in the expanded technical assistance programme are: International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organi-

zation, World Health Organization, International Civil Aviation Organization, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Technical assistance is available to all governments that are members of one or more of these organizations. In the United Nations itself this work is handled by the Technical Assistance Administration.

While the funds for the regular programmes, which continue to be in operation, are appropriated under the ordinary budgets of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies carrying out technical assistance schemes of their own, the Expanded Programme is financed through voluntary contributions to a special account. In a conference convened in 1950 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, a sum exceeding the equivalent of 20 million United States dollars was pledged by fifty nations for the operation of the programme from 1 July 1950 to 31 December 1951.

The Expanded Programme makes increased provision for the types of assistance that have been heretofore provided by the United Nations, adds certain supplementary services, and emphasizes the importance of improvements in the social and administrative fields as a means of promoting economic development.

The magnitude of the objectives of the Expanded Programme and the fact that for the first time all the major countries have united in a scheme under which they will pool their resources to grant technical assistance upon requests of eligible governments, make this a new and positive advance in the field of international co-operation.

III

THE purpose of technical assistance is to help under-developed countries to strengthen their national economies with a view to promoting their economic and political welfare. There is, however, no intention of trying to impose on them schemes of economic development which would be incompatible with their wishes or

which might in their own judgment weaken their independence or prestige. Technical assistance is therefore given by the participating organizations only in agreement with the governments concerned and on the basis of requests received from or through these governments.

Such assistance is exclusively designed to meet the development needs of the requesting countries; in accordance with the spirit of the Charter and the guiding principles of the programme, it is never to be a means of foreign economic or political interference in the internal affairs of the country concerned, and is not to be accompanied by any considerations of a political nature. While the participating organizations are always prepared to assist eligible governments to analyze their needs and to help them in the formulation of their requirements, the kind of services to be rendered and the form in which they are to be provided is always decided by the governments concerned.

In embarking on such a programme, it is necessary to view it in the proper perspective recognizing what it can accomplish and what are its limitations. The limited funds of the technical assistance programme are not available to supply the needs of the less-developed countries for the capital imports they require. Unquestionably, the economic development of almost all the less-developed countries could be greatly accelerated by a substantial programme of capital investment for resource utilization, increased production, educational and public health measures and those basic utilities, such as an adequate transportation system, fundamental to the creation of a modern economy. But the question of what might be an appropriate and feasible level of capital exports by the economically advanced countries is beyond the scope of this article. It must be recognized, of course, that the rate of economic development in many areas depends to a very considerable extent on the rate of capital imports, and that in such areas the technical assistance programme alone can have little immediate effect on the rate of economic development.

IT would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the long-run effects of the programme even in the areas that are presently starved for capital.

In the first place, it is safe to say that there is no under-developed country which is now making full use for economic development of the capital resources available at home or from current foreign income. In some instances, this is due to an inadequate system of public administration. Under favourable circumstances technical assistance can contribute effectively to the correction of these administrative weaknesses. In other cases, the bottleneck inhibiting the rate of economic development is a shortage of the necessary trained technical personnel. Technical assistance can contribute by supplying technicians from abroad as a temporary remedial measure and by the training of the country's own technicians as a long-run solution.

In the second place, technical assistance can aid in creating a political and economic climate that will be favourable for the import of capital. In many under-developed countries the principal limiting factor on the volume of capital imports from public or private sources, is political instability. By improving standards of public administration, such political instability may be lessened. Moreover, most of the less-developed countries have agricultural economies and in many of these there is little or no surplus production to contribute to capital accumulation. By aiding in the less spectacular phases of economic development as, for example, by increased food production through the introduction of high-yielding seed varieties, economic progress may in some measure contribute to political stability. Such simple improvements may require little in the way of capital imports. Thus, technical assistance may, in the initial stages, provide a gradual development that can help to create conditions favourable to the investment of capital on which, in turn, more rapid economic progress is dependent.

Finally, technical assistance can accelerate the fuller utilization of those agencies for international financing already in exist-

ence. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development has not made loans to the limit of its resources despite the desire of the Bank's officials to do so. This is said to be due to the absence of well formulated investment projects. Technical assistance can and is meeting this problem by aiding needy countries in the formulation of projects suitable for financing by the International Bank.

