

JIU

FAO

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Joint Inspection Unit

Visit of Inspection to Mexico. September 1968

UNDP/FAO/SF Operations

A. Negotiation of Projects

Mexico is not unusual in offering many examples of slow gestation of Special Fund projects. Delay in reaching agreement on the details of a plan of operations, while annoying, is not necessarily time wasted if it leads to precise understanding about the co-operation requested and offered. It would be helpful, however, if some means could be found to reduce disagreement on mere drafting points or minutiae of translation which frequently delay signature of a final document long after full agreement has been reached on its substantive content. To this end, the UNDP Resident Representative in Mexico is thinking in terms of a gradual approach, together with the Mexican authorities, to the idea of standardized clauses, wherever these may be applicable, and greater reliance on the relevant provisions of the basic technical assistance agreement to avoid the need for redefinition of such details as those concerning privileges and immunities, which often necessitate prolonged negotiation. It might be profitable to pursue the same line of thought at other posts.

B. The Start of Special Fund Operations

2. I have suggested to the Administrator of the UNDP that, in connexion with the new flexibility on authorizing the start of SF operations described in circular DP/SF/CM 30 and FIELD 25 dated 12 July 1968, he consider the desirability of a more extended period of preparation for most projects in order that the elements essential to the success of the operation can be marshalled, as far as may be, by the time a given project is formally declared operational. In Mexico, as earlier in Ghana,

I found examples of serious delays in the recruitment of experts; of the absence on fellowships abroad of those who were supposed to be co-operating closely with their foreign counterparts; of the arrival of equipment after the departure of the experts who had ordered it. In my experience so far, such dislocations seem to have been almost part of the nature of SF projects hitherto, and I believe that much of the waste of resources entailed could be avoided by careful planning of the lead-in to each project as an integrated operation and by postponing the formal start of the timed programme to make this possible. I am not advocating even further delay in starting operations - I believe that preliminary work should begin as soon as may be practicable and prudent - but I believe that serious steps should be taken to try to cut down the present large number of false starts in United Nations aid projects.

3. It is also clear that in some instances the valuable time of experts is being wasted by inadequate preparation of their work. To take the case of the Oaxaca Project in Mexico, I found at least three examples in which preliminary spade-work would have greatly increased the value of the contribution which experts could have made in the time available to them. The expert on Forest Industries was labouring under the handicap that the current research into the forest resources of Mexico has not yet reached the State of Oaxaca. He was therefore reduced largely to guess-work on the nature and extent of the raw material for his calculations. This is a special case in as much as this expert was a member of an integrated team engaged in an over-all study of a given area, but the principle is nevertheless valid. Several other participants in the Oaxaca Project told me how much time and labour they could have devoted to more important matters if the study could first have been taken as far as possible by local means (perhaps under TA supervision). Thus the study of soil samples, the making of elementary maps, the assembly of a bibliography and of basic literature could all have been done before the arrival of the experts concerned. Similarly, the two mining engineers on the project arrived in Mexico thinking that their task would be primarily to advise on the better

exploitation of existing mines. In fact, they found that there were virtually no mines in operation, all mining activity in Oaxaca having come to a stand-still in 1910 and never having been re-activated. They had therefore to start from zero, with no basic equipment and no maps. A prior reconnaissance by a junior officer would have been an invaluable preliminary step to more productive work by the senior experts.

C. Elasticity of Instructions

4. It is obvious that fairly strict limits to the activities of a project must be prescribed from the outset. It is also clear that the Survey of the Resources of Oaxaca is primarily a research project which is not intended to be operational. However, research without experiment has proved to be frustrating in certain areas. Theoretic conclusions about crop yields or the availability of water, no matter how soundly based scientifically, carry less weight than a few practical demonstrations and these, for lack of provision to purchase, say, seeds or a pump, have proved difficult. Some built-in flexibility would be helpful; to arrange such matters locally is not always as simple as it may sound at Headquarters.

D. Local Purchase

5. Similar considerations apply to the rule under which funds provided from international sources must not be used for local purchases. The rule is logical and well founded, but its results are sometimes bizarre, such, for example, as to see expensive microscopes out of use for lack of glass slides, or to hear of would-be map-makers without compasses. Again, it is easy to underestimate the value of local servicing of equipment by a local agent holding spare parts. Early delivery and the guarantee that goods will not be handed over to the project in a damaged condition are also valuable considerations which local purchase can usually ensure.

