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Interview with Mrs. Catley-Carlson,*
Deputy Executive Director, Operations

by Mr. John Charnow

30 June and 1 July 1983, UNICEF Headquarters

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*Mrs. Catley-Carlson was Deputy Executive Director (Operations) for two years, (September 1981 - July 1983) leaving to become President of the Canadian International Development Agency. Previously she had been CIDA Vice-President in charge of multilateral organizations. She was a member of the Canadian delegation to the UNICEF Board in 1978 and headed it in 1979 and 1980.

30 June

Canada and UNICEF

CIDA/Catley-Carlson involvement

JC: Maggie, how did you get to be involved in UNICEF?

MCC: I was the multilateral Vice President of CIDA in 1978. At that time National Health and Welfare had the leadership of the Canadian Delegation to the UNICEF Board. The CIDA contingent was not terribly happy about this. They felt this was less and less adequate as both UNICEF and Canadian Government policy affecting UNICEF and development policy had both moved forward.

The original designation of responsibility had reflected personalities in the form of Adelaide Sinclair and others but had also reflected the fact that at that time what was being offered was fairly professional health advice to the Board. As UNICEF moved to become a development agency — a full development agency — what was more and more an issue within the UNICEF Board was the kinds of development issues that were coming up in other international organizations. In Canada this meant that either CIDA or External Affairs, and more and more CIDA, had the lead in those areas, and so we felt that CIDA should be taking the lead role on the UNICEF governing board. We felt that we could do a better job in bringing to light for policy considerations and bringing to light the considerations that Canada was bringing to bear on international organizations as a whole and their funding in their policies. It was difficult having the head of the Canadian Delegation, who was not necessarily in touch with the position being taken in other organizations, to be the leader of the UNICEF delegation. So the first year I attended the Board was as deputy head of the delegation and that meant that I stayed for seven or eight days and made a few statements. But I wasn't the Head. After that I went back and agreed with my people that we ought to make an appeal that the switchover ought to be made official in Canada and so steps were taken to effect this. So in 1979 and 1980 I was the Canadian Chief Delegate to the Board.

Delegation positions

JC: From the secretariat point of view during that period it wasn't quite clear what the Canadian position really was on some issues. The people in CIDA seemed to have one point of view and Health and Welfare another, and we weren't sure where the Mission stood. What was the level of government attention to UNICEF and how was it coordinated? On what issues, for example, did the Cabinet get into the picture?

MCC: I doubt if the Cabinet had been involved for many, many years. It was probably the case in UNICEF's early days the instruction went to the Cabinet because that was quite normal then, but international organizations were in their infancy and a great deal of attention was paid at the Cabinet level to what Canadian representatives said abroad at that time. There was also a great deal of press attention. As international organizations became more and more numerous and widespread, handling them in the sense of arriving at agreed instructions, level and quality of representation etc became a great deal more routine and the blessing of the instructions, the official endorsement of the instructions to the Canadian Delegation correspondingly moved down to the level of those that usually approved corresponding instructions in other organizations.

There is a fairly formal process for approval. Since CIDA is now the lead Department, it convenes the meetings. These are attended by the inter-departmental community which is composed of External Affairs, National Health and Welfare, CIDA, the Department of Finance and possibly others as necessary, and each of the agenda items is reviewed. The briefing that has been prepared is also reviewed and the discussions go on in the light of the briefing notes that have been prepared for each agenda item.

You asked about policy coordination. I think there was such coordination, although there was some continuing contention. CIDA saw UNICEF as being a somewhat more broad-based development institution than National Health and Welfare did and the head of the delegation for many years really saw UNICEF's mandate best being served by staying to a very narrow range of interests. He defined it as being zero to five and keeping the focus on the young child. He was very concerned about forays into education. He was very concerned about keeping the focus on health.

UNICEF Scope

I must say it's rather interesting that within the last two years UNICEF's own views appear to have come around rather to an endorsement of the need to have at least a primary focus which is quite defined and narrower in scope than the organization was becoming two or three years ago.

JC: The issue of the scope of UNICEF has been one in which UNICEF has been concerned with almost from the very beginning. I well remember that Adelaide Sinclair authored a paper that was a major agenda item of the Board in 1963, but the issue comes up at the Board every two or three years in one way or another. One can argue about concentration versus diffusion and so on but would you say there is a general agreement that UNICEF must be involved in some family/and community activities in order to help the child effectively? And then there is the issue of the role of the other agencies. You always get the question "Why does UNICEF do this or that? Isn't it a function of ILO or UNESCO or WHO?" What do you personally feel? Do you think our scope should be broader or narrower?

MCC: Well, let me go back to being a delegate and see what I would feel as a representative of a government. An organization has to have a defined mandate, and the more definable and the less arguable or subject to argumentation the mandate is, the stronger the organization will be and it's my conviction that one of the great strengths of UNICEF is that its mandate is, more or less, unassailable. And to the extent that it becomes, in the words of a Canadian Delegate, "UNDP for children", you are weakening the mandate; you are weakening your ability to go to Parliament, to Congress, to the press and say this is what is unique, this is what is special. Because if you're doing EPI in one country and WHO is doing it in another, if you're doing water in one country and the World Bank is doing it in another, it's very difficult to say why and what UNICEF is that is special.

So it isn't as much the narrow mandate that is important, it's that you have some rigor in your definition of what it is you are doing. You must be able to tie it very closely and very carefully to — you know the jargon — both a strategic overview and a shared perception of the problems of the child in a particular country and to an attack on those problems. If UNICEF just becomes something that finances that which other organizations are not picking up, with rather tenuous links toward the situation of the child in that country, it will weaken the appeal of the organization, it will weaken the organization.

So I suppose what I'm arguing for is a narrower focus. I would like, however, to say that it is not as much narrow as that you really must be able to, with some rigour, draw the line back from whatever the specific assistance is to direct the provision of direct service to the children, and not have that line go through too much in the way of layers. A hydro-electric dam is of interest to a child because it can produce electricity, electricity comes to homes, children live in homes, homes are better if they have electricity and, therefore, life would be better for children if there are hydro-electric dams. But that's six or seven layers of reality. I think that UNICEF will be a stronger organization the more it can keep those layers down. In other words if you're providing supplies, equipment and expertise to a Government which has a program for vaccinating children, you are only one 'layer' away from providing a service to the child.

