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Observations on the Work of the Food and Agriculture
Organisation in Colombia

Report

by

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During a tour of inspection which I carried out in Colombia during the whole month of February 1970, I saw something of, or had discussions on, the following Special Fund projects for which the FAO is Executing Agent:-

The Institute for Training and Research in Agricultural Marketing, Bogotá, which bears the reference number COL 10; the Pre-Investment Study on Forestry Development in the Magdalena and Sinú River Valleys - COL 14; the National Forestry Institute and Forest Rangers' School, Medellín - COL 16; the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Husbandry at the National University, Bogotá - COL 18; and the Marine Fisheries Development Project - COL 22.

The Forestry Development project - COL 14 - has two related but separate aspects, the first being a pre-investment study, the second directed towards practical experiment in reforestation. The pre-investment study is nearly completed and this part of the project is now due to end in May 1970, after having been extended for three months. By all reports, the project has gone well, in spite of the misfortune of the enforced abandonment of one of its chief zones of operation as the result of a breakdown of law and order. There has been excellent co-operation with the Colombian authorities and the counterpart agency - INDERENA (the Institute for the Development of Natural Resources) - is reported as being very satisfied with the results of the study. The reforestation side of the programme is to be continued on a TA basis, which, at the present stage of the operation, appears to me to be right.

The Faculty-forming operation at the National University appears to me to be moving excellently, on the right lines, in a field of great importance for the future of Colombia and to this I have nothing to add.

My observations on the three remaining projects listed above, COL 10, 16, and 22 are given in the following pages.

"Institute for Training and Research in Agricultural Marketing, Bogotá"

(UNDP/SF project COL 10)

(Instituto Latino - Americano de Mercadeo Agrícola - ILMA)

The ILMA project, declared operational in November 1962, came to an end in mid-1969, after two extensions. Its cardinal aim, as expressed in the Plan of Operations, was to train staff for the continuation of the Institute after the end of the project. This goal was not attained. The Institute has disappeared and those who were trained in it by UN instructors have been scattered into various other bodies - the Agricultural Marketing Unit of the National Training Centre operated by the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Science and its Centre for Agrarian Reform, the Farm Produce Marketing Institute, the National Institute for Agrarian Reform, the Administrative Statistical Department and the Agrarian Credit Bank. There is also an embryonic successor movement in the Jorge Tadeo Lozano University at Bogotá. Some of the good which the project did lives after it, but not in the form intended. Government interest in the project appears to have been slight.

2. The Spanish-language title of the Institute indicated the regional intention behind the project, but this also ended in frustration, possibly demonstrating once again that it is a difficult enterprise to combine several countries in the management of an institution and that a nationally controlled teaching institute drawing students from adjacent countries is perhaps a better method of serving a linguistically homogeneous area while economizing on overhead costs.

National Forestry Institute and Forest Rangers' School, Medellín

(UNDP/SF project COL 16)

There are many unsatisfactory aspects to this project; some might have been foreseen and avoided with better planning and greater persistence, others must be written off as due to bad luck and debited to experience.

2. In the first place, this is a "split-level" project, with the formation of a university faculty producing forest engineers and of a school producing forest technical staff rolled into one operation. In my experience to date, such an arrangement rarely produces the happiest results. Moreover, according to the plan of operation, sponsorship of the project on the Colombian side is shared between the Ministry of Agriculture and the National University, while a subsequent devolution of a major degree of authority has taken place from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Institute for the Development of Natural Resources (Instituto del Desarrollo de los Recursos Naturales Renovables - INDERENA). As will be seen later, the views of this organisation on the project appear to differ from those of the original signatory of the agreement.

3. A Special Fund mission sent to Colombia in 1960 spotted the cardinal point that there were three faculties of Forestry in Colombia - at Bogotá, Medellín and Ibagué - and realised the importance of rationalization. This problem proved too complicated to solve, however, the UN project was established at Medellín and the three centres, in spite of continual exhortation to co-operate, are still essentially in competition. The plan of operations for Medellín was drawn within the framework of an expected production of graduates of 20 to 30 a year. The average out-turn over recent years has been of the order of 8, after

a wastage of just over two-thirds of the initial intake of students over the five-year course before final examination. (This wastage figure is roughly that of the whole Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at Medellín, of which the Forestry Studies are a branch). Particularly in Forestry, with its high overhead requirements for teaching outside the classroom and laboratory, this gives a very high cost figure per graduate and leaves the Institute wide open to criticism on this score. On the other hand, trying to improve the output-cost ratio by producing more graduates would, with Bogotá and Ibagué competing in the same field, run the risk of over-production of newly graduated forest engineers, Colombia's overall annual requirements of which I have seen placed at a maximum of 25. In other words, Colombia's total needs in high-grade foresters for the foreseeable future could be produced from one institution in which all students could profit indirectly from the experience of the international specialists now serving at Medellín. One can thus say that the project's utility to Colombia is something of the order of one third of what it might be, if better applied.