6. I understand that another Specialized Agency, which has the same basic rule, nevertheless authorizes local purchase when the above considerations are important, provided the goods concerned are manufactured abroad, that they are immediately available from existing

stock and that the agreement of Headquarters has been obtained in each instance. I submit that this system has advantages.

E. Administration of Projects

7. I have now seen several examples of fairly large SF projects in which the project director (co-director in Mexico) has to devote a considerable proportion of his time to pure administration. When he has been appointed primarily as an organizer, this is acceptable, but when his value to the project rests principally on his scientific background his time spent on administration is largely misapplied. In similar circumstances, a commercial consultant would not hesitate to include an administrative officer in his team and I believe that the UN family should also do so more frequently than at present. Alternatively, plans of operations should include a very detailed description of the full duties required of any locally appointed administrator.

F. Language

8. At some period during the course of many discussions in Mexico regarding the need for foreign experts to arrive at their duty station with an adequate working knowledge of Spanish, it was suggested to me that FAO had already set up in Rome a language laboratory with facilities for "crash courses". If this is so, it represents a long step in the right direction. If not, I hope that the step will be taken soon. It is not enough for a prospective expert to say that he is willing to learn Spanish. Easy though Spanish may be to acquire, it is possible to be willing but unable. Moreover, undertakings to provide interpreters (except for occasional lectures to highly specialized audiences) are not always easy to carry out and the bulk of potential Latin American counterparts are not necessarily fluent in other European languages. Finally, the usefulness of Spanish is not confined to one country; UN personnel are to be found in a score of Spanish-speaking countries, and this clearly strengthens the justification for the effort and expense involved. In the interests of co-operation and as a means of reducing overhead costs, facilities might be made available to other agencies on a repayment basis.

G. Administrative Delay

9. Delay in the receipt of travel authorizations by the FAO Administrative Officer in Mexico seems practically endemic and I was assailed with examples of fellows missing the start of their planned courses, duty travel upset, leave journeys postponed, travellers paying their own fares, etc. The average delay in the half-dozen examples brought to my notice in detail was of the order of over two months, in spite of telegraphic reminders in most cases. I suggest that this subject might deserve closer examination by Headquarters.

Leonard Scopes.



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October 1968

Integrated agricultural programme for teaching,
investigation and extension work, at Chapingo

The Chapingo Project, as I shall call it for short, has enjoyed two of the ingredients which I am beginning to regard as vital for success in a SF project of this nature - a firm base and good personal relations. The Mexican National School of Agriculture, which is virtually an agricultural university, is an old foundation which has benefited from the generosity of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and of US AID, and the financial support of the Inter-American Development Bank. Its premises are a show-piece for visitors to Mexico and the new buildings into which the experts of the UN project moved two years ago are, according to all reports, a framework conducive to productive labour. As for personal relations, I spoke for half an hour with the Project Director, Ingeniero José Rodríguez Vallejo, in the presence of his Co-Director, Dr. Harold Mouat of New Zealand, and came away with the impression of a very happy combination. Ing. Rodríguez is clearly deeply devoted to the success of the project, of which - another advantage - he has been Director from the start. As part-time Director, however (and this arrangement is more the rule than the exception in Mexico), he has the good sense to leave Dr. Mouat a large degree of independence, while being always ready to intervene at short notice, when required, with his valuable influence in the right places.

2. It is lamentable that just at the time when extension and a second phase are under active consideration, the work of the project should have been brought to a standstill by the students' strike, called at the end of July in token of solidarity with the strike at the National University. Although field work has continued to some extent, there has been no formal class work at Chapingo and the experts have not been able to complete their terminal reports, now due after four years of the project's operations. It is to be sincerely hoped that present difficulties will be soon overcome. The project has done

excellent work and acquired influence - partly through the graduation of its alumni into positions of influence in the Ministries - from which it could profit during a second phase. It is a healthy sign that during the discussions on the desirability of a second phase, the accent was primarily on the need for experts and advice, not for equipment.