JC: Well, let me approach this very important problem from a slightly different angle. I have heard Maurice Pate say from time to time "Well if some other agency isn't doing it and we can't get them to do it, why don't we start in UNICEF?" If this is a catalyst for them, if it stimulates them to do it, great — that's what we want them to do. We have plenty of other things to do. We are not really interested in turf, but if we think it's important for children, let's not hold back." Now my reading of UNICEF history is that we have been a catalyst with the agencies in doing that. Would you like to comment?

MCC: A catalyst implies that you get out of the picture at some time. You would really have to show me how many instances there was UNICEF investment where we actually said, "Okay, we've done our job, we've been the catalytic agent in this and now it's time that we get out."

The natural tendency of bureaucrats is to continue to do that which is successful and stay in projects that have been a success. Nobody can dispute the catalytic theory and it's a terribly attractive one, as is the seed money theory, the pilot project theory. The problem is that a pilot project is of very little use unless there is an evaluation phase which follows, that somebody actually makes a decision on the basis of that evaluation. Seed money is only seed money until such time as it produces something. A catalytic project is only catalytic if you've managed at the outset to introduce somebody in taking an interest in what you're doing.

JC: I think our efforts in bringing in larger external sources of aid - using a little bit of leverage...

MCC: It's important not just to say it, but to prove it.

JC: We hope to do so in the History Project. Certainly in MCH, WHO has moved much farther because of our interest in it. In some of the mass campaigns WHO came into it when we took the initiative, beginning with BCG. In food and nutrition, I think maybe FAO never really responded as much to our challenge as perhaps one would hope they should have. But your point is exceedingly well taken.

MCC: I admit that we are catalytic - try to find our specific reality.

JC: What I would like to do is get evidence from our folks in the field on that. You've raised a very important point.

Financial Support

On the question of Canadian financial support for UNICEF, how was the delegation to the Board influential? And do you want to generally comment on our fund-raising efforts and system as you saw it on the Canadian side, and the contribution of decisions that the Canadian Government made in relation to how important UNICEF was seen in relation to UNDP and other agencies and Canadian bilateral aid?

MCC: The decisions on the precise allocation to be made between bilateral/multilateral forms of assistance is set at a very high level in Canada. That percentage is decided by the Cabinet and it certainly isn't done with reference to UNICEF versus the bilateral programme of CIDA or anything like that. The split is decided at the percentage level, really quite a high level, so that there really aren't considerations such as the effectiveness of any particular agency taken into account at that type of decision. It's a decision taken on much more political grounds than that.

The main importance of the delegation was that the same people that wrote the briefs and did preparatory work for the delegation, are responsible for drafting the whole multilateral budget. And the multilateral budget in CIDA, the UN part of it is worth roughly \$100 million or so - it has been for the last few years - and it's up to this group of people who attend all of the meetings (UNICEF, UNDP,

(NFPA, etc.) to make the original proposal to Ministers on how to divide that particular pie. Therefore, to the extent that these persons are involved in, feel captured, captivated, attracted by the programmes of these agencies as set out during their Board, etc., as set out through early visits, as set out through reports from Embassies, that the initial proposed figures are set into the budget. The initial number has a great strength. If there's an 8, it goes in the initial number, the final number may be 9 or 7 but it's probably not likely to be too far from 8. Whereas the first number that's written in is 6.5, the final number is likely to be 5.5 or 7.5. So, in other words, what the number has been the year before combined with what the bureaucrat in charge of the process puts in as an initial guess has a tremendous amount of power in terms of what the final result is.

Feedback from Canadian Field Missions

JC: On the question of feedback from your Embassies and your CIDA people in the field, some of the other Board delegates I have interviewed felt that our field people should take more initiative in getting in touch with them. Very often their country people in the field had many other preoccupations, but they would respond if we were more forthcoming in involving them. I know, of course, this sometimes creates a problem for our overworked field staff. Insofar as the Canadian positions in the Board are concerned — and not only the feedback for its general position but in specific programme recommendations — how has it worked?

MCC: I don't think we get enough from the field and I don't know whose fault that is. You can take the view that because Canada is providing the funds, that it's Canadian taxpayers that are doing it, that it ought to be the embassy that is taking the initiative. Well it's fine but the embassy is equally overworked like the UNICEF field offices. A smart UNICEF field officer will stimulate feedbacks to national capitals because five telegrams coming in in a year is an avalanche. And if you get five telegrams from various Canadian missions abroad saying the splendid work UNICEF is doing or UNDP or ILO or anybody else and this is promptly sent around to the whole community, a tremendously positive impression is built up for the expenditure of possibly very minimal time. You know, five telegrams can make an extraordinary difference.

JC: Thank you for the clue. We'll try and make it an even half dozen. What advice do you have about the contacts of our field people and our top staff in Ottawa, including visits of the Executive Director?

UNICEF visits to Ottawa

MCC: Canadians are fairly isolationist developers. Put crudely, they pay their multilateral money and feel that organizations should then get on with the job. There is never great pressure from Canadians to be visited. You will never find Canadian Delegates on the Board insisting that it's time UNICEF visited, although this is very much the case with other delegations. I've had lots of delegations come to me at the Board and ask "Can't you come and visit our country?" This is not the

case of Canada. This is not a strength in particular, and I'm not happy about it and it's something I rather think I should try to do something about. But the Canadian bureaucracy is a very busy one and it neither encourages nor gets a lot of contact.

JC: Well, then we don't have to worry about Canadian visits all that much?

MCC: That's right. Well, I'm not sure it's a terribly healthy situation. I'm just stating the situation that is.

National Committee representation on delegation

JC: There's always a National Committee person on the Canadian Delegation. My impression is that you have a very vigorous, a very good National Committee. Does the National Committee really provide any input into the substance of Delegation policy?

