

THE IMPACT OF LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL ADVISORY EXPERTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW NATIONS

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Summary

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This is an examination of the extent to which long-term, high level experts operating under technical assistance schemes have contributed to the development of new nations.

It is based on a review of the hortatory literature addressed to experts, the constraints within which experts work, and interviews in Paris and London in May - June 1970. By reasoned academic argument the author supports the pro-position that the expert cannot and does not make any appreciable contribution to the development of new nations.

Report

Technical assistance was a big item of expenditure in the aid budget of western nations between the years 1949 and 1956. After that it fell into disfavour as western nations placed more emphasis on financial assistance as a means of increasing available capital in new nations. However, as aid budgets have begun to shrink, the relative importance of technical assistance in those budgets has been increasing in the last three to five years.

It is in view of this development that I undertake to make a study of the extent to which experts have made, either individually or as a groups, a contribution to the development of new nations. I was also interested in the differences in recruitment, training, and on-the-job performance of experts who were part of bilateral assistance programmes on the one hand and multilateral assistance programmes on the other. This paper presents only a part of my findings.

Technical assistance is one of the means which developed nations put at the disposal of developing nations to enable the latter to get closer to the standards and ways of life of the former. Technical assistance attempts to help fill gaps between the skill requirements implicit in development plans and the domestic stock of skills. It also aims to strengthen and supplement a country's capacity to produce new skills via its educational system. In the process of doing this technical assistance may help to inculcate "development mindedness," push latent entrepreneurship in the right direction, help discover natural resources, and help discern and promote growing points in the developing economy, thereby accelerating the development of these countries. Three distinct but interrelated aspects of economic growth are expected to benefit from such assistance: techniques of planning, operation

and production; institutional framework and organizational structure; cultural values and attitudes.

If money and goods are the means by which financial assistance is provided, people are the means by which almost all technical assistance is given. They may be administrators of donor or recipient organizations, experts of all types, and scholars who go to developed countries for further study. In this paper we will only deal with "experts." Experts may be classified according to the agency of sponsorship (nation-state, international agency, private organizations), the time of their service (long-term or short-term), the geographic unit (country or region which covers many countries such as South Asia), and function (advisor, teacher and trainer, operational worker), and level (high level experts, middle level expert, etc.). My concern here is with long-term high-level advisers who go from one country to another under official bilateral or multilateral agreements. Some of my observations may be applicable to other kinds of experts as well.

The expert is expected to render advice on the basis of his professional competence concerning the technical aspects of problems which he sees or are brought to his attention. Legally he is forbidden to participate in the political and decision-making processes of recipient governments, although most experts cannot help do this some of the time either by the inherent nature of their work or because of specific invitation by the host government. The hortatory literature addressed to the expert, however, is full of cautions and warnings on this point.

There is also in the literature considerable discussions about the qualities of the ideal expert, problems of recruiting and training experts, the difficulties experts and recipient countries face in developing satisfactory relationships, the personal frustrations experts have to cope with, and the difficulties of evaluating the impact of any expert or group of experts on the development of a new nation, and suggestions on how to deal with at least some of these problems. Space constraints compel me not to deal with them here and to state briefly the following propositions.

1. Even after granting the difficulties of evaluating the contribution of experts, the evidence available in the literature and which I collected in interviews in Paris and London recently indicate that the expert makes very little or no contribution to the development of new nations. As Ladislav Cerych puts it, the complaint of many persons in developing countries is "We may be under-developed, but we are certainly 'over-expertised'."
2. There is growing dissatisfaction with attempts to explain the relative ineffectiveness of "experting" in terms of shortcomings of individuals whether they are experts or their counterparts.
3. Similarly, while granting in specific terms the relevance of some problems such as the unavailability of suitable candidates and the tendency of most experts who are recruited from the universities to be abstract instead of concrete in providing advice, theoretical and practical considerations cast doubt on the general validity of some of these "problems." Two examples must suffice now. What good is it to complain about the lack of adequate secretarial assistance in developing countries when this inadequacy is itself a result of the

underdevelopment which the expert has come to help alleviate? Or the description of the ideally suitable persons in some of the official and non-official documents convinces me that such mortals, if they do exist, are not only suitable for experting but also for canonization. Even if there are candidates for sainthood among experts, it is doubtful whether they will make contributions of the quality, magnitude or scale required to bring about accelerated development.

