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Cover Sheet

Interview with Martha Branscombe*
Conducted by John Charnow
at Chapel Hill, North Carolina on 30 July 1983

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* Martha Branscombe served in the United Nations for 13 years. She was Chief of the Social Service Section in the Bureau of Social Affairs. This included her responsibility for family and child welfare, social security, rehabilitation of the disabled, social welfare training and migration. She served as liaison with UNICEF for the Bureau of Social Affairs and was directly involved in development of UNICEF policy extending assistance for social services. Prior to appointment with the United Nations, she served as Chief of the Child Welfare Section with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) at Headquarters in Washington and the European Regional Office in London from its organization until 1946. She was Assistant Chief of the US Children's Bureau, Department of Health, Education and Welfare during the initial period of organization and operations of UNICEF and assisted in the organization of the US Committee for UNICEF. Katharine Lenroot was then Chief of the US Children's Bureau and as US member of the Executive Board played a major role in the formulation of UNICEF policy and programme development. After resigning from the United Nations she became Senior Social Welfare Consultant for the Agency for International Development, US Department of State.

conception of what the situation is like in Europe. He is just a bright young man. He was vigorously fighting this and he carried a lot of weight in the Department. Yes, I was very much aware of this battle that went on and he was only one of many including those supporting the specialized agencies.

Charnow: You were talking about the opposition, the split within the US Government, on whether there should be a separate children's agency. What would you say would be the reasons why there would be opposition. You mentioned one person who was not sympathetic to children, but weren't there also other reasons?

Branscombe: Yes. They thought, as I recall it, that it was unnecessary to keep on multiplying agencies. In addition to those previously affiliated with the League, there were already several new specialized agencies being set up and it was going to cost too much money administratively. This also came at a time when I think they were feeling that the emergency period was over that this kind of business should be left to the specialized agencies and to the governments and that there was no need to set up a separate agency just for children. A separate children's agency was going to cause conflict with other agencies and cut across lines and make difficulties. And you can understand why that seemed so to some people. Similarly, it was at this same time people were arguing that you did not need a separate children's bureau.

Charnow: Did you have any sense that the specialized agencies were lobbying the US Government to take this position?

Branscombe: Oh, absolutely. Very definitely. By this time a US/UNESCO Commission was being set up in the Department - it was organized by the Department of State and based there. Louise Wright had started the organization of a national commission for WHO. FAO never had a national commission but FAO was one of the strongest opponents of the idea, because you see, UNRRA had done a lot of child feeding and nutrition was still one of the greatest needs of children. They feared that it was going to take away money that they would otherwise have. WHO, of course, is always jealous, and they had the same notion that it was going to take away from resources the governments might make available to them. They lobbied, there is no question about that.

<u>Lenroot/Rajchman/Hoover</u>

Charnow: On the other hand, there were those outside the US Government who were pushing for a children's agency. Rajchman for one and Herbert Hoover. Did you sense any relationship between them and Katharine?

Branscombe: Well, I can't say that I sensed it with Hoover, though she knew him and I'm sure that her father knew him. In fact I met with her and Rajchman several times in the formative stages of UNICEF when he was so perturbed at what he thought was the pressure being brought by the US Government to prevent it or to keep it to

principles she was willing to be a realist about taking into account other people's views rather than using the clout of the US being the principal contributor.

Branscombe: Exactly. I think this is also, you see, a carry-over from her experience in working with State governments in a comparable fashion.

UNICEF life span

Charnow: Did you have any sense that Rajchman or Katharine Lenroot felt that even if it was not for just two years, UNICEF was to function for only a limited time, or that it would ever work in a substantial way outside Europe, or that it might work later in developing countries?

Branscombe: I'm certain that Katharine's assumption was that this agency would continue. I don't think she was satisfied to accept it as an emergency measure to stem the tide after UNRRA closed out. I don't think she ever had the idea that it was going to terminate, I think she expected it to be extended. Now, I think at one point, when they were debating about whether there was going to be a Social Commission as a permanent part of the UN, and it was only a temporary commission for quite a while, I recall in the period of those debates there was some question in her mind as to whether, if they weren't able to get UNICEF extended, it could be embodied in the Social Commission. The old Social Questions Commission of the League dealt mainly with questions of children and women. She never said anything until the time came to contemplate its continuation. But I think she always assumed that it was going to continue.