MCC: They're very closely consulted on those items that make an immediate difference to their ability to be effective. For example on the Greeting Card Operation, I don't think the Government has an idea. We expect the National Committee to agree essentially on how things are with Greeting Cards. The Canadian Government side may comment from the standpoint of finance, budget, management and things like that, if at all. But it's really the National Committee that comments there. On information and public relations items generally the views of the National Committee are absolutely key. Budget is discussed in a general way because the Committee is asked a lot of questions about overhead and questions like that so that this is discussed in general terms. Substantive policy issues would be discussed with the committee more in the sense of how this will affect your operations; will this make UNICEF more or less appealing, is this comprehensible, is this the kind of direction that will do anything? Obviously sensitive issues - abortion, birth control - if UNICEF were to undertake major efforts in these areas - this would be something one would discuss with the National Committee.

Committee fundraising

JC: What's been your experience with the effect of fund raising by the Committee in relation to Canadian Government contributions? Has there been a tendency to say, "Well, we're getting an awful lot from the private sources and that increases the whole amount of Canada as a whole, so the Government doesn't have to do much?"

MCC: No.

JC: Does it work the other way?

MCC: No.

JC: In fact, either way, is there any special relationship?

MCC: No.

Board Atmosphere

JC: Before you came to the Board, you had experience in some other bodies. How did you find the UNICEF Board atmosphere? How did you find the relations between the Board and the secretariat, and how have you seen that changing?

MCC:: Well, I was totally suspicious. I laugh about my great conversion because I guess until such time as I joined UNICEF's Board I'd spent something like 12 years in multilateral diplomacy. There are very few international organizations I haven't attended, either as junior delegate, as a head of a delegation or whatever. And I had developed a profound cynicism of the whole process. I had particularly been a trade policy specialist by origin and became very much engaged in the trade policy side of things, in which every word and resolution is weighed, measured and battled over, etc., etc. And so when I first sat down in UNICEF I looked at the papers and I said, "They can't use that phrase -- that word -- and they can't say that." And my delegation spent a very great deal of time at the first meeting trying to calm me down and to say "Now just wait a minute here -- the words aren't particularly important, it's the thoughts behind them. You don't need to get excited about words," and I said "Oh, well you know, if you let that phrase go by the secretariat will use it this way and that way," and they said, "No, the secretariat doesn't really behave like that" and I thought, "Oh nonsense, all secretariats behave exactly the same way." So I sat there for a week reading the documentation and saying, "I don't know how they can get away with these phrases" because UNICEF uses routinely in its documentation, in all innocence, for example, phrases which in the New Economic Order debates have been battled over for hour after hour after hour. And we use them in total innocence.

Let's just give an example. In building up the financial framework for the new international economic order one phrase which has never been allowed by common consent is relating the financial framework to the needs of the developing countries. That then brings up the studies which relate to the capital development needs produced by UNCTAD or by other organizations, and the much disputed concept of the 'gap' in funding availability. You can always talk about needs and capacities but you can never just refer to the needs without the capacity. And so UNICEF goes out talking about needs, talking about targets in a sense which, if it were in ECOSOC or UNCTAD would be the subject of endless and acrimonious debate. And since those were the organizations that I had attended, or at least among the organizations that I had attended, I was very suspicious of this whole process. I was also fresh from the UNDP Board where I'd seen 14 percent per annum growth being established and you could see even then that this was going to lead to, not disaster, but certainly to an underfunding and as far as I could see UNICEF secretariat was building its financial framework on thin air. And so I was a very suspicious delegate, and it really took me the whole of the first session and part of the next one to become a little more relaxed and to concentrate a little more on what the organization was doing and a little less on what the similarities the words and phrases being used were to other international organizations.

JC: To what do you attribute this somewhat different atmosphere in UNICEF?

MCC: Everything, really. First of all its history. It had a Board composed of pediatricians, health workers, etc., who were sent off with a mandate to discuss these subjects. Secondly, the relative unimportance of UNICEF, which is highly protective. The fact also that we are not a flagship organization, we're not a UN economic policy trend-setter — at least we're not perceived to be! And so our very small size has protected us. Also the fact that we're not a political "Policy" making body in any sense of the word, and therefore it doesn't really matter — in the sense of what would happen in other organizations, for example, whether we have a programme for the Palestinian child. It can be important to the Palestinian child, but it is not going to be the turning point in ensuring that the World Bank, UNDP, everybody else has to have, therefore, a programme for the Palestinian child. Thirdly, the international community has almost tacitly decided that there should be one international organization where you simply get on with business and our business is delivering services to children and this has been allowed. This serves countries' interests well. It's nice for them to be able to point to one organization and say "Now wait a minute; we're not totally mixing up our bilateral concerns with, we're not competing with the international community from our bilateral concerns — just look at UNICEF. We've allowed a programme in Kampuchea to go on. Just look at UNICEF, we've allowed this to go through." It serves all interests well. I think it's a combination of these factors.

JC: Is it also because people feel very badly if they raise political issues about the child?

MCC: Nope.

JC: You don't think that's a factor?

MCC: No.

JC: You think that's one of our myths?

MCC: Yes. Otherwise what about food aid? If that were the case then food aid would not be politicized. Starving people certainly is an emotional issue and impacts on the child. Yet the World Food Programme has been totally politicized in the sense of when food aid could go or could not go to Viet Nam, to Kampuchea, to Laos.

JC: Well, let me ask you about what is generally considered another factor in this UNICEF aura. Our Executive Directors and their Deputies and senior staff have generally been regarded as characterizing the essence of international integrity — of being non-political. The secretariat has avoided being overloaded with people put in for political purposes.

MCC: I think that's more of an effect than a cause.

Operational issues

Office automation

JC: Maggie, you've been responsible for the acceleration of office automation. What in your background induced you to push on this, and what do you foresee for the future?

MCC: Well, the main thing in my background is that we had done such a rotten job in CIDA. We spent an awful lot of money in CIDA - much, much more than in UNICEF - and really achieved less impressive results, I'm sorry to say. When I came here, I reviewed the way EDP was in progress and I must say I was very satisfied with it. UNICEF is a very critical place by itself that I thought that the progress had been very soundly based and very soundly built. Basically it has been constructed around the principle of a central trunk - a tree trunk if you wish - of systems which are integrated with each other. Financial control, supply and similar functions are the central part of these. You build out based on this creation at the centre of a data bank of facts, adding branches to this tree trunk to reflect the information needs of other parts of the organization.