4. A significant minority among scholars and policymakers are calling our attention to the constraints within which experting is done, and asking whether or not, or asserting that, these constraints are the most significant causes of the ineffectiveness of experts. In this connection, may I call your attention to G.C. Ruscoe. The Conditions for Success in Educational Planning (Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, 1969) although I consider some aspects of his analysis inadequate.
5. One of the most important constraints is that experts are not entrepreneurs. They are component parts of complex hierarchical structured organizations. Organizations, whatever the purpose for which they were brought into being, develop, over time, rules and regulations for their own survival which may take precedence over goals such as promoting development.
6. Official technical assistance is a special form of relationship between governments which - it is commonly acknowledged - leads to compliments being freely (indeed sometimes comically) exchanged and criticisms watered down. International agencies and government must be very careful not to offend each other. No official technical assistance programme has succeeded where the governmental agencies have been offended by implicit or explicit criticism. This is another constraint.
7. The extent of the success of expert advising - indeed technical assistance programmes - depends on the development of that field of knowledge in the developed nation. For example, the techniques of controlling certain diseases were highly developed in the west. Therefore, it was possible to transfer these to developing countries with great success. It is not possible for the developed nations to claim with any certainty that their techniques of economic or educational planning, forecasting etc. are comparably advanced. Indeed, the theory of economic and social development is rich in speculation and poor in firm knowledge of how development takes place. Thus, the expert adviser cannot claim to be any more knowledgeable on this subject than the people he is advising.
8. Specifically, the two conceptual anchors of social change theory on which technical assistance rests, are diffusion and acculturation. The diffusion is seen to spread from the metropoli of developed nations to the national capitals of the underdeveloped ones, and from there to the provincial capitals and eventually the hinterland. As a result of the diffusion of knowledge, skills, organization, values and technology, the developing nations, in time, become variants of that which made the developed nations successful.

I do not have the space here to go over all the criticisms which can be made of this approach to social change which encompasses sociological and psychological frames of reference. However, I do want to make two points:

(a) The process of economic and social development does not benefit everybody at any given time. In fact, that process usually hits, rather hard, those who are reasonably well-off now and have the money, power, and political influence. The diffusion theory of social change blithely ignores these institutional, political, cultural and economic blocks to diffusion. Some diffusion theorists and strategists have attempted to accommodate these blocks by developing the concept of "absorptive capacity". While the concept has utility in pointing up, and dealing with, problems associated with lack of knowledge, lack of skills and lack of management experience, it can not deal adequately with institutional, social and cultural constraints in a society. Expert advice and other forms of foreign aid therefore tend to be blocked by vested interests at certain points of the imaginary diffusion line. That is why foreign aid benefits proportionately and absolutely the better-off groups in developing countries than the majority of poor people.

(b) It would be extremely naive on my part, now that I have introduced political, economic, and social structure considerations on the recipient nations' part, to ignore the role these considerations play on the part of donor nations. That they exist is readily admitted but not much research has been done on how they affect the process of recruitment, selection, and on-the-job performance of experts. I expect to find significant differences on this subject between bilateral and multilateral aid programmes. There is considerable truth, indeed, in the statement that "Foreign aid takes from the poor in rich countries and gives it to the rich in poor countries."

In this paper, my posture has been that of an academic who is interested in policy without being a Manichean; who tries in his research endeavours to seek to understand policy. I did not undertake policy-oriented research in this instance, so I do not have any recommendations to make in this paper. But if I had to make a recommendation, I would be facing the dilemma that the rapporteur of an OECD Conference on Development Plans and Programs wrote about:

In (some cases,) nothing but a change of government, which in some countries might require a revolution, could pave the way for effective development. It was not felt, however, (concluded the Conference rapporteur) that the planning of revolution as such belonged properly to the curriculum of institutes of development planning.

Or, the discussion section of the First World Congress of Comparative Education Societies.