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Part II

(JIU/REP/70/5-3)

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SUMMARY

This document contains a report by Inspector Macy on Unesco activities in some Central American countries and the observations thereon of the Director-General

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REPORT ON UNESCO ACTIVITIES IN SOME
CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES

by

Robert M. Macy
Joint Inspection Unit

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A. EL SALVADOR

(a) Special Fund project: Faculty of Engineering, University of El Salvador

I do not think the rationale for this "mini-project" makes sense, and suggest a fresh look along the lines outlined in this report.

B. GUATEMALA

(a) Special Fund project: Teachers' Training College

It is recommended that in September, after the new government has been functioning for a couple of months and key personnel changes have been made, a mission be sent to Guatemala to review this project and if possible secure agreement to establish the college separate from the university and under the Minister of Education. The present situation is not viable.

A. EL SALVADOR

Special Fund project: Faculty of Engineering, University of El Salvador

1. In early 1967, when this project proposal was first prepared, engineering was in the hands of two schools of the University of El Salvador. There were about 880 students and 45 full-time professors. The instruction was confined almost wholly to textbooks with little or no demonstration equipment and laboratory facilities. The objective of the university officials was to modernize their engineering courses with modern laboratory facilities, and to extend the engineering student body to 1,750 students and the faculty to 130 professors and instructors during the next five years.
2. This proposal resulted from a visit of a senior official of Unesco in 1966. At the time of this visit an aide mémoire was signed by this official and the Minister of Education. It included a statement regarding the need for experts, equipment and fellowships for purposes of modernizing the Faculty of Engineering. During a five-year period it was estimated that between 500 and 600 hours of experts' time would be required, plus 15 fellowships and some equipment. It was also agreed that the government would request a Unesco/UNDP mission to firm up a Special Fund request. It is not clear from the file how the "500 hour-experts" in paragraph 9 of the aide mémoire became 50 man-years in the actual request from the government for assistance.
3. Unesco with its long experience in such matters is certainly very well qualified to assist the university in modernizing the engineering training. Also, it is noted that the Rectors of the six National Universities of Central America (CSUCA) reached agreement in 1967 on subjects in which each university would seek UNDP assistance. The University of El Salvador was the only one which would ask for such help for engineering. Thus Unesco would not be embarrassed by requests for help from more than one university when the probable demand for engineers in Central America could be met from one institution.
4. In spite of very prolonged attempts to justify a large Special Fund project request, a mini-project including only three man-years was finally approved by the UNDP Governing Council in June 1969, for only one year, and the Plan of Operation has not yet been approved. The project provides for five fellowships, some money for laboratory equipment and three experts to develop a proposed programme for modernizing the engineering curricula for electrical, mechanical and industrial engineering together with appropriate laboratory work. A decision regarding a follow-on project would be determined at a later date. Implementation of the project has now been stopped because of a student strike at the university.
5. I find it difficult to understand the rationale for this "mini-project". It is apparently designed to provide a three-man team to spell out the broad outlines of a modern engineering school for the University of El Salvador. If this is true, why should the project include five fellowships before the proposals are drawn up and approved, when the possibility of a follow-on project had been left completely open? Similarly, should money have been provided for laboratory equipment before laboratory proposals were developed and approved? It is also noted that the experts will have left before the fellows trained abroad have returned, so the experts will have no opportunity to instruct them in the use of laboratory equipment.

6. From another point of view, data in the files support the conclusion that the university could not implement a modernization plan, no matter how well designed, without further outside help. The UNDP funds put in this project may be money wasted unless agreement is reached for a follow-in project. Yet the project leaves the decision open.
7. It is suggested that in this case the more conventional approach should have been adopted, viz. recruiting experts under a Technical Assistance project to draw up an outline plan for modernizing the Engineering School, and following this by a Special Fund project proposal with enough man-years of experts' time to justify Unesco sharing the responsibility for the modernization programme including provision of some of the faculty and instruction in use of laboratories. In other words, unless Unesco is given enough money to really make an impact on a very difficult assignment in San Salvador, I think it should have stayed out of the picture. In any event, I do not think that "mini" Special Fund projects are necessarily the answer to the overall financial situation in Central America where their commitments to the United Nations as a whole were in arrears by about two million dollars last year, particularly in the case of this university which because of its autonomous status cannot have its counterpart payments blocked by the Minister of Finance.