4. Failure to plan the start of the project in a logical manner led to the customary difficulties - not to speak of a delay of fourteen months between the signature of the plan and the formal declaration of the beginning of operations which engenders some doubts about the enthusiasm for the project of the Government of the day. There was some complaint of inordinate delay in the recruitment of UN experts, but when these arrived they found themselves without trained counterparts and therefore plunged into lecturing to undergraduates and carrying out independent research (rather than "research to support training", to quote the words of the plan). At the time of my visit, I found among the experts universal and enthusiastic endorsement of the idea that their work would have been much more rewarding had they come to Medellín to find carefully selected counterparts already returned from foreign study and thus prepared to benefit to the full from the experts' advice on pedagogical methods, courses

of lectures, lines of research, etc. As it is, according to my latest information, there are 11 counterparts for 7 UN experts, but only two have gone abroad for study so far. The remaining fellowships are held up for linguistic reasons (are there no forestry facultics in Spanish-speaking countries to which these men can be sent?) and when the fellows go on training there will, for budgetary reasons, be no replacements to sit at the feet of the individual UN specialists whom they have left. Their absences may be from 18 to 21 months. After their return they will engage in the ordering of the particular type of equipment with which each counterpart has become accustomed to working. The project now has only 20 months to run.

5. In the face of this picture it seems to me that an initial delay of two years incurred during the foreign training of carefully selected counterparts would be a small price to pay for a better chance of achieving an orderly, more productive project. Nor should it be impossible, provided it is clear that Government support is fully assured, to compress preliminary negotiations in order to make up for some of this initial delay: in this case, the Special Fund mission visited the Institute at Medellín in August 1960 and operations were not officially started until November 1967. Unfortunately, the above picture is not untypical for university-faculty-forming projects and I recommend that serious thought be given to the possibility of radical reforms in the general procedure for putting this type of plan into operation.

6. I believe that the UN experts and their Colombian counterparts in the Institute can still produce useful results in spite of all the handicaps they carry. I am less sanguine about the prospects for the proposed Forestry School. This was originally to have been set up at a farm near Pereira, but this idea was superseded by that of bringing it

to Piedras Blancas, in the mountains above Medellín less than an hour's drive from the Institute. I visited Piedras Blancas with the Resident Representative's Senior Agricultural Adviser, the Project Manager and the Adviser to the non-existent Director of the Forestry School. The existing buildings at Piedras Blancas are used by the Forestry Institute for practical work in the eighth and tenth semesters of the five-year course. They cannot, without extension, be used also for the two-year course for fifty aspirant forest rangers a year called for under the plan of operations. The proposed new school buildings and dormitories are fully planned, but INDERENA has not yet made available the necessary funds for construction. The UN Adviser to the Director has now been at Medellín for eighteen months without having a Director to work to, a school to work in, or pupils to work with. One Director was selected but did not take up his post. Another, whom I met, is now up for approval. The disadvantages of shared responsibility now come to the surface. Entry into the Forestry School will be by competition among boys completing the fifth year of primary schooling in whom, naturally, the University has no direct interest. It is however prepared to grant all possible facilities and help, at its (rented) premises at Piedras Blancas, provided INDERENA guarantee all costs and sign an agreement setting out the conditions of this co-operation. INDERENA's apparent unwillingness to meet the financial implications, however, casts doubts on its enthusiasm for the whole operation, as does its wish to move elsewhere responsibility for meeting the living costs of forest rangers under training and its reluctance to guarantee subsequent employment for more than half of the school's eventual output of foresters, although admitting that Colombia's need for forest staff at the technical level is very great.

7. The Planning Department in Bogotá is pressing INDERENA to take a more constructive attitude towards the school, but if this is not

forthcoming within the near future I should be very doubtful about the possibility of making a success out of this part of the project, vital though its aims appear to be for the future of Colombian forestry. As I have already pointed out, there are only 20 months of the project still to run - little enough time to erect buildings, recruit students in an unpromising atmosphere and adequately launch a two-year cycle of training. I stressed in conversations in Bogotá that the proposed school is not a UN project approved by Colombia, but a Colombian project to be assisted by the UN under a formal agreement. If, over two years from the start of operations, there is in fact no project for the UN to assist, there seems no good reason for the UN expert to remain. He is a man of energy and enterprise and he has not entirely wasted his time. Among other work, he has laid on and given two three-month courses for two dozen existing forest inspectors at a time, in addition to a course of training in fire precautions. Strangely enough, INDERENA has expressed very warm appreciation of the value of these courses, but this does not seem to have affected its attitude towards the proposed school as such. And this, coming from a counterpart agency, is an indifferent augury.

8. Finally, I should like to refer to a letter from the Executing Agency to the UNDP in New York, of which I saw a copy at Bogotá, bearing the reference COL 16 SF 4/10 and the date 12 February 1970, which, in my view, gave an inadequately explicit picture of the present state of the project, but still suggested a joint mission of FAO and UNDP to see what should be done about it. I am satisfied that the cost of a mission of enquiry would be an unjustifiable expenditure of international money at the present stage. The facts are well known to the Resident Representative and to his Senior Agricultural Adviser, to the Project Manager and to his experts, all of whom are in close touch at their appropriate levels with the Colombian authorities concerned and know their views. Furthermore, the Director General of FAO visited Colombia in May 1969 and Mr. Willstedt,

Project Operations Officer in Rome, visited Medellín and Piedras Blancas as recently as November 1969 and attended the five-hour-long evaluation meeting held in the offices of the Dean of the Faculty on 7 November. The situation has not changed greatly since then.