IV

THE forms in which assistance may be extended under the regular and the Expanded Programmes of the United Nations are as varied as the needs for such assistance. The most important types include the supplying of expert advice with reference both to broad aspects of development and to narrowly defined specialized problems; the granting of fellowships and scholarships to candidates from under-developed countries for study and observation abroad; the establishment of training institutes in the less-developed areas for instruction in techniques of importance for economic development; the convening of expert seminars for the exchange of and the investigation of problems of particular importance; the encouragement of industrial research and construction and operation of experimental units in order to facilitate the adaptation of certain techniques to the needs of less-developed countries; the organizing of practical demonstrations of modern techniques or processes; the dissemination of technical information; and the provision of equipment and supplies for specific projects of technical assistance.

The core of most technical activity is likely to be formed by individual experts or groups of experts working in under-developed countries for periods ranging from several weeks to several years. Whether it is a question of providing advice and assistance on specific problems or in particular fields such as industry, finance, transport, social welfare, etc., or in the broader field of assessment of resources, the determination of priorities

and the preparation of development plans, the United Nations is already equipped or can obtain personnel with the needed technical "know-how" and specialized knowledge. The United Nations is able to draw on the knowledge and skills of experts from many countries with different social patterns and cultural traditions. Although the more highly developed countries will necessarily make the principal contributions in this respect, it must be emphasized that no nation or region has a monopoly of technical knowledge and competence. In fact, in many cases, the methods used in countries in the intermediate stages of economic development fit the needs of still less-developed areas better than do the most advanced techniques used in highly industrialized economies. It is essential, therefore, that the technical contribution of many countries be sought and utilized.

Several countries which stand at the threshold of economic development have asked the United Nations to provide expert assistance in surveying the economy as a whole and recommending the most feasible lines of progress. As an integral part of such a survey, such comprehensive missions normally recommend also an order of priority for further technical assistance. Countries aided in this way may thus embark on an integrated programme of economic development closely linked to the essential technical assistance.

AN example of such a comprehensive mission was that sent by the United Nations at the request of the Republic of Haiti in 1948. Comprising experts provided by the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization, the Haiti mission included specialists in the organization and planning of economic development and agriculture, industry, education, health, monetary and credit and public finance. The mission carried out an investigation and appraisal of the entire Haitian economy and recommended in its report (*Mission to Haiti*, United Nations, 1948) a series of steps in the econ-

omic development of the country and a number of specific technical assistance projects.

These recommendations of the mission to Haiti are now being implemented by a series of specific individual projects. Thus a soils expert has been dispatched to Haiti to advise on the analysis of the soils of the Artibonite Valley as a prerequisite to the determination of the most effective land use in that area. This can contribute to increased food production by stretching the effective resources of this hard-pressed island Republic.

To the same end, an expert is advising the Government on the formulation of a long-range programme to increase the protein food supply from the Nation's ponds and waterways. The peoples of Asia have long supplemented their diet by the systematic cultivation of fish in ponds. By this means, such ponds are cropped as regularly as a field and yield, when properly handled, substantially more protein food than a similar acreage devoted to cattle raising. Despite the favourable opportunities in Latin American countries, such fish farming has never been widely practiced in the latter region. This exchange of techniques between Asia and Latin America, both areas in the early stages of economic development, is typical of the technical cross fertilization produced by the United Nations programme.

These projects are typical of the manner in which specific individual technical assistance projects grow out of comprehensive surveys by initial missions comprising specialists in a number of fields.

During 1950 the United Nations dispatched similar comprehensive missions to Bolivia and Afghanistan.

In other instances, governments may be in a position to formulate requests for specific assistance in particular fields at the outset. Such requests may range from assistance on broad questions of public administration or economic strategy to aid in the operation of particular factories.

An example of the former was the economic mission to Chile which diagnosed the inflationary pressures which have been chronic features of that nation's economy, and recommended a specific pro-

gramme of action to stabilize prices and provide a solid basis for future investment. It may be noted in passing that such potentially inflationary situations are typical of many countries that have begun to achieve a substantial measure of economic development but have failed to reflect this progress in the increased production of consumer goods.

To achieve increased production, an under-developed country may have to solve specific technical problems. Such was the case of Mexico where the developing iron and steel industry has been plagued by problems arising from the inadequate quality of its resources of coking coal. This situation, which is characteristic of the kind of problems faced by many under-developed countries, led to a request by Mexico for a team of experts in coal preparation and its use in iron smelting. The United Nations experts visited Mexico in 1950 and made specific recommendations for overcoming this industrial handicap.

Although the technical assistance programme is not old, the list of such expert missions is too lengthy for detailed description here. It will increase markedly during 1951.

