

October 1968

Joint Inspection Unit
Visit of Inspection to Mexico, September 1968
General observations on UNDP/UNESCO Operations

A. Language

My argument that it is highly desirable, if not essential, for foreign experts posted to UN assignments in Latin America to arrive with an adequate knowledge of Spanish is somewhat deflated in the case of UNESCO by the fact that, in negotiating the agreement for co-operation in establishing the Centre for Training Graduate Engineers and Professors of Engineering Science and Technology at the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), the Mexican authorities stated that in considering experts proposed for the project they would rate high technical qualifications above ability to lecture in Spanish. Perhaps in consequence of this, very few of the original experts on this project did, in fact, speak Spanish. However, the interpreters promised in the plan of operations were not always provided and most lectures were given in English, which the bulk of students attending the courses could not follow with ease. A considerable effort has since been made, many of the experts are attending language classes and some of them, it is hoped, will be able to lecture in Spanish when the students' strike ends and normal work is resumed.

2. In general, the language barrier remains a serious factor of inefficiency in many UN projects in Latin America, particularly in the early stages, and I think it very important that linguistic instruction should be given before an expert is sent to his post. The time, effort and expense involved are the more justified since the usefulness of Spanish is not limited as is that of many other languages; UN personnel are to be found in at least a score of Spanish-speaking countries.

B. Inter-Agency Co-operation in the Field

3. The Resident Representative of the UNDP in Mexico City, told me that, at the next of his very useful monthly meetings of representatives of Specialized Agencies and other organizations, he intended to encourage discussion of inter-agency co-operation at the country level. This, I believe, is important and could be valuable. It seems anomalous that, at one end of the scale, inter-agency co-ordination should be discussed assiduously between headquarters while, in the field, experts of different agencies in the same discipline should feel inhibited from indulging in a full and free exchange of ideas. Such co-operation could only result in a broadening of ideas and perhaps an improvement of performance, yet I have already met several concrete examples of diffidence to venture outside agency boundaries.

4. I suggest that it would help to dispel mistaken ideas on the subject if agency headquarters were to circularize their field-staff, specifically authorizing and indeed encouraging inter-agency fraternization.

C. Inadequate Preparation of SF Projects?

5. The course of development of two of the three UNDP/UNESCO/SF projects in Mexico make me wonder whether they were prepared with all the care required to achieve that complete understanding on aims and methods between the three parties involved which is vital for the subsequent smooth running of the operation. I omit the third project, the Regional Centre for Technical Teaching for Industry (Mex.20) since it was declared operational only in March 1968 and I did not have time to visit Guadalajara where the Centre is situated.

6. The National Centre for Technological Teacher Training (CENETI) (Mex.5), handed over to the Mexican authorities in

March 1968 on the completion of the five-year project, began with the primary goal of producing professors of technical education. In circumstances which I did not investigate in depth, the accent on the aims of the Centre appears to have changed, or to have been changed, from the production of teachers to the production of engineers. I wonder if the friction which resulted would have been avoided by more thorough preliminary discussion, leading to better understanding before the start of the project.

7. To turn to another example, it was found, even before the disruption caused by the students' strike, that the supply of really good students coming forward for training by the highly qualified professors provided under the IPN project (MEX. 13) referred to in paragraph 1 above was quite inadequate to produce anything like the 450 masters and 120 doctors degrees called for under the plan of operations. It is impossible to form a definite opinion in the present circumstances, but it will be interesting to see, when academic life returns to normal in Mexico, whether the resumed flow of students will be adequate to occupy reasonably fully the time of the experts assembled for the IPN project. If not, there will be a strong presumption that this aspect of the plan should have been much more closely examined before conclusion of an agreement.

8. In this latter case too, quite apart from the retrospective look at the origin of the project, I recommend that when conditions permit the full resumption of the operation, the Co-Director should submit detailed monthly attendance rolls, in order that Headquarters can form a considered judgement of the cost effectiveness of this project.



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