We have made rapid progress in the last two years, but I think it might well have been made with or without me, frankly. I was poised at the stage of take-off and I may have given it a helpful push, but it had already been developed in a very sound manner. I think probably where I gave the major push was on word processing and trying to make professionals see that this is a management tool as well as a super-secretarial tool and I hope that will go on because I was very pleased to be able to report to this Board that 60% of all UNICEF Headquarters staff had received word-processing training, which is a very impressive number.

Everyone wants to get into the act now -- and that's great. Do you know, we automated the budget at the same time that it was being prepared and written this year? The result was that hours of work were saved; by the time we write the next one, the field offices will be sent mocked-up computer-written budgets for their correction and comment - rather than their having to invent from whole cloth. It will be a great time saver.

I am particularly pleased that in Supply Division, in PFO and other places, there is an appreciation that this has to go on and that professionals must also become proficient in this capacity. I have certainly enjoyed having a word processor in my own office and I have ordered one for CIDA.

JC: But in addition to raising consciousness, weren't you also instrumental in getting more money in the budget for this? Someone else less interested might not have not have wanted to put in as much.

MCC: Yes.

Supply Division reorganization

JC: What about the reorganization of the supply operation?

MCC: This resulted from the intensive examination of the Supply Division that followed on the acceptance of the Danish Government offer to upgrade the facilities of UNIPAC. When we started asking ourselves, "What functions should logically be fulfilled at UNIPAC that are now being done in New York or Geneva?", it turned out to be a real Pandora's box! We examined all of the supply functions being performed in all three locations of the Supply Division. And we looked at the support services for these three divisions — the financial back-up, invoicing, personnel services, computer services, communications costs and services, administration, building space, utilities costs, etc. And we asked ourselves if these functions — all of them, not just supply but also the 'surrounding functions' could be done more economically under another configuration. We looked at six possible arrangements and decided that it made more sense to have one major supply operation — based in Copenhagen since the warehouse was there — with a smaller operation left in New York to do major policy work, liaise with other Divisions and the Front Office, and do North American procurement. It is going to save a lot of posts, time and money. But getting there is not easy. I've likened it more than once to doing a self-appendectomy without anaesthesia.

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Implications Biennial Budget

JC: Well, Maggie, we have discussed office automation and the reorganization of the supply operation. I wonder if we might could go on to some of the other operational problems and issues that you have been seized with (if that is the right term) these last two years. Would you like to say something about the Geneva office?

MCC: Well, you have to put it in the context of the Budget. When the United Nations moved to the biennial budget system, this had a more profound impact on UNICEF than I think most people probably realized at the time. What biennial budget means is that it's 36 months from the time offices prepare their budgetary requests before these budgets actually come into effect. Offices have to sit down and state what their requirements are in terms of human resources and financial backup to actually put their programmes in operation. This is particularly difficult for offices that haven't even gone to the Board yet for a programme. So it has added some new rigidities to the system. It has also added more discipline and I think that the discipline was well needed in the organization. It isn't there yet because even three weeks after the budget is done, you get a request for a new post or a job classification. Obviously throughout the system there isn't a widespread appreciation of the fact that this is II and that since it's a biennial budget not only is it II but it isn't even starting. Usually at the time the budget is adopted, another six or seven months elapse.

Another implication of the biennial budget is that you really have to do more work on the same priorities within the organization. And it was in this context that we started to take a very close look at the Geneva office. I think it would be more proper to say that we started to take a very close look at Headquarters' functions. We looked at the supply function (we talked about that briefly earlier) and decided that it could more efficiently be done in essentially one location with an outposting in New York — a very important outposting because it will also contain the policy axis for Supply Division and also the plan for procurement in America.

Investment function

We then looked at our investment function. UNICEF earns a lot from investments. The majority of these are short-term paper. Essentially as soon as money is paid in to us it starts being invested and earning interest. In these days of high interest rates these earnings can become quite substantial indeed. It used to be the case that to capture both the European and American markets you had to have officers and expertise and relationships on both sides of the Atlantic. In today's world where you have 24 hours investment around the world, it becomes possible to do all of those functions from New York. This means the decisions can be taken by a single group working together rather than constantly on long distance expensive telephone calls to Geneva. We can go on maintaining currency balances which reflect the need to invest in European and North American currencies but we can do this in a more efficient manner.

TIRS function

At that point we had looked at three functions of the Geneva office: supply, the investment function and the other one (I forget what it was). But we then kept going, and another thing we then started to look at was the so-called TIRS function — Technical Information Referral System. The problem that was discovered there was that while it was very good at collecting information on a variety of problems involving children, including those in developed countries, and also on a variety of approaches to the solutions to these problems, basically because these were not integrated into the field planning and field programming processes, there was no draw-down on what was a very expensive system to maintain.

Management Information System

The reason there was no draw-down was that we don't really have an integrated management information system. In other words, people in the system don't know where to turn to get information. There's no orderly cataloguing of the availability of information, there's no orderly disposition and dispersion of material on a monthly basis saying what is available.

This ties into the need for an evaluation system and into the need for programming assistance. And so essentially with TIRS we were way ahead of ourselves in that we were setting up a reference library without

having some of the basic tools of a management information system. So again we decided that job of setting up a basic global management information system had to be done at Headquarters. There was just no other way for the close liaison that was needed between the Programme Division, Comptroller and the Reports Office, Information people, Programme Funding Office — all of these which feed into and feed off of the management information system. So we brought back the TIRS post, or the capacity that was in Geneva working on one aspect of this, because we decided that the priority for the next couple of years was simply more urgent to create this management information system.

Information

The next functional area we looked at was Information and we discovered for example that we had two principal publications in Geneva. Whereas one of these publications had a fairly impressive backup staff, the other one was done by one single person with a part-time secretary and no backup staff at all. We then said, this is not good management, that we need to merge the capacity to produce these two publications using the same staff and we need to set up between the two headquarters places, Geneva and New York, a common idea of what publications are being produced and again a common pool of information.

National Committees

The next area looked at then became the complex of issues surrounding the National Committees. There are a whole complex of functions surrounding the Committees: development education, liaison with greeting card, the financial work done with National Committees, the infeed of information into Committees. This was being done in a relatively organized fashion in Geneva. But in New York, on the other hand, to whom a Committee came for information basically depended on who they knew. Who the Canadian Committee appeals to has usually been whatever Canadian is around and the U.S. Committee deals with a variety of places. The Australian Committee — I never have found out who they deal with.