V

THE supply of experts from other countries, however useful in sustaining the flow of advanced technical knowledge, is no long-run solution to the need of the under-developed countries for larger corps of trained engineers, economists, administrators, social welfare specialists and other technicians. The United Nations, in co-operation with the appropriate specialized agencies, therefore assists under-developed countries to provide advanced training for their technical and specialized personnel.

The long-term objective should be to develop adequate training facilities within the under-developed countries themselves. This, however, will take considerable time since it involves the planning, construction and equipment of permanent training institutions. In the meantime, external

help can be provided on a short-term basis.

Awards for training and study abroad constitute an important form of technical assistance. Fellowships granted by the United Nations enable eligible governments to send suitably qualified personnel to countries where special facilities exist for observation, higher training or advanced study of the kind which would promote the economic development or the public administration of the country of the fellowship holder on his return home. Scholarships granted by the United Nations enable under-developed countries to send their most promising graduate students, junior technical personnel, or members of their civil service, to study abroad in the technical training institutes of more highly developed countries.

"Actually, to see things under construction instead of just reading or hearing about them not only produces more vivid and lasting impressions, but leads to a keener appreciation of the operations involved." With these words a senior expert from the Philippine Republic studying under the United Nations Fellowship Programme expressed his conception of the value of this programme.

The needs of this engineer were definite and concrete. Upon arriving to take up his studies he had said: "I want to study hydro-electric projects in varying stages of construction, for example where work has just started, where the dam site is still being subjected to foundation treatments to make it watertight. I want to see methods of diversion and care of rivers during construction; to study current practice in the organization of construction and the inspection of personnel; to observe field methods for controlling and testing construction material, for lay-out of plant and equipment and other aspects necessary to keep construction going." This is a typical attitude and need.

Such fellowships are not limited, however, to engineering fields. Thus, a statistician from Syria who served in his home country as Chief of the Department of Foreign Trade in the Ministry of National Economy studied statistical techniques related to economic planning in the

National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies in France. The French Government arranged for him to investigate the collection and use of statistics in governmental agencies and to supplement this by visits to other places where he was able to see the economic activities lying behind the statistics.

A Chilean employee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fertilizers visited the institutions in England concerned with dairy farming with a view to applying the experiences learned at home.

Similarly, in the field of Public Administration, a fellowship was granted to a Brazilian professor engaged in the development of public administration services in Brazil. During his field studies he interviewed many outstanding professors, graduate students, private specialists and top ranking public officials. He saw numerous institutions, engaged in the problems of improving public administration, in actual operation. He reported that the composite picture of systematic training and research gained during this period will be very helpful in setting up the School of Public Administration in Rio de Janeiro.

The experiences described above are only a few of the many that will help those studying under the programme to apply to their own countries the benefits of their observations abroad.

MORE than 1,000 fellowships, scholarships, and other opportunities for international training are currently offered by the United Nations and the specialized agencies and the number of training opportunities is steadily growing as the organizations expand their programmes of technical assistance. Of the total, more than 600 are for fellowships and scholarships permitting individual study abroad in technical fields including economic development, public administration, social welfare, labour problems, education, science, public health, and child care.

In addition, almost 400 opportunities are available for training at the headquarters of the United Nations and a number of specialized agencies and for group training courses in such subjects as

child health, nutrition, and economic development.

In general, the fellowships and scholarships provide awards enabling specialists in technical fields to spend several months in countries offering advanced methods applicable in the fellow's home country. Applications are made by Member Governments rather than directly by individuals. Candidates are required to have considerable experience in the field of study to be qualified for positions of leadership in their own countries, and to be proficient in the language of the country of study. While studying they are asked to submit periodic reports on their work.

Among the more important fields in which fellowships are awarded are: combined resource development statistics, industrial development, transport and communications, co-operatives, and public finance and fiscal policies.

Facilities for the study of those subjects have been made available in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, India, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

For training in public administration, about thirty fellowships of four months' duration were awarded in 1950 to intermediate and senior civil servants of Member Governments, and about twenty-five scholarships of a year's duration to junior civil servants of Member Governments.

The fellowships and scholarships were awarded on the assumption that the holder would return to the civil service of his own country. The fellowships consisted entirely of practical training; scholarships included both practical and academic training.

Facilities for the study of various aspects of public administration were made available in Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Lebanon, Mexico, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Designed to assist countries wishing to initiate or develop social welfare services, approximately 190 fellowships were awarded in 1950 for men and women sponsored in each case by one of thirty-six governments.