3. I was told that, of the three main objects of the operation, that aiming at improvement of the agricultural extension service was probably the one which had made the least progress so far. Interest and enthusiasm among members of the extension service themselves have greatly progressed and a recent substantial increase in their basic pay should improve morale and recruitment. The dissemination of knowledge of improved methods of farming among the large rural population is, in the opinion of many, among the most useful functions which the FAO can perform in Mexico and I trust that special emphasis would be given to this in a second phase of the Chapingo plan. Equally useful, for similar reasons, would be the proposed stress on the introduction of new crops and the improvement of existing ones in the tropical areas of the country, which are among the least prosperous at the present time.

4. Finally, two small, but nevertheless important points:

(a) The Chapingo Project was one of those in which the lack of knowledge of Spanish among experts was severely felt (see Section F of my general observations).

(b) The supply of vehicles for which no spare parts were available in Mexico led to delays in putting into service so serious as certainly to outweigh whatever advantage was derived from the initial purchase (see Section D of my general observations).

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Veterinary Education at the Autonomous
National University of Mexico (UNAM)

I was unable to visit UNAM because of the students' strike. My knowledge of this project is derived from no other source than my conversations with the project Co-Director, Dr. Sydney Jennings, and I shall therefore not reproduce views which he has already reported to FAO Headquarters. I should merely like to state that my observations on familiarity with the Spanish language and the possible occasional advantages of local purchases of material and equipment are as applicable to this project as to the agricultural project at Chapingo.



October 1968

Evaluation of the Multiple Resources
of the State of Oaxaca

Although Signor Angelo de Tuddo, Co-Director of the Oaxaca Project, objects to my application of the word "pilot" to his operation, I nevertheless think that the epithet is not entirely misplaced. This evaluation of the resources of Mexico's poorest state undoubtedly arose from a positively touching appeal for advice which might help to raise standards of living, but I believe that this broad examination of a specific area, involving over a score of separate disciplines, has had an element of experiment, the lessons of which should be recorded and studied. I draw one or two conclusions from my own fleeting visit in some of the attached general observations, but I think that it would be valuable to encourage de Tuddo to round off his final report, at the end of the impending extension of the project, by drawing some conclusions from his experience to serve as a guide for future similar operations, such as the proposed Lerma Valley SF project.

2. My visit to Oaxaca coincided with one of the newly instituted reunions of the organizers of the four area development schemes covering the Balsas, Papaloapan and Lerma River Valleys and the State of Oaxaca. The first two are operational plans whose hydrological areas impinge largely on the State of Oaxaca but - more particularly since the Oaxaca Project is not operational but concerned with research - the organizations co-operate rather than clash. The meetings, which struck me as being an excellent example of cross-fertilization of ideas in action, ran concurrently with a seminar attended by staff down to village-promoter level. As de Tuddo had foreseen, the audience-spread was too great for optimum results and the well-supported plea for more practical, earthy meetings will, I trust, produce useful results in future. In any case it was a healthy and helpful exchange.

3. When Dr. Flores visited Oaxaca some nine months ago on the assumption of his duties as Resident Representative, he was impressed by the thought that an inventory without demonstration was not enough

and he lent his weight to ensuring that the product of the exercise should be as heavily angled towards action as possible. This is of course quite right in a preinvestment project and is in line with the spirit of the plan of operations. I too was critical of the absence of a "demonstration element" in the project, but I am satisfied from what I saw of the drafts now in preparation for what would have been the Final Report but for the extension of the project into 1969 that the practical side has been kept well to the fore. In the mining field particularly, where the task has been rather one of identifying individual promising prospects rather than making an over-all study, there is already an impressive list of potential investors. There will also be positive suggestions for small investment in minor industries closely wedded to local agricultural and forest production. Sadly, the core of the problem, irrigation of the central valleys where a quarter of the total state population of two million live and where I saw no flowing rivers even at the tail end of the rainy season, is unlikely to become a "bankable project" and it is hard to see how the much-to-be-desired follow-up can eventuate. Access roads too are a vital requirement and in Oaxaca, as I had found in Hidalgo, roads are the villagers' prime choice in the WFP-supported "Food for Work" projects, but whether such schemes by themselves can produce enough of the infrastructure required is doubtful. Nor is it easy to see from where other resources can be raised. This has been a dilemma at the root of the whole project - as de Tuddo put it to me - with so large a field to handle and the consequent necessity to select, how to strike a balance between producing results and helping those who most need help.