JC: John Williams, our in-house Australian, I suppose.

Geneva office

MCC: So it became very clear that if we were going to pursue an organized approach to the needs of Committees and the challenges with which that we should be facing Committees, the services we should be providing them with — visits, steady stream of photographic material, tapes, audio visual, etc., we had to get our act in order there too. The logical place to centralize that was Geneva because there are so many more Committees in Europe serviced out of the Geneva office than anywhere else.

So, whereas the supply function was consolidated in Copenhagen, the investment and management and information systems in New York Headquarters, it was logical to consolidate the responsibility -- the

formulation of working up the service needs -- for National Committees in Geneva.

The last big area was programming and here a very difficult decision was made. Following on the International Year of the Child, the Geneva office had embarked on the holding of seminars and the hiring of consultants and work that was directed at the problems of the European child. This, as you'll remember, was always contested, if the Board decision on this were read strictly. I wonder whether the Board would be somewhat surprised to discover that these activities were in fact going on. They certainly had value and they were appreciated by some communities in Europe and the National Committees. But they also raised all sorts of questions - why the children of Europe and not of North America (no parallel activities are carried out by New York) or Japan or Australia? So the decision was taken that as desirable as these activities might be, at a time when we were really taking a rigorous examination of priorities, we had to regretfully give these activities a lower priority than those associated with the delivery of services to the child in the developing areas of the world. And so the professional resources that had been devoted to programming activities centred on the European child were dispatched to other areas of the world to concentrate on programmes and to the help that was related to children in the developing countries.

So, all in all, the Headquarters functions were quite ready for change in the 1984-1985 biennial budget. It was not a rush look at the Geneva office. Rather it was a functional approach which examined how a number of functions had grown up over the years in two or three places and the budget provided an opportunity to say how things might be done in the most economical, cohesive, coherent fashion possible. Are there better ways to do it through some consolidation and regrouping of forces?

JC: I am glad you have set down such a explanation of the approach taken to what many of us considered long-standing issues. Was there not mixed up in this, somehow or other, the feeling on the part of many people in Europe that all this was downgrading the European aspect of UNICEF?

MCC: We would have to distinguish between European governments, virtually all of them who supported these moves in the Board, and the interest of the Committees. European governments have, with other developed country governments, constantly urged the Organization to put the maximum number of resources in the field, and so therefore, these governments applauded these moves, which were doing exactly that. The National Committees on the other hand were concerned that this might be representing a downgrading. It certainly isn't the case.

JC: I know that over the years there have been inevitable conflicts and frictions between Headquarters and our European Office, for understandable reasons.

MCC: I don't think these are understandable.

JC: What I mean is that they were understandable in the light of certain historical things that had happened in terms of the delegation of authority in the beginning, when our European Office was primarily a regional office running programmes in a dozen countries or so, the kind of people who were running the European Office, and a number of other factors as well. Do you now foresee that with this change there is likely to be less friction, less irritation?

MCC: There should be. I would hope that what will emerge from this is a clear idea of who has the continuing responsibility for doing various functions. It is very bad management to have lines of authority so unclear that people are spending time fighting jurisdictional battles. This system, if people want to make it work, has the potential to greatly reduce conflicts and reduce friction. I have never found the conflicts comprehensible. I have never found them understandable at all. All organizations that deal internationally have branch offices and the supposition that Headquarters is not Headquarters and that branch offices do not have a certain relationship to Headquarters is one that I find rather mystifying.

Budget review process

JC: Maggie, you talked about the budget and the effect of the biennial budget and its implications. Let me ask you about the internal budget review process. In recent years, we have been saying we are going to take a hard look at every office, every unit, there is going to be zero growth and a unitary approach, and so on. Where do you think we now stand on all this?

MCC: Well, we certainly did that for 1984 and 1985. There was zero growth in professional posts that was some 175 redeployments, which means that some posts were cancelled and the people in them rotated, and the funding sources of posts were changed radically, and this was done within zero growth of professional posts. A total office-by-office look was taken of every single existing staff in post.

I am not sure if an organization can stand that kind of examination with that kind of rigour at every single budget session. I would hope that more of this over a time would be developed in the regions, and that the regional directors would become the best authorities for where there are possibilities for a regression in the region and where there are possibilities for expansion. You have one third of UNICEF staff in the region that reports to Bangkok; it certainly does not have one third of the world's children. It doesn't have India, it doesn't have China. It has the countries with the lowest IMR in the developing world and not the highest.

But UNICEF staff deployment reflects our historical pattern beginning in Asia, of growing in Asia, of finding good models of cooperation with the governments that are in many ways the most advanced of the developing countries, and of moving in much later stages to Middle East, East Africa and to West Africa, and Latin America. The result has been that you have well-staffed, well-running offices in East Asia and a much fragmented situation in West Africa. Now, this doesn't mean

that nobody was paying attention. Based on child populations you can make the case that the Asian offices are appropriately staffed because Indonesia, with a population of some 160-180 million, obviously has more children than probably the whole of Africa. I know that India has more children than the whole of Africa put together. So it isn't that this was allowed to happen through neglect or oversight, but I think that as we move into the mid-80s and the late 80s we need to take a good look at how the developing world itself has evolved and we need to ask, "Does Indonesia at its current stage of development really need more of UNICEF's budgetary resources? Should Thailand at its stage of development be absorbing any more of UNICEF's budgetary resources? What are we doing about countries with very high infant mortality rates?" It is just a normal part of the fact that an organization should be adjusting the primary focus of the application of its mandate.

JC: Well, I take it that you think that this process is now begun. You mention that you hope the fact that the regional directors would have more responsibility for participating in it. Who here at Headquarters, beside you and the Budget Officer, gets involved in the review process and in the final decision making. How does that work?

MCC: Oh, it involves the head of the office of Management, Organization and Administration. It involves the head of Programme Services or one of his deputies, which means that every time we discuss a country, the officer who is responsible for that country is there and is wholly part of these decisions and is usually tasked with getting more information as and when more information is needed. The functional director in Headquarters is often involved and brought into the picture if we are discussing, say, the information needs of a certain region, and discussing whether national officers or an international professional is needed for certain information tasks, for example.