Charnow: I know that she was the principal author and she introduced on behalf of the US (maybe you worked with her on it), a set of principles on which UNICEF should operate. They were long-range, because what UNICEF would be doing was helping establish permanent child welfare services. We were not going to come in as a relief agency and just provide supplies. Even the original legislation said we could provide technical assistance.

Branscombe: I don't think there is any doubt that Katharine always assumed it would continue and hoped it would broaden the scope of operations to include technical services.

Lenroot/Rajchman

Charnow: Is it your feeling that probably on the basic legislation of UNICEF or the early principles and so on, that she and Rajchman worked very closely together?

Branscombe: Oh, they did. They spent hours together. You may recall some of that because sometimes they met over in Dupont Circle building. I remember they did a lot of work together. I don't think he had the notion it was going to terminate. He was a remarkable man, a tedious man, but remarkable.

had a lot to do also with resources available at that time. And of course, my feeling was that having fought UNICEF so hard, WHO and FAO really wanted to keep it in control so they did not lose the benefit of the resources that UNICEF had. They were not congenial to the idea of UNICEF getting into social services.

Of course, at that time, outside of a few countries, the term social welfare had a different connotation and social work was non-existent in most developing countries. It had long existed in England and the rest of Europe in a less professional context than in the US. It was much more advanced as a profession here than anywhere else. But I could understand why there was this reluctance even though I could see the importance of the countries extending the concept of health. To me it did not have to be entirely separate. My idea of social work, of course, was not just casework. And I could see all of the possibilities of what the Bureau, with its complex of social programmes, could add that UNICEF could support where there was a need for supplies or by amplifying the training for personnel. This I could see.

Charnow: But wasn't there, aside from the general atmosphere and lack of sympathy and feeling that this was not UNICEF's balliwick because we were so predominantly supplies? What could you do in social services with supplies? And if you did it in training why would WHO want social work in training? So didn't you really have a hard row to hoe? I don't think Maurice Pate or probably Adelaide Sinclair were sympathetic to social work as commonly thought of.

Branscombe: Adelaide and I were very akin in our thinking. She had no idea that UNICEF should get into what I call traditional social work programmes. I could see it, frankly. In the first place the countries were not ready for it. One of the battles I used to have with my American friends, Dorothy Lally and company had to do with their notions of what it ought to be in other countries. But they did not fit the stage of development of those countries. We were trying to hammer away at WHO at the time, an approach that modified a strictly sanitary, fresh clean water, immunization approach which gave something more and was a way of dealing with the people to get the people involved - use of the community development approach.

Community development and UNICEF

Charnow: Well now you are touching on community development which was a separate section in your Bureau.

Branscombe: It did not begin as a separate section, though. It was in social services to begin with. You know, initially, the idea of community development grew out of community organization and community action, which in the UN started in the social services section. That is where it originally started and it became separate only after the idea of community development was fostered in India with funds from the Ford Foundation - one of the first places for trying the idea of community development - and the U.S. picked it up with aid to India. Glen Leet had been

developing countries. You have already indicated to a certain extent why you did not make as much progress in those areas with UNICEF and the other agencies that one would expect, in view of the soundness of the ideas. Is there anything else you want to say on this.

Branscombe: Well, I think we did mention that one factor was that some of these possibilities that we saw involved personnel but did not call for significant supplies. At that time UNICEF was mainly a provider of supplies in relation to programmes and the technical advisers required were provided by the agencies. But UNICEF primarily was providing supplies. Most of the programmes we were speaking of, other than some assistance with local costs for training personnel did not involve much by way of supplies. That is one factor plus the fact that it was not necessarily an acceptable idea in a lot of circles. Our own government was not a strong supporter of social service programmes, if you recall, and France, for example, social workers were really trained in two ways - primarily as nurses with a social work layer. They were primarily in the health field and trained as nurses on the one hand and on the other, as assistants sociale who were mainly government personnel carrying out public assistance. And, of course, the British had a different system also, much more akin to the American system as they had a lot more exchange even then. The social welfare programme of the UN operated out of its Geneva office, provided significant exchanges between and among the European countries. When it came to the countries UNICEF was assisting, they did not have programmes in this field. Most of the countries were only just beginning to set up some kind of a welfare service. This lack of structure for programming within the countries was another factor.