4. One obvious answer to another of the basic problems of the area - uneconomically small holdings of land - would seem to be co-operatives of all kinds - production, marketing, storage and transport. Moreover, co-operation is very much in the tradition of most Mexican Indians, who traditionally combine to prepare celebrations, face disasters and indeed, in the more remote areas, for the purpose of agriculture. However, there is a general prejudice against the word co-operation and vested interests work against the practice. Perhaps something could be achieved by stressing not the new name but the traditional idea!

5. Once again, without attributing any blame, I must revert to the unfortunate results of tardy recruitment of experts. The second mining engineer (of a proposed team of two) arrived twelve months after the start of a two-year plan of operations, the forest products expert fifteen months after, the fishery economist twenty, the manpower expert twenty-two and the expert on soil analysis and land classification twenty-three. Even discounting the extension of the project, these men have not had enough time to give of their best. Clearly, too, such delays, which apply also - inevitably - to the procurement of equipment, hurt a relatively short-term project more severely than one with more time ahead of it.

6. I was interested to note that, since this is a research and not a training project (as evidenced too by the fact that no provision of fellowships is involved), Mexican experts were playing a very full part in the study, not only working alongside foreign experts, but in at least two cases in charge of their particular branches of the common investigation - housing and tourism - on which no outside co-operation was required although the subjects covered important aspects of the investigation.

7. Oaxaca has not been an easy project to execute, but it will, I think, be counted as a success within its limitations. And once again we find two of the basic ingredients for success - immediate occupation of a building at least moderately well adaptable to the purpose of the project and an excellent "fit" between the Director and Co-Director - almost since the start of operations. Finally, I should like to record a tribute to the FAO and UNDP offices in Mexico City, without the constant support and helpfulness of which, the Directors told me, their work could not have been accomplished.



the ready-made services of Pasteur Institutes the world over, he is inclined to be impatient at unaccustomed delays. He has however two excellent colleagues, familiar with the ways of international organizations and ready to apply diplomatic sedation when required.

5. In our conversation, the question of the level of salaries of the Mexican experts arose. The Mexican Government has recently increased the salary of veterinary staff by 80 per cent at the lowest level and by 40 per cent at the next higher level, but private interests can still easily outbid the Government for the services of the well qualified. We must hope that interest in their work will hold the Mexican experts with the team, even at the cost of some financial sacrifice, but I recommend that Headquarters keep a close watch on the situation in case further thought may have to be given to the possibility of action of some kind.

6. Fears were expressed to me that financial provisions under the plan of operations might fall short in three respects: travel, the provision of disease-free cattle for control experiments and the salary of a qualified laboratory technician. Personal contact with other centres performing research on certain angles of the derriengue problem is clearly important; to what extent healthy cattle could be found within rather than outside the frontiers of Mexico is not for me to judge; the provision of funds for the employment of the desired technician for six months seems to show that the reasonableness of the request is acknowledged. It is not for me to argue the experts' case in detail; this they can well do for themselves. But this is such a trim little, promising vessel that I sincerely hope that her perfection will not be threatened by unduly close calculation of the price of tar.

7. I should also like to raise the question of local servicing (please see Section D of my general remarks) with particular reference to the required closed-circuit television system for observation of the proposed artificial bat cave. If this project achieves a break-through at all, this may very well happen on the ecological side, on which the bat cave is a basic and formidable tool, and I find it intolerable to contemplate

Research on Paralytic Rabies in Cattle: Palo Alto

This is one of the neatest, most encouraging SF projects I have yet seen. It is compact, has very specific objectives and these, if attained, will be of immense benefit not only to national economies within and beyond the frontiers of Mexico, but also to the smallest cattle farmer whose stock is now exposed to the devastating menace of vampire-borne rabies, known in Spanish as derriengue.

2. The project is at Palo Alto, 16 km. out of Mexico City, in the precincts of the National Institute for Research on Cattle. The separate offices and laboratories built for the project are nearing completion. The three UN experts of the project categorized them as adequate but not luxurious; this seems to me a proper note to strike. Equipment is now beginning to arrive, some nine months, on the average, after ordering, which seems slow, but some three months after the formal start of the project, which is good.