Basically, the final decisions have a secretive air about them because obviously when you are trying to roll up the process, it is not particularly helpful to have petitions and appeals being made on an hourly basis for anybody who suspects they may be losing out in their own eyes in the budgetary process. So in the final wrap-up stages there is an element of some secrecy as this is put together for the Executive Director's final blessing. But the consultative process is not the least bit secret. You go over the structure of the office, you ask if it is adequate, you compare it to its next door neighbours, you wonder why, for example, the General Service ratio is 3.1 to one Professional in one office whereas another seems to be able to get along with 1.7 to one. You ask the Desk why this is the case; when did it start, what are the reasons for it? So it is not a secretive process at all, and if it had been in the early stages, I am not sure why. It certainly is when you start to do the roll-up.

Internal Auditors

JC: Are the Internal Auditors a help in this too?

MCC: The audit reports are more than the auditors in the sense that the same community reads all the audit reports and is therefore very much aware of areas where there are problems of finance, administration, any particular problems with supply, and particular problems with programme implementation. So the audit reports are very much in the minds of those who are sitting in the Committee.

Staff development/rotation

JC: As we move away from being bound by past history and to meeting present day and future needs in office organization, that obviously does bring to the fore the question of deployment of staff and rotation of staff from Headquarters to the field and so on. Would you like to comment on this?

MCC: I would hope that this budget would be the signal for a great deal more rotation. The field posts have always had staff in them who rotated. Basically, you don't have people in field posts for longer than four or five years. It's interesting enough that the list of people as we speak here in 1983, the list of those persons who have been in posts since 1977, only covers two handwritten pages on the professional side. There is more rotation than there appears to be. There is probably less rotation than would be helpful. We are now working on the system which will state which posts in Headquarters are rotational. Virtually all of them will be, except for the highly specialized ones. I mean, once we have trained the Director of Remuneration on how to do salary surveys and job classifications, whereas the poor Director probably would probably like to escape, we certainly can't just deposit somebody in that post and expect him to acquire a year's worth of expertise without having a real loss of efficiency. Ditto on the budget; ditto on the film production side. Also some financial functions are pretty specialized. The EDP functions are pretty specialized. But aside from that, I hope that two years from now we will see a great accelerated pattern of rotation. I think this will help in some of the traditional and really unnecessary suspicion between the field and Headquarters.

Staff training

JC: I guess that related to that is a whole business of staff training. Would you like to say something on that?

MCC: Well, training is very decentralized in UNICEF and, I think, this is right. The vast majority of the resources are available in the regions. They are the ones who know best whether what is needed are training courses on basic supply procedures or basic knowledge on the health of children, issues in programming or use of the UNICEF instruments such as call-forwards, Basic Assistance Lists, and all the other planning instruments we use. Regional Directors are in the best position to know exactly what the training needs are.

JC: What was your feeling about our approach towards in-service training when you came here, and what do you see for the future?

MCC: I'm not very good at training. The whole subject of training is not one which I have ever thought was one of my particular strengths. The Executive Director would like to see a lot more done in this area, and I am confident that my successor will be able to do a lot more than I have been able. From where I sit I see a great number of deficiencies in the ability of the organization to use its own instruments. I see supply lists not well filled out. I see a number of offices who are really unable to use basic agreements, who are unable to construct plans of operation. The fact that a lot of our training is concentrated on the use of these basic instruments has been very satisfactory to me. I also tend to think that training must reflect the cultural and immediate environment and, therefore, the fact that our training is localized in the regions has been a source of satisfaction to me. That said, I do hope those aspects can be promoted because I think they cover the areas of our greatest vulnerability. But I think I have not been as successful as I would like to have been in some of the aspects of training. But I'm starting now to see this more clearly.

Decentralization

JC: I take it from the references you have made to the Regional Directors that you consider them a very important part of the organization. You will perhaps recall that when the SIAR Report was made, the whole question was raised as to whether we needed those regional offices altogether; a question that has also been raised from time to time. Can we assume now that that function is fairly well established?

MCC: I think so. I find them essential. If you are going to decentralize as much as we have to the field, if you are going to retain such miniscule capacity at Headquarters on the programme field services side. You know what we have — just three people for the whole of Africa, three people for Asia, two for Latin America. With that kind of resource capacity for Headquarters it would be impossible for these people to read each and every annual report, each and every evaluation, each and every mid-term review, each and every project report. You simply don't have the capacity to even read the documents, let alone take the kind of action that might be necessary. So if you don't have some sort of medium mid-level process, the distance really becomes too great between headquarters and the field offices.

JC: On the question of centralization and delegation of authority, what did you find and what would you say are the things that you would like to give some advice about for the future?

MCC: Well, UNICEF is enormously decentralized in programme terms. The external auditors have commented on this I am consistently amazed when I discover how decentralized it is. It was decentralized really without leaving much in the way of staff resources at Headquarters to deal with the every-day business of how the field offices are functioning, or without very precise concepts of exactly what matters field officers ought to be accountable for. This does not serve the organization as well as it might.

You can decentralize programming authority and accountability, but if field offices only have to report annually, and in very general terms, then how does the organization as a whole know what is going on, or whether the programming that is approved by the Board is actually being implemented, and how does the Executive Director then assure the Board this is what is happening or what is being done?

I strongly agree with decentralization. I think that the closer that you do your programming to the ground the better you are going to be. I think that the flexibility the field officers have is marvellous. It is what has given us our vitality, but I think that to have decentralized that amount, without much more vigorous and predictable and regular reporting requirements on the status of projects and the status of programmes, has left us in a situation where we are running very fast to catch up.

Accountability of field representatives

JC: In addition to the question of reporting, there has in recent years arisen the question of accountability of our field representatives for their actions, and the feeling was, in some quarters at least, that we were too lax in not keeping them accountable for omissions or things that they had done.

MCC: I don't know how you ever judge, because we have rather little in the way of reporting guidelines and there so little in the way of instructions. It is very difficult to say someone is accountable for something when it is very difficult to trace what they were asked to do. Again, this relates back to having an organization which has the working habits of a much smaller organization. You do not tamper with that for the sake of tampering. You do not put in a more strict guidelines and more strict accountability for the sake of it because the current freedom and flexibility really does allow something very precious, immediate and vital. It gives the people on the ground the feeling that they are responsible and therefore you get this tremendous work-load and tremendous involvement in the field. If the field is simply implementing Headquarters instructions, the performance will be definitely be of a different quality. Yes, I would like the field office to be more accountable, but accountable for what? I don't think the administrative policy guidelines have yet been sufficiently well set down that you can therefore make them fully accountable.