Fields of observation included all phases of social services and social work; social aspects of migration, housing and town and country planning; and services for the handicapped. The fellowships were for three to six months and were available to nationals, twenty-five to fifty-five, of all countries demonstrating the need for the services.

This programme has operated for the past three years, with a total of 414 fellowships awarded through 1949.

In addition to these United Nations scholarships, fellowships and training programmes, the specialized agencies are, of course, active in providing similar facilities.

This programme in international training is expected to expand in accordance with demonstrated needs.

A SECOND way in which the United Nations affords training to technicians of less developed countries is by establishing temporary training institutes in the less developed countries themselves. In general, such training institutes are regional in character involving participants from countries in the area other than the host country. During the past three years, there has been a total of nine such seminars and training institutes attended by 324 participants from 32 nations. A number of training institutes dealt with statistics. In particular, the United Nations afforded training to officials of a number of countries in preparation for the 1950 census. For a number of countries, 1950 represented the first year in which there had been an accurate census taking. A number of other training seminars have dealt with problems of social welfare.

It is expected that in the future a wider range of topics will be dealt with as the subject of such training institutes.

A unique project, which concluded its sessions in late 1950 at Lahore, Pakistan, dealt with the economic appraisal of development projects sponsored jointly by the Government of Pakistan, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the United Nations. This Asian training centre provided a

three-months course for some 50 officials of the Far Eastern countries. In the case of projects such as irrigation, drainage and power production, the proper formulation of reports on the plans for such development projects is an essential first step in carrying them forward. Unless such projects are considered in relation to national economic conditions and plans for future development, and unless their prospective costs and returns are forecast with reasonable accuracy, there can be no basis for determining whether or not it is economically feasible to undertake them. Moreover, there are special problems for particular types of development projects which arise depending upon whether it is devoted to irrigation and drainage, marketing and processing plants or measures for increased food production through the introduction of improved species. Finally, a project statement should include a clear formulation of the proposed organization and administration, and a full consideration of its financial aspects. A legislative body or an international financing institution which is to pass judgment on its feasibility must have full knowledge of the relevant facts. Accordingly, the techniques of considering and relating all such factors in the preparation of project plans was the subject of the three-months training course delivered by experts engaged for the purpose or from the staffs of the co-operating sponsors. Plans are now under way for convening additional institutes of this type.

VI

IN summary, then, the Technical Assistance Administration aids less-developed countries to fill their needs for larger corps of trained personnel by supplying experts upon request to supplement the countries' own technical forces, by fellowships and scholarships for the training of personnel from less-developed countries and by establishing training institutes for specific purposes.

However, the reservoir of technical knowledge is no static thing that once filled needs no replenishing. The one

thing constant about scientific knowledge is its change and development. Such progress is especially necessary in adapting techniques for application to the problems of the less-developed countries. The methods that are successful in increasing production in Detroit may need extensive modification if they are to be used in Calcutta. The techniques of public administration useful in Western Europe may require adjustment to the patterns and customs of the locality for application in Latin America. In some instances, such modifications are obviously essential because of climatic or other ecological differences. For example, the techniques of silviculture developed for application to forests of the temperate zone dominated by 2 or 3 species may be inapplicable to the tropical rain forests in which the occurrence of a hundred species per acre is not unusual. Such striking differences do not obtain in all fields but the expert affording technical assistance is wise to scrutinize carefully the methods he has applied in his own country before prescribing them for other and different situations.

The Technical Assistance Administration must and does consider this factor in its expert advice and training activities. In addition, it will, as need arises, undertake the examination of particular fields

of knowledge to determine the adaptations necessary for their application to the special conditions of various less-developed countries. This can be accomplished through expert working groups assembled for such purposes, by stimulating research activities where necessary, and in some instances by trying out such new developments in pilot projects arranged in co-operation with the governments of less-developed countries.

The variety of tools which may be employed to achieve the objects of the Technical Assistance Programme is not yet fully explored. The Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations showed great legislative wisdom in drafting the terms of reference for the programme so as to permit great flexibility and experimentation in such methods. It is certain that the Technical Assistance Administration does not as yet have all of the answers to the question of how to do its job best. It is humble in the face of the magnitude of the task, but confident that with the support of the participating nations it can contribute effectively to the economic and social welfare of many people in many lands. It has an opportunity of a uniquely constructive character. Its objective is human happiness; its method is co-operation.

A truly democratic state should consist of a few real statesmen and several million politically-minded citizens, and not of a thousand politicians and several million sheep.

J. B. PRIESTLEY