International Children's Centre

Charnow: You know we were helping finance the International Children's Centre and as I gather, the Department of Social Affairs was negotiating with them to get some elements of social welfare into their training. On the UNICEF side we had the feeling that Debré was fairly well advanced in getting the social aspects into ICC training.

Branscombe: Well, I'm sure Debré was a factor because he was a determining force in who was to be trained in that Centre, as well as the one in Dakar. But I never felt that he necessarily embraced the concept that some of the leaders in the French social welfare system embraced. For example, he and Maurice Milhaud never agreed, not that Maurice was a psychiatric social worker by any means but they did not agree and I think he felt that the French system was it - and he did not see any reason for it to be otherwise. That was primarily from our point of view a nurse-oriented programme.

Social welfare advisers

Charnow: Now, at a fairly early stage, I believe you began to have regional social welfare advisers. You had one, I believe, in our Paris office, mostly for handicapped children. Then you had Maude Barrett working in Guatemala. Then in the Middle East, Iskander. You had some regional ones and some country ones on community development and social welfare, training and so on.

Branscombe: Well the regional ones were mainly attached to the Regional Economic and Social Commissioner. As I recall it they certainly had contact with the regional and country offices of UNICEF, but I don't recall there being any specific activity on their part in developing projects until after the UNICEF policy on social services was adopted in 1959 following Alice Shaffer's survey. And then projects began to be developed. But until then I don't think any steps had been taken by our regional people. Now Maude I think would have been interested and I'm sure Alice Shaffer would have been and we did provide assistance to Guatemala on training.

Technical approval of UNICEF projects

Charnow: There was a system in the early days for technical approval for projects by the concerned agencies. In 1958, I think, we worked out a procedure with the Department of Social Affairs where you could provide technical approval for a project if you wanted to, and could take part in the field work of it. But if you didn't, that did not preclude us from going ahead. If you were not involved in country planning, however, could you give the kind of approval that was meaningful?

Branscombe: Well by and large, I wonder how often we undertook to give technical approval if we did not have somebody on the ground or could send somebody in from a regional office. Now I can't speak for community development.

Charnow: My recollection is that Phyllis Burns would come to the meetings that Adelaide chaired and have comments to make, some of which might have been based on field information from your people, some might have been just a general approach in looking at the projects. Was she pretty much on her own or did she consult with you? For a period you personally seemed to be out of it for a while.

Branscombe: That is right. We got her on as liaison to UNICEF so as to relieve me as I had more than I could cope with. For the most part we delegated to her. When she had a question she brought it to me and I at least always knew what projects she was going to be looking at, but she attended the meetings with your staff, as I recall. I know for a while I did that. We attended your meetings for review of the projects at headquarters when they came in from the field - round-the-table review. In some cases our comments were of a general nature or might have had to do with a knowledge of the situation in the country that related but

was not necessarily a part of the health programme, for instance, but had to do with some other aspect of development in the country, that we might point out. I don't recall us giving any specific technical approval unless it involved a programme for which we had some responsibility.

Charnow: Well there certainly were years in which you had, if you counted up the number of advisers in the field who were financed either through expanded technical assistance or by UNICEF, twenty, twenty-five. Where did you get these people? Were they people with a Western oriented background?

Branscombe: Not all of them by any means. But it was a period where it was difficult getting people released because of the demand for them in their own country. If they had the capability to go to another country as a UN adviser, they were in great demand in their own country. I know how difficult it was to recruit advisers, even from Europe; a lot of the competent people did not want to go into developing areas. The Americans were always eager! So we always had more Americans then we did any other single nationality. We had a good many from Great Britain, some from France but it was always a problem for us recruiting technical assistance advisers from developing countries. The other obstacle sometimes was to get the governments to accept certain nationals. For example it was very difficult to get an East African country to accept an adviser from West Africa. They figured that if they were from another African country they did not know any more than they themselves did. It was often times in the English speaking countries, they wanted Americans, they did not want the British because they had already had them!

Charnow: Are you suggesting that the developing countries really wanted to get people from the developed countries who had a kind of standard approach which might not have been applicable; that it was not just the international agencies forcing it on them?