Medium-term Plan

JC: Let me ask you about the medium-term plan. One aspect of the medium-term plan — the financial plan — has had a rather long history. Then the Board, as a result of Swedish initiative, asked the Secretariat to develop a medium-term plan. So, we developed, with some reluctance, a medium-term plan which the Board has received very well. And, it becomes part of our documentation. Do you think that the medium-term plan, aside from the financial plan part of it, really adds anything to our operations?

MCC: Well, when I first discovered it, I asked what relevance does this have to field operations, and the answer was "Well, some." Representatives read it. And I said we must be pushing on a string, and you know how far you get when you push on a string. It really is related to your earlier question about accountability. Once the medium-term plan is in there, to what extent is our representative accountable and responsible for implementing what it says it is going to do? We don't really regularly and predictably follow it up, with the Executive Director then saying to his representatives -"Okay, this is the medium-term plan which I have set down and the Board has approved. You are accountable; report to me within a year as to the extent to which your programme corresponds to this medium-term plan, and report regularly on project implementation."

The concomitant of that is that the medium-term plan should be built up on reports from the field offices and on what the field is doing so that it is realistic in terms of what is already happening in the field. We are far from having that process in any kind of circle. There ought to be a circular process, ours looks more like a colander than a circle; it has got an awful lot of holes.

Internal Communications

JC: I believe that you have sat through one or two Mohonk sessions. Do you consider that an essential part of training or communication - these brainstorming things? What's been your feeling about them? I have heard some people be critical because of their cost.

MCC: They do cost an awful lot of money. They have been necessary in the time that I have been here because when I came the Executive Director was still deemed to be new and had a lot of very vital ideas that he wanted to implement quickly, and because our communication system within UNICEF is primitive. It is quite necessary to get people together occasionally and trying to increase thinking along the same wave length. It would be particularly good for Jim Grant to fire people with the same enthusiasm that he has on a number of issues. If one had a better communication system these meetings would be less necessary. But I would say that a better communication system would cost infinitely more than Mohonk meetings. Communication systems are terribly expensive.

JC: Are you talking about electronic communication systems or written or...?

MCC: I am talking about a regular flow of telexes and letters, a system of telex equipment which, of necessity, partly would need to be classified as somewhat of a confidential nature; the habit of writing and reporting on a regular basis on items of interest. This then obliges you to have in Headquarters somebody to read those reports and analyse them, to synthesize them, reporting them to the Executive Director. We don't have that within UNICEF and it would be an enormously expensive undertaking to have the kind of communication system that, for example, diplomatic corps regards as normal.

Travel

JC: During the years that I have been here, I have seen a great evolution in the amount of communication that results from greater travel back and forth. In the early days of UNICEF practically nobody travelled. We were all saving travel money. Do you have any questions about the amount of travelling or the control of travel, or..?

MCC: My questions on travel relate more to the fact that we have not yet arrived at locating a trip within a series of programming priorities. When the Executive Director or the deputies arrive in the field office, it is not yet standard practice in UNICEF offices to locate the importance or relevance of that visit to the achievement of programming objectives. The same thing could be said in the use of Headquarters advisors. The visit to a field office or to Headquarters of a representative should follow on a fairly detailed exchange of views on the purposes, objectives, how these are to be realized, who will be seen, who will be talked to and what agreements are sought — either in Headquarters or in the field — and what purposes are to be served by this visit. There I think UNICEF still has a good distance to go. I was often quite disconcerted in my travel to find out that I was going out to see a number of people but that there was no particular brief written which related to what was going on in the UNICEF programme to the particular points that I would be raising with the people that I would be seeing.

JC: That's a very interesting point. Whose responsibility would it be to follow through on this important point that you are making?

MCC: That's systemic and we are inching toward it, and it is something that would have been done if I were here another two years because you don't do that on a Wednesday morning. You know, through the submission of trip reports, you know we now have a travel roster that is published and sent out, we now do checks and balances for who is travelling to where. This travel roster is now published three times a year and a check is made to all field offices visited. There is now some coherence between the different members of Headquarters travelling so that I hope we don't get as often as before a number of people from Headquarters who didn't even know that somebody else is travelling to that particular place. You sneak up on things like this, its not something that you can achieve very quickly. I would have hoped to have had within another year or so a much more systematic approach to the use of visits as the tool which they are.

JC: Maggie, I can assure you that we will be sure that your successor reads the transcript of this tape — and more than once!

Management/Staff relations

JC: Maggie, you are strong in emphasizing managerial responsibility, and I am wondering about your reconciling that role to what seems to be an increased feeling in UNICEF for staff participation and a stronger role for the Staff Association?

MCC: First of all, I think UNICEF is blessed with particularly good staff associations. I think there has been a responsible attitude towards the development of them and I think that the general relationships between the staff associations and management reflects the way UNICEF does things — tending to be in a family way. This is useful in some instances, although it's sometimes an obstacle to applying a rather more management orientation to a particular question at hand. But it is basically non-confrontational, wishing to find solutions and wishing to find these in a positive manner. We do have good staff associations and we're blessed with good executives of these associations. We've been particularly lucky because we're right next door and very much a part of the United Nations, which has not in the recent past had these good relations. There was a walk-in last year into the work of one of the Committees and various public manifestations which I think brought discredit on the whole U.N. system. So I think we're particularly lucky that we have had this.

It's the function of somebody in my job to question quite seriously what the staff associations ask for — whether it's participation in various levels of management, or their viewpoints on various matters, because it is the nature of the staff association to favour the interests of existing staff, their promotion, their acceleration and their general interests. It has to be part of the interest of management to try and improve the organization, taking into account existing staff. But where existing staff cannot be mobilized or used to bring about the improvements that are needed, you may also have to go on measures which will not be approved by the staff association. This is a natural form of tension in an organization. It certainly is not particular to UNICEF. It would be a bizarre organization where the staff association and the head of operations were in complete agreement. This would reflect a very dead organization indeed. So we do have different interests. We come from the standpoint of different interests but, as I said at the beginning, because there is a shared interest in finding solutions to questions and in moving forward in the best way possible, these have tended to be resolved, I would say, in a reasonably good fashion.