Summary of Recommendations

1. That the possibility be considered of sending Spanish-speaking fellows with inadequate command of English to Spanish-speaking countries for study (Para. 4).
2. That thought be given to the desirability of so planning similar projects in future that the various inputs essential to success be brought forward in the right order and at the right time - counterparts and buildings, then experts and equipment (Paras. 4 and 5).
3. That UN help to the Forestry School be abandoned unless there is an early and radical change of heart in the Counterpart Agency (Paras. 6 and 7).
4. That whatever further enquiry into this project may be considered necessary at the present stage be pursued in the first place by correspondence (Para.8).

Marine Fisheries Development Project

(UNDP/SF Project COL 22)

I did not see any of the offices or other installations of this project during my stay in Colombia, but I talked of its operations with the Resident Representative and members of his staff, with the Project Manager, with the related Fishery Development TA officer stationed at Buenaventura and with officials of the Colombian Planning Department. From these contacts I received a general impression of a project much appreciated and well supported by the Colombian authorities, headed by a competent and usefully diplomatic manager, blessed with excellent relations between experts and counterparts, overcoming most of the early difficulties of organisation, finance and staffing, and now well launched to do a useful job well. I therefore decided that a closer look into details was unnecessary, more particularly since Mr. Aubray, the Fishing Division's Projects Officer for Latin America had been in Colombia for some two weeks in mid-1969 and since Mr. Iyengar, also of the Division, was expected in Bogotá in March 1970.

2. The peculiarity of having the headquarters of a fishing project thousands of feet high and hundreds of miles from the sea is, of course, the same situation as I had met before in Mexico, which, like Colombia, has the same justification of an inland, mountain capital and shore-lines on two oceans. I would hope, however, that, as soon as the situation justifies a change of emphasis, it would be made financially possible for at least the more technical experts working primarily at the Atlantic field station to establish their families permanently at Cartagena.

3. In most of the fishing projects I have seen to date, I have heard a lament over the time wasted by experts pending the arrival of their research vessel. In the Colombian instance, the Project Manager

told me that he had specifically selected a standard type and refrained from ordering any special adaptations in order to cut the inevitable delay down to a minimum. If, as I must presume, the prime purpose of the vessel is to be a tool of instruction rather than a gift to the recipient country, its value is reduced by the amount of project time which elapses before delivery. Of course, there is useful preparatory work which must be performed by the project manager designate and often some preliminary arrangements which certain members of his staff can make, but the amount of time often unprofitably spent by the UN project staff as a whole appears to me to be quite unjustifiable. The Colombian project was declared operational fifteen months before the research vessel was delivered (an' eighteen months before the first instalment of the Cartagena "field station" building was ready). Might there not be advantage, in future fishing projects, in taking the probable delivery date of the research vessel as a cardinal planning point around which to fit the times of arrival of various experts, the ordering of gear and the departure of fellows on training, according to the prospective real needs of each case?

4. Finally, I cannot refrain from mentioning the subject of the fishing net needed by the project for research into the seasonable availability of certain species of fish, held up by the Customs, for lack of an import permit, for eight months by the time of my visit to Colombia. The net will presumably be released in due course, but the time lost out of a project of five years duration is considerable and cannot be adequately replaced. It is greatly to be hoped that all concerned will bring all their diplomacy to bear to ensure the early conclusion of a more acceptable arrangement for the import of project equipment.

5. Various kinds of bad luck will prevent the TA expert working under the Colombian Apprenticeship Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje - SENA) in the training of middle-level technicians for the fishing industry from seeing the promised new project building at Buenaventura before his departure from the country at the expiry of his contract at the end of 1970. He assured me, however, that he had completed all the necessary preparations and texts for the courses proposed and that instruction could start, on the lines he had laid down, as soon as the building was ready for occupation.

6. This expert's work for SENA in the field of training is quite separate from that of project COL 22, the counterpart agency for which is the Colombian Institute for the Development of Natural Resources (Instituto del Desarrollo de Recursos Naturales Renovables - INDERENA). There is, however, close liaison between the two operations and all concerned are careful to ensure that they are complementary and not competitive.

7. Out of nine fellows who attended courses on fishing, processing and conservation, under the aegis of this TA project, at the Marine Fishing Centre at Vigo, two have been lost to the private sector, where wages offered are some fifty percent higher than those paid in official service. The efficacy of UN co-operation would be greatly increased if this situation could be boldly faced and a solution contrived.

Summary of recommendations

1. That the expected date of delivery of the research vessel be taken as the basic planning point for the calculation of the appropriate timing of other inputs in future fishing projects (Para.3).
2. That every effort be made to establish more efficient working relations with the Colombian Customs Authorities (Para.4).