Branscombe: It was not that they wanted a standard approach but they were aiming at imitating. This was a difficult thing, I can remember people from developing countries telling me, we don't want someone who does not know any more than we know. We want to advance, we want the latest, most advanced thing from other countries - even though they knew they could not do it. I can remember a regional meeting in Nigeria, the first African conference we had on family/child welfare. What they said at that meeting was if you send us people from the countries that don't have any more than we do, it is because you are looking down on us and you don't think we are as good. And they resented it. Very often it was a real problem because they felt you were wanting to keep them at the same level by sending them someone who wasn't from the more advanced countries. That is why they often turned them down. Plus the fact that as those from Third World countries with the required competence were the people their government did not want to release. Same was true in staffing from our own office.

Charnow: I have not particularly thought of it in terms of social welfare. I was aware that in the health field there was a constant battle on our part to keep WHO experts and their colleagues in the health ministries from getting fancy equipment for expensive hospitals from us. More recently the issue arose in connection with childhood disability. We had decided to emphasize a simple approach at the community level with attention to what the family can do for itself, and there were some people associated with the International Year for the Disabled, I believe, feeling this would be giving second-class help. The same issue arises in PHC.

Branscombe: This was a very real factor in recommending advisers. We always tried to recommend more than one, if we had more than one. But almost every time, as I recall, they would want someone from the more advanced countries. I think it was too bad, because it was awfully hard to drill this idea into our people. Some of them said you go in and try to persuade them to do something at a much simpler level and try not to get into such specialization. They feel you don't want to bring them up to your level.

Regional commissions/staff

Charnow: Looking back in retrospect on the organization of your Division, particularly as it affected UNICEF, do you think that on the one hand you might have been too meagerly staffed in New York for the responsibilities you had, and on the other that in some ways you were too centralized for the services you could perform at the field level with UNICEF?

Branscombe: Well there were two things there. Number one, we had no control over the regional staff really. The regional commissions determined what staff they had and it was very difficult for us at time to persuade them to add social service staff. They determined how many posts would be on the regional staff and what the qualifications were. We didn't. We could only urge them to increase the staff. However, when it came to recruitment we had to give final approval, but if they had recommended a candidate, it was very difficult for us to turn them down. The other field personnel was the technical assistance advisers. As you well know we were dependent entirely upon requests from the governments which usually gave higher priority to assistance in some other fields. Therefore at HQ we were not in control of the number of people we ever had in the field, nor their location.

Charnow: From the standpoint of general approach, policy, exchange of experience, was the regional staff responsible to you or to the regional office? Was it a kind of amorphous relationship?

Branscombe: Yes. The regional economic commissions were decentralised, because the countries within the region were the members of the commission and those governments decided the priorities for that region. Granted many things had to come back for approval by ECOSOC or the General Assembly, but once the governments in the region had determined what they wanted by way of programmes from

Branscombe: Well there were two things - number one, I knew Alice's background and interests and I also knew she was part of UNICEF and knew everything about UNICEF a person would require to make a valid recommendation. Secondly, we were strapped for money and I think UNICEF loaned her to us funded by UNICEF.

Charnow: Yes, we did. That was 1959 and it seemed to take several years to get going after that. You may remember, that in 1966 we had an assessment which was done by three consultants, Henry Maas, Ray Godfrey, and Gloria Abate. That was one of your last ventures in Social Affairs, sort of at the end. There was a report to the Board which was a joint report by UNICEF and the Bureau on the findings, and the general conclusions were that there should be strong technical support from the very beginning for projects, that we ought to help countries identify the most suitable approaches; in other words do assessments of needs and experiment with pilot projects and demonstration and training suited to local needs and building up national and local staff and so on, but it was all in terms of family and child welfare programmes as such.

Shortly after that you left the Bureau. Somehow or other the term family and child welfare sort of went out and what we began to classify as family and child welfare were not separate projects. We tried to pick out pieces, if it was something like a day-care centre or involved a community centre, or women's activities we classified that as family and child welfare. We also had something called mothercraft and homecraft and women's activities such as in Kenya, and it got to be something different from what we had previously thought of as being social welfare.

Branscombe: It was much more like what it seemed to me social welfare ought to be. I think part of that had to do with the fact that this was about the time Jean Ilovici took over when I left so you had a French orientation. Aida Gindy had come back after two years in Africa and she had picked up some of this approach you mentioned.