Staff Recruitment

JC: Would you like to say something about recruitment of staff — whether we should be active or passive, the geographic distribution, the issues of promotion from within as against bringing in new blood from the outside, women on the staff? I guess this is a three- or four-fold question, but I think they are all related.

MCC: During the period that I have been here, there has been little or no growth in the professional staff and, indeed, when I arrived there were a great many supernumeraries, which meant that we had more staff than we had posts. And so the question of recruitment has not been a terribly active one for me, and whereas it might have been my natural disposition to say, "Let's look at our recruitment patterns — let's go and recruit along such-and-such lines", this is an expenditure of time which has to be questioned when potential for staff growth is limited. You could, of course, embark on an active recruiting campaign if you

were willing to embark on an active termination campaign but that hardly fits the needs of the situation. I think our recruitment does tend to be a little passive and there are good reasons for this. We get eight thousand applicants every year to come and work in UNICEF and when you have eight thousand people knocking on the door who have expressed an interest in working for the Organization, you've got a good field already for looking about.

But I am disappointed in our recruitment, particularly of Africans, and I think we have not yet developed the methods and means and normal practices of having good African nutritionists, child-care workers, community development workers, signalled to us by the institutes in which they are being trained. This is part and parcel of developing contacts with the people who are running these institutes and developing recruiting procedures to include such institutions. So I think that would be the major area of weakness that I would signal — that we really haven't been active enough in this kind of area.

On external versus internal recruitment, this is one that always makes people smile because you will get somebody in a meeting giving the most passionate defence of internal promotion and that person has been in the organization for, say, three years. If only internal promotion had been applied, the person would not be sitting there making this passionate case. It's almost the classic immigration syndrome of 'the last person in, close the door' and we'll have a private club. And UNICEF can never be a private club; it just isn't the way it operates.

I think UNICEF will always have to have more external recruitment than the staff association would like. We're moving very quickly at the moment, we have a need for very specialized skills. You cannot develop these skills overnight in your staff and sometimes we need them overnight. We need people from the outside. We need people who have the latest perception of the EDP, the electronic data process techniques. We have been very fortunate in getting somebody who had the latest perceptions on how budgets should be put together. Each one of these is a very real addition to the Organization, and I think I can say without excessive modesty that you need people like me occasionally to come in with management experience in other organizations to try and apply some of the hard-gained wisdom that you get from having worked in other organizations.

UNICEF does a lot of other things well but it doesn't do everything perfectly, and if you don't have people who come in from working in other organizations, which happen to have done some tasks better, you will never get a revision of how tasks are performed. I come from an organization that does not have external recruitment, the diplomatic corps do not — you come in at the very bottom and you work your way up to the top and nobody ever comes in other than at the very bottom, so I know the advantages of that system, which are considerable, but I also can see very clearly that the deficiencies of that system in terms of new blood, new vitality, new approaches to the same problems. I think it's particularly the approaches to the same problems that I would signal as being the absolute need for new recruitment.

GS promotions to Professional

JC: Would you like to comment on the movement from General Service to Professional and also women on the staff?

MCC: We've had some very good instances of movement from General Service to Professional, but it's a subject on which some real caution is needed for the good of the Organization. Obviously, for the good of the staff, you look at the movement from General Service upward, particularly for the morale of the General Service staff. It is beyond dispute that General Service persons, particularly those without the requisite educational background, may be promoted into a position in which they can do well, if not better than somebody coming in from university, but they will not be able to do well beyond that. And so you are blocking posts at a junior level which should be used for taking in people who have the capacity to be Deputy Executive Directors and could well do so by working their way up through the Organization. It isn't only a matter of being able to do the job at hand. Very much of what is involved is having the wide perception of organizational realities, concepts of how the Organization fits with other organizations, concepts of how all organizations fit within the community of international relations and fit within various thoughts and currents — in our case, development planning. And it's the capacity for these other tasks that determine promotability from the task at hand. The risk in promoting General Service people is that you're promoting people who have a capacity to the next job up immediately, but whose capacity to perform beyond that has never been tested, or indeed is not brought into place when the promotion decision is made.

JC: Well, Maggie, we have covered a lot of territory in these brief two interviews, giving a small indication of the large UNICEF territory on which you have made a very substantial — I believe historic — impact in the two brief years you have been in the secretariat. Exercising my prerogative to speak for all the UNICEF staff, by virtue of having the longest association of anybody still around, I want to express the profound gratitude of all of us to you. I am convinced that we are not at all losing you for the UNICEF cause.

Field observations by Maggie Catley-Carlson: UNICEF strengths

JC: I recall a conversation with you when you were a delegate, in which I believe you confessed that you really had not had much project field observation. Since then, you have had some. What has been your reaction? How has it changed your perceptions? Has the kind of observation you have had been helpful, or have there been other types of observations you should have had?

MCC: It is always helpful. I think it has served to underline to me how difficult it is to actually accomplish very much in many areas of the world. I have seen very good and very bad.

I suppose the major thing that has struck me is how much impact UNICEF has for really quite small amounts of money and the impact that UNICEF appears to have on national administrations, given really quite infinitesimal levels of investment compared to levels of investments of others in comparable processes. This has been the main thing.

Also, the other thing that really struck me was the enthusiasm of the people and the great degree of personal involvement that they have in the field. Why not? If you are shaping the destiny of peoples and services, what could be more exciting?

JC: Well, I always believed that some of that impact is due to the commitment of our people and their high calibre. Would there be any other reasons why we would have such a disproportionate impact in relation to our financial inputs?

MCC: I think our ideas on an intellectual basis are very good and here this again goes back to Dick Heyward and others. But UNICEF appears to enjoy something that is certainly not available to a bilateral agency. I was particularly struck when I had the actual experience of sitting in an inter-departmental meeting where officials from several ministries discussed (almost as if we weren't there - which was great!) the problems and difficulties they were having in implementing programs and fulfilling objectives. Thoroughly on professional discussions, too.

We were in a very privileged position in that meeting — governments cannot really afford to be that open and candid with other governments.

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