B. GUATEMALA

Special Fund project to establish a secondary teachers' training college

8. In 1948 the School of Humanities of the University of San Carlos was directed to train teachers. However, only 24 teachers were produced up to the time the project was approved, 20 years later. At the time of preparation of this request, there were thought to be 5,000 secondary school teachers in Guatemala, but a more accurate figure was about 3,000 because of double counting. Many were teaching in one school in the morning and another school in the afternoon. Of the estimated 3,000, probably not more than 1% had any professional training.
9. In particular, there was a need for training teachers in the field of science. There is no science faculty in any of the universities in Guatemala. This new Secondary Teachers' Training College was designed to help fill that gap.
10. The training college appeared to be both timely and of high priority. The project was strongly supported by the Minister of Education.
11. The World Bank approved a loan to construct 17 buildings, including a building for the College at the University of San Carlos, and 14 secondary schools. A condition of this loan was the implementation of the Training College project.
12. A capable and experienced Project Director and staff of experts were recruited to carry out the project. Over a year later, however, I found a dedicated but rather discouraged group of experts, most of whom had waited around for months with almost nothing to do (one for ten months), until arrangements were completed for them to start lecturing. They feel unwanted at the university, and day-to-day relationships with university officials are rather awkward. The government authorities have no plan for fellowships and the Plan of Operation does not provide that the government will pay the salaries of fellows going abroad (there is no provision in the government's budget to pay these salaries).

13. Just what went wrong? There is a consensus among the Unesco personnel that the principal difficulty is the fact that the head of the University of San Carlos did not sign the Plan of Operation, and hence feels no responsibility for the project even though the government designated the university as the counterpart agency. The experts feel that a further major weakness is the fact that the college was located in the School of Humanities rather than established as a separate college. This school only covers part of the courses to be taught in the new college, faculty members are not responsible for the college and all expenditures have to be approved by the Dean of the School of Humanities.
14. The Unesco experts feel that the above difficulties might have been avoided if their Headquarters had taken another year to straighten out the administrative arrangements and ensure that the necessary government support for the college existed before staff was recruited and brought to Guatemala.
15. I understand that it would have been very difficult or impossible to secure the signature of the Director of the University on the Plan of Operation because he could not have done so without the approval of the University Council. The actions of this Council are dominated by its student members who are against any foreign loans or technical assistance to the university. I understand further that at the time the project was under consultation, Unesco Headquarters proposed setting up the college separately from the university, but such a step was frowned upon by university authorities and the idea was dropped.
16. Conversations with Guatemalan planning officials indicate that at the time this college was being proposed, its only strong supporter was the Minister of Education. The government's priority concern at that time was the literacy problem. Today there is somewhat broader support for the college because of a growing recognition of the need for science teaching. It is my recommendation that in September, after the new government has been functioning for a couple of months and key personnel changes have been made, a mission be sent to Guatemala to review this situation and if possible obtain agreement to establish the college separate from the university and under the Minister of Education. The present situation is not viable.
17. Alone, among all their United Nations colleagues, the Unesco experts pointed out that they had to wait ten or twelve days after the end of each month for their monthly pay cheques. Apparently the authorization dispatched from Paris on the 19th of each month does not arrive in San Salvador until the 29th or 30th. Communications are slow between El Salvador and the other Central American countries. A simple solution would appear to be to give the UNDP Regional Representative in San Salvador a "standing order" to pay Unesco experts each month during their contract period, rather than authorize the Regional Representative each month to make payments. This procedure would save money through reducing the number of communications to the field, and would permit the Regional Representative to mail cheques to the neighbouring countries at an early enough date to compensate for any local communications problems that may exist. Only the UNDP has such a standing order at the moment. Corrective action has now been taken by Unesco Headquarters.

C. REGIONAL PROJECT

Technical Assistance project: science teaching at primary and secondary levels

18. This project, started eighteen months ago, has been carried further in Costa Rica than in the other countries of Central America. With the help of four science teachers on a full-time basis, a revised science programme has been developed for the primary grades, and introduced into the first grade in 1969, and in the second grade in 1970. Ninety primary teachers received science training in February 1970, and double their number will be trained in July. Unicef provided \$150,000 for laboratory equipment for 150 primary schools, as well as some advanced schools and per diem for training 450 primary teachers. A textbook for primary schools has been completed and simple and low-priced kits were designed and constructed at the university workshop.
19. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama as well as Costa Rica, groups to study the improvement of science teaching - GEMEC - were established.
20. Teacher training was carried out for primary teachers in 1969 and 1970 in all of the countries except Honduras, and a study programme for the primary level was put into effect in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama.
21. This project appears to be off to a good start in a high priority area. Interest among the countries is very uneven, being highest in Costa Rica and El Salvador. Comparatively little interest has been shown so far in Nicaragua and Honduras.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT
"REPORT ON UNESCO ACTIVITIES IN SOME CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES"

(JIU/REP/70/5-3)