But I also think from my point of view that that was a very good change in terms of meeting the needs of the country in the light of the stage of development and their readiness. They did not have the structure or the personnel for a distinctive organization and therefore to start with those simple approaches to me made sense. Julia left just after I did and went over to Technical Assistance, and Inga Thorssen cared only about womens rights. The whole social programme steadily went to pieces as did community development. Now I don't know what it is. UN gave up the European programme in Geneva and transferred what was left of it to Vienna. Today, nobody seems to be able to tell me what the social programme of the UN is. Mostly it seemed to become women's rights. I see some reports on UNICEF but I don't know what UNICEF is doing in terms of training local personnel for day-care and community centres which to me were the important things to carry on, because there you can train mothers and do things for kids at the same time.

did influence the Bureau if only because it kept a focus on children and was operational in such large number of developing countries.

Charnow: Would you say that if there had not been projects for which UNICEF was providing assistance to latch onto that there would not have been for your field people the development of the kind of advice they could give?

Branscombe: I don't think there is any doubt that it was UNICEF assistance in many countries that did provide a background or a basis upon which other social welfare programmes were furthered because of their being there. If you ask me to be specific, it is rather difficult to recall specific instances but there is no doubt in my mind that it opened the way in many cases for the development and extension of services in the social welfare field for children that would not have taken place, at least not that soon.

Advocacy

Charnow: Even through you have been away for a long time, you were just now a little earlier voicing something which has become very important in UNICEF, namely advocacy for children. This has become especially talked about since the International Year of the Child. Some of the UNICEF National Committees in Europe particularly have a feeling that UNICEF as a spokesman for children has been keeping quiet on some of the things that have been happening to children all over the world affecting their human rights, what particular governments are doing, questions of child labour and so on and so forth, even if we don't have programmes in those fields. Now based upon your long experience in the international child welfare field and your knowledge of UNICEF what would be your reaction to our speaking up on so-called controversial issues and on the approaches we might take.

Branscombe: I think you took issue, certainly with WHO on the cases where they did not want to move into a certain field and didn't want to do certain things whether because of its political implications or that wasn't what they wanted to do at that point. But I as far as I can recall, I have the feeling that UNICEF has avoided controversial issues. Very often those very issues are political.

Family planning

It's like family planning, which WHO have never wanted to support from the very word go. And I think that's placed a restraint or constraint upon UNICEF. You do so much to maintain life and decrease the infant mortality rate and yet do not do anything as result of increasing population to really move out vigorously on family planning. I'm not saying that UNICEF should do the whole thing. In some countries the growth of its population is its greatest problem economically and there should have been a stronger position of advocacy for family planning. Now I know this becomes a hot political issue, it is in our own country but

at least, it seems to me, that where a government is interested and wishes this kind of assistance it ought to be possible for UNICEF to provide it.

Also, I do think in many other cases, it would be very desirable if UNICEF could function as an advocate for children, not only in relation to what's being done in national planning. I think there are probably many other issues where with its status today and its acceptance, UNICEF could be an advocate in some countries where you have very serious problems that are not being given consideration. Because of its acceptance and its status UNICEF could be an advocate for children and have some impact. It would not operate against it.

Pate

I think Maurice Pate undoubtedly was very leary of becoming involved in advocacy because it would inevitably hold the possiblity of confrontation and a political conflict. I think he wanted to avoid that. And maybe it's better for UNICEF not to. It may be more appropriate for some of the other UN bodies to function in this role, but I should think it's a policy question that UNICEF should seriously consider today. When you see child abuse, when we see what happens to refugees, when we see what happens in war situations, in inter-country adoption, etc.

NGO's

Charnow: We haven't discussed one aspect of social welfare - which is the role of non-governmental organizations many of them in the social welfare field. The position we have taken is that they are a very important resource, that they show the way, that they could be pioneers, and so on. Now virtually everything we have said in the UNICEF literature indeed (I've written an awful lot of it myself) has all been positive. But I am aware that we should not ignore many of their weaknesses and some of the things to watch out for in our dealings with non-governmental organizations, particularly since we are now moving into a greater collaboration with them in the field. Based upon your experience what are the things we ought to be careful about?

Branscombe: Well, first I think you ought to be very careful about the basic objectives and methods of operation of the agency. If it's going to proselytize, I think you have to be cautious. The other thing, instead of going in breaking the ground and involving local people, in getting them to set up a suitable structure or to provide services, it becomes a matter of perpetuation of the voluntary agency's own interests and activities. We do that in this country.

Of course, I happen to think that the function of the voluntary agency is to break ground or to do those things you cannot provide by government or it's too small a group to be served to get a big government programme, etc. But it seems to me that one of the important things in the developing countries with the

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