

JIU.

JIU/REP/70/2-1

Observations on the work of the Office of Technical  
Co-operation in Colombia

Report

by

L.A. Scopes

Joint Inspection Unit

Geneva,  
March 1970.

GE.70-7486

"Institute of General Administration, Bogotá" (UNDP/SF Project COL 19 Phase I )

"Institute of General and Financial Administration" (UNDP/SF Project COL 38 Phase II)

No one to whom I spoke on the subject in Bogotá failed to apply the word "fracaso" to Phase I of this project, launched with such high hopes in 1965, and one can only sincerely hope that the present move into Phase II will prove to be a genuine "triumph of optimism over experience". Such a victory is possible, but it will require the iron resolve of all concerned to overcome the basic problems which wrecked Phase I and still threaten Phase II. Fortunately, all the organisations involved seem to be grimly determined that the success that evaded the first attempt shall be attained during the second.

2. - The fundamental difficulties are clearly revealed in the Agency Terminal Report for Phase I, dated 1 August 1969, and Professor Ivor Gowon's mid-term report of 1966 still remains extremely pertinent. The most important points have been recently summarized by the new Project Manager under the following heads:- i) Counterparts; ii) The "fellowship drain"; iii) Under-use of equipment; and iv) Employment prospects.

3. On the first point, I cannot overstress that the work of the UN specialists must be primarily directed not to teaching, or independent research, but to the formation of the Institute through the training of their counterparts - by which I mean the whole Colombian teaching staff of the Institute. Quite apart from other indications, I deduce from the fact that the students protested, by way of a strike, against the general quality of the UN experts provided under Phase I that the experts were used primarily as lecturers. This may be largely unavoidable in the early stages of new projects of this nature, which, in the past, have usually been launched before adequately trained counterparts were available, but in Phase II of this project I suggest that the prime target of institution-forming rather than the secondary aim of student production must be continually borne in mind from the very beginning. Similarly it appears

to me that detailed studies, such as that on the Municipal Tax System of Colombia produced by one UN expert during the first phase, should be the work of a counterpart working on a research assignment under the direction of a UN specialist and not of the UN specialist himself. If the Government require work of the latter kind, it would be more appropriately performed by a short-time consultant. I suggest that the paramountcy of institution-forming should be held firmly in view by a requirement that the Project Manager should comment on it specifically in his periodic reports. There appears to be adequate general realisation of the need for the greatest care to be taken in the selection of UN experts for the second phase. The field for this is clear; of the earlier team, only the present Project Manager now remains and it is encouraging to be able to record that he appears to enjoy the full confidence of the Colombian authorities.

4. On the second point, I should like to mention only that, at the time of my visit, of ten fellows who studied abroad under Phase I only two were still connected with the project. This problem is general, not particular, and a satisfactory solution is basic to the whole possibility of lasting success for external technical co-operation in Colombia (and many other countries in similar circumstances). Colombia has a system of obliging returned fellows to serve their parent project, after their return, during a given multiple of the time spent abroad. I submit that the necessity for such a requirement is a measure of the extent to which existing rewards for service are out of line with the national labour market; given competitive terms, fellows would presumably return to their own countries inspired by the training received and eager to devote their energies to the service of the state in their chosen profession. At one remove, similar considerations apply to point four - Employment prospects for students of the Institute - a problem of cardinal importance on which Professor Gowon put his finger as long ago as 1966 in the report mentioned in paragraph 2 above.

5. Point three - inadequate use of equipment provided - has perhaps been overstressed. As far as UN-supplied equipment is concerned, the two most expensive items - the Multilith offset duplicator and the project transport vehicle - have been working overtime for three years. (It will, incidentally soon become more economical to replace the latter than to continue to pay increasing bills for repairs and maintenance.) Of the other items on the property control list at the time of my visit to the project I found only two which were not in working order - the "Varityper" photo composing machine and the "Multigraph" exposure frame and its ancillary "Veripax" signer and offset adaptor. The reason for non-use of these items is primarily lack of understanding of the machinery, in spite of the existence of the appropriate manuals. The Project Manager is considering the best method of getting this equipment into use and I should like to commend his idea that, instead of getting a technician (or perhaps two might be required) from abroad to rectify and demonstrate the correct use of these pieces, the now Secretary General of the Institute, who is himself an "Engineer", might be given a course in general use and maintenance of audio-visual equipment, including these two particular machines. I make this suggestion also in consideration of the many other pieces of equipment which I was shown - projectors in particular - which were simply described as out of order and unserviceable. I believe that not only should the Institute itself be able to maintain such equipment in working order, but that all or most counterparts should be trained in its repair and upkeep. Furthermore, at least one of the UN specialists supplied should be able to instruct counterparts in the use of all the equipment available, in support of the proposed audio-visual aids Centre within the Institute. It is not enough that this Centre should exist and be at the service of the UN experts and their counterparts; the latter must also be trained in the full exploitation of modern audio-visual teaching techniques. To maintain pressure on this point, it might, once again, be useful to require specific periodic reports on this aspect of the project.

6. After drafting the above paragraph I learned that the expert in audio-visual techniques in another Special Fund project centred in Bogotá, to whom I had suggested informally that he could contribute some useful cross-fertilization in this matter, has kindly drawn up and submitted a report on his views to the manager of project COL 38. These observations, which I presume will have been relayed to the executing agency, are clearly more professional and more pertinent than my own.

7. I should like to close these few observations with a rapid comparison of the plans of operations for the two phases of this project:-

COL 19 ( Phase I )

COL 38 ( Phase II )

480 senior officials a year to receive in-service, subject-oriented training.

In-service training courses for middle and top-level officials on common subjects and subjects specific to individual departments.

Post-graduate courses in general and financial administration.

A regular post-graduate course of two years' duration in public administration.

Job-oriented courses for tax and insurance inspectors etc.

Research to support post-graduate teaching and lead to reforms in public administration.

There will be more stress in Phase II on Economic, Financial, Social and Municipal Administration, in line with legislative reforms in these directions. This demonstrates a satisfactory spirit of adaptability to Colombia's requirements, but my attention is drawn to the upward tendency in the direction of the UN effort, as indicated by the words in the Phase II plan of operations which I have underlined above. I trust that independent efforts are being made - on a large scale - to produce or upgrade the army of competent civil servants on a lower level which will be needed to match the Institute's output of staff officers.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the project manager be instructed to report periodically on the specific institution-forming and audio-visual training aspects of his work ( Paras. 3 and 5 )
2. That the utmost care be devoted to selecting the very best specialists possible for the second phase of the project ( Para. 3 ).