3. I had a very adequate discussion with the team composed of Dr. Solana, Director of both the Institute and the project, the three experts (Dr. Sureau, Co-Director, epizootiologist, Dr. Bijlenga, virologist, and Mr. Greenhall, ecologist) and two of their three Mexican counterparts. The atmosphere of the discussion was frank and cordial. Dr. Solana, young, brisk, and on Christian name terms with his colleagues, shares his time between his two responsibilities. This could prove to be an occasional minor source of frustration, but all depends on the extent to which he leaves his team a free hand. At least, he gave me the impression of being most interested in the attack on derriengue and personally engaged in its success. He repeatedly stressed the novelty of the team approach to the problem and I did indeed get the impression that this was the spirit which pervaded the operation.

4. Dr. Sureau's year-long lead-in to the project has proved most valuable. He is clearly a highly competent scientist, capable of great attention to detail and with a high capacity for work. Used to

Administration raised in Section E of my general observations. If this looks at all feasible, Mr. Kesteven, who has already found himself faced with a heavy load of administrative work of an instructional nature, might welcome an invitation to express an opinion.

4. Good omens for the future development of this project when it becomes air-borne, are the initial good relations between Mr. Kesteven and Mr. Amin Zarur, who assumed office as Director of the Institute as recently as August 1968, and the enthusiasm among fishermen themselves for the first practical trial research sweep that Mr. Kesteven was able to organize.

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Programme for Fishery Research and Development

Doubts about this project's financial implications are still holding up Treasury agreement. The Resident Representative is pressing for an early decision but it seems probable that no action will result until the Olympic fixation works itself out of the Mexican political psychology. Meanwhile, Mr. Kesteven, the Project Co-Director designate is worried about losing the much needed services of a Swedish Associate Expert in Marine Biology should the delay continue for much longer, but it appears that everything is being done that can. Although I did not speak specifically to any Mexican authority about this particular case, it is clear from general conversation that the Mexican Treasury is, of necessity, following a conscious policy of restraint in the primary interest of maintaining the exchange value of the peso. We can only hope that the Resident Representative will soon persuade the Mexican authorities of the soundness of this proposed investment.

2. Mr. Kesteven, who has been in Mexico since January 1968, told me that his preliminary reconnaissance of the situation convinced him that, to ensure success and continuity after the end of the project, he must work from within the existing Institute for Fisheries Biology Research and not confine the work of the project to research and subsequent recommendations. He is persuasive on this point and I see no reason to contest his conclusions in this respect, more particularly since the Director of the Institute is also the prospective Director of the SF project. Quite apart from the training and continuity advantages of working in the Institute itself, identification of the Director with the project is likely to be greater under the organization which Mr. Kesteven proposes than if he were to be in effect - as often occurs in Mexico - a part-time director visiting a separate department or even a separate building from time to time.

3. Although I did not discuss this with Mr. Kesteven, I wonder whether there is sufficient elasticity in the plan as it now stands to consider with particular reference to the Fisheries Project the point about

the very real possibility of month-long breakdowns on this side of the work for lack of immediate spares and servicing facilities (as we have all seen so many times before) because the rule-book prescribes the issue of invitations to tender. If only one maker has a local agent, that fact, by any method of calculation, should put him many laps ahead of all other competitors.

8. Work on derriengue and related subjects is of course being performed at other centres, as indicated at the beginning of the plan for the project's first year of activity. If, however, as I am assured, Palo Alto is the only institution in which a co-ordinated team is delivering so concerted and well conceived an attack on the problem as a unique aim, it appears to me important that FAO should do all it possibly can to get this primacy generally accepted, particularly in respect of the standardization of all relevant records on the Palo Alto pattern, with a view to the possible use of electronic means for the retrieval of information in due course. The experts assure me that the size of the operation is such that the use of computer methods may well be justified at later stages. But it is at the present stage that the ground must be prepared.

9. Finally, I should like to emphasize that the strength of this project lies in its compact nature and in the unity of its team. Its attachment to the Institute can be a source of strength, but it could also be a source of weakness if there were any attempt to merge activities with that of the larger organization. The project has a strictly limited aim; it appears to be excellently staffed; the team must be left to pursue its target in its own way without reference to the work of its big brother next door.