1. The Director-General received this report, prepared by Inspector Macy, on 7 September 1970, too late for its submission to the 25th session of the Executive Board. The observations of the Director-General follow.
 - A. Special Fund project: Faculty of Engineering, University of El Salvador
2. The Inspector's conclusion in paragraph 7 of his report that a Technical Assistance project would have been more appropriate in this case than a "mini" Special Fund project, is one possible conclusion. UNDP, with the agreement of executing agencies, is increasingly phasing long-term projects, so that more and more large and long-term projects start with a limited first and/or second phase. In this case, the "mini" project came into being through circumstances described below.
3. The original request of the government (8 September 1967) was for 50 man-years of expert assistance. At that time the Secretariat agreed with the government only that there would be a Unesco/UNDP mission to work with the government on the formulation of the project request.
4. The Secretariat had originally envisaged a project of average size (20-25 man-years) but UNDP suggested that the project should have two parts - one for the Faculty of Engineering and the other for the Faculty of Agricultural Studies. Both faculties drew up projects for their own development, each with 20-25 man-years of expert assistance. The Secretariat attempted to negotiate a reduction in the size of the project, but this proved difficult since UNDP placed emphasis on agricultural studies while the university reaffirmed its interest in developing the Faculty of Engineering primarily.
5. In order to keep the size of the project within the limit of what could be expected to be approved, the Secretariat proposed a reduction in the agricultural studies component. This suggestion led to a joint Unesco/UNDP mission in April 1969 which proposed a project in two phases.
6. Phase one, of limited scope, began officially on 5 October 1970 and was to be followed, if successful, by a second larger phase. It was felt that when Phase two started it would be important to have part of the counterpart staff already trained. This explains the provision for fellowships in Phase one referred to by the inspector in paragraph 5 of his report. Phase one also carries a provision of \$65,000 for equipment since this equipment is necessary even if the project ends with Phase one.
7. In paragraph 6 of his report, the inspector states that the "university could not implement a modernization plan ... without further outside help". This may be overly pessimistic, since the Faculty of Engineering has made notable progress on its own. But a Special Fund project would, no doubt, have a positive and guiding influence on the growth of the faculty.

8. Although the Secretariat regrets that the approval of the second phase must await the completion of the first phase, we cannot but accept this situation and strive to ensure that the success of the first phase will lead to a larger project with little delay.

B. Special Fund project to establish a secondary teachers' training college in Guatemala

1. As pointed out by the inspector in paragraphs 12 and 13 of his report, the principal difficulty encountered has been of a jurisdictional nature involving the Ministry of Education and the University of San Carlos, and has prevented expert staff in the initial period from making a full contribution. The jurisdictional problem commented on below has not been resolved despite frequent negotiations.
2. The training of secondary teachers in Guatemala is traditionally a responsibility of universities. Since the university has by law responsibility for the training of teachers, it was not possible to create an autonomous institution responsible to the Minister of Education, even if this were desirable.
3. Although the Rector of the university favoured the incorporation of the Teacher Training College in the university, he could not sign the Plan of Operation. However, he did, by letter of 3 July 1969, to the Minister of Education, approve the Plan of Operation, which was then signed by the Ministers of Education and Finance.
4. In paragraph 14 of his report, the inspector suggests that difficulties might have been avoided if an additional year had been taken to prepare the project. This is a questionable assumption since there have been extended discussions between the Ministry and the university for some years on this very problem, in part through an occasionally active joint committee, and with technical assistance through a bilateral programme. It was reasonable to expect that the pending IBRD loan - which specified that a teacher training college must exist before the loan would become active - would be the crucial factor in moving ahead from the years of discussion to a practical project.
5. The inspector states in paragraph 16 of his report that the government's priority concern at the time was literacy. But information available to the Secretariat shows that the government had given first priority to primary education and, subsequently, to secondary education, since it believed that the considerable resources required for literacy could not be made available.
6. In paragraph 16, the inspector recommended a mission to Guatemala to review the situation and, if possible, to obtain agreement to establish the college separate from the university and under the Minister of Education. The Director of the Department of School and Higher Education visited Guatemala in July of 1970 and came to agreements with the Rector and Minister as to the conditions necessary for the continuance of the project. These included sound budget provisions by the Ministry and the establishment of proper statutes for the school by the university. Both agreed that they would attempt to meet these conditions by September.

7. In September 1970, another mission confirmed that there had been some progress, but still no firm decisions on these matters. In October, it was learned that the draft budget of the Ministry for 1971 did not include provision for a new group of students for 1971.
8. A meeting was held in October 1970 between the Minister of Education and the Deputy Director-General. It was then decided that there would be a pause in the project until the government was able to assure the local budget for the project and to provide approved statutes for the school. Negotiations are continuing and an oral report will be made to the Executive Board when it considers this document.

C. Regional Technical Assistance project: science teaching at primary and secondary levels

1. The Director-General notes that the inspector found this project "to be off to a good start".
2. Of the six participating countries, greatest impact has been felt in El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama. However, the other countries are also benefiting from the project. In all, 1,550 primary and secondary teachers, primary supervisors and school directors have been trained in new curricula, methods and materials. A total of 192 laboratories has been constructed and 74 more are foreseen. Sets of materials have been prepared in Costa Rica for all of the participating countries.