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Interview V

Interview with Dr. Charles Egger*
Conducted by Jack Charnow at UNICEF Headquarters
on 26 October 1983

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* Biography

Relationship headquarters divisions

Programme/Supply/Information

Charnow: Yesterday we talked about the growth and development of the Programme Division. For various reasons, Supply and Information were not brought into that process quite as much as they should have been. The thought that occurs to me is that it has perhaps been the tendency for one part of UNICEF headquarters to develop, with others not being brought in enough.

Egger: That is not an easy subject. We started from the premise that the Programme Division was much involved in following up in the field, encouraging exchanges at the country level and adapting UNICEF's policies to the requirements in individual countries. Many of the other units at HQ were not either given the chance, or didn't have the capability, or showed some reluctance to take part in this because they felt that they were not being invited as partners, but were more or less asked just to underwrite what Programme Division had been formulating.

Reports Office

Charnow: So far as the Reports Office is concerned, in retrospect, now, I have the feeling that many people thought that, "Well, if the Reports Office is going to rewrite everything we prepare for the Board, why should we bother to knock ourselves out on a draft," and therefore this could have been an obstacle to real growth on their part.

Heyward

Likewise I have a feeling that because Dick Heyward was such a germinal thinker on the development of programme policy, that, in a sense, made it unnecessary for the Programme Division people, who were busy anyway, to do much sustained thinking about it. I suspect that because Dick had a special interest in nutrition, and it seemed to be more under his bailiwick rather than the Programme Division, that the nutrition part wasn't given as much attention in the Programme Division as other parts with which it might have been more integrated. Would you like to comment on that impression?

Egger: Dick Heyward was a creative thinker and one that really could concentrate on one theme and one basic problem at a time, which he then developed in all its aspects — concepts, relationships with other fields of activities, funding, how it related to an existing policy, how it should be further developed, etc.

Certainly, Dick has been one of the main contributors to the constant labour of formulating new policies or suggesting critical review of existing policies. The difficulty was that he was so all-absorbing and so much taking-it-in-his-own-hands, almost embracing and crushing his subject, that you either went entirely along with him and agreed on almost everything, or you left him to do it alone.

Origin

Egger: This is rather a long history and I don't want to go back to the origin which, as you know, grew out of the involvement of UNICEF in the International Tuberculosis Campaign. WHO was anxious to have a forum where programme policies and technical health aspects could be discussed and where WHO could bring to bear its full weight as the technical health unit of the United Nations and wean UNICEF away from other uncertain bed-fellows.

Values

Let's take it from the time when I represented UNICEF in the Joint Committee on Health Policy, namely 1967. Over these 14 years we have witnessed a rather interesting period of moving the JCHP into becoming a body where representatives of the legislative organs of two organizations (WHO and UNICEF) and representatives of the secretariat joined together to really examine basic policies in the health field. The application of existing policies in the field were regularly reviewed.

JCHP was often the cradle for free-wheeling discussions where new ideas and suggestions came up. Many of the different sections of WHO had an opportunity to put forward their ideas or problems that emerged from our joint work. It was, in the first place, a very excellent opportunity to educate members of our own Board. The Chairmen of the Board and the Programme Committee, as well as three or four members, were there. Before the meetings began, we had a chance to discuss with them what was going to come up at the JCHP and how to determine the line we wanted to follow and also give due weight to the point of view of WHO. Members could talk directly with each other without the interference of the Secretariat.

Many of the new policies in the health field, and this includes a broad field, e.g. water supplies, sanitation, human nutrition, MCH and family planning, PHC, mental health, etc., have found their place on the agenda. As these were organized meetings where papers on each subject, or rather elaborated policy review papers, had to be prepared with the help of consultants, a record was kept of all discussions. These recommendations of the JCHP were submitted to the respective Boards of the two organizations.

I would give JCHP a rather good rating. If we have advanced, if we were able to initiate in-depth reviews which often led to the elaboration of improved policies in the health field, it is largely thanks to this system of the JCHP.

I can frankly say that UNICEF very often was the organization that took the initiative. UNICEF had not only the ability to formulate new policies but also have a keen eye to sense implications of new policies and have a feeling how they would look from the point

of view of the countries, what could be eventual operation implications, e.g. supplies, maintenance, training, relationship to other than health services, etc. The initiative did not always come from UNICEF, and we had in certain fields excellent contributions from WHO. UNICEF took an active position and was prepared to take risks which WHO appreciated.

It was also an excellent opportunity for the education of representatives of WHO headquarters who were far more bound up in their own bureaucracy. By and large, WHO accepted this reposition of our respective roles, sometimes with some grudging and reluctance, but also often pushed by their younger and more enterprising staff. The JCHP meetings were open and permitted many staff of WHO interested in a particular question to participate.

Birth of PHC concept

I've referred earlier to some of the programme reviews that were presented to JCHP. There is one historical session that really gave later birth to the concept of primary health care. We had a session where, during the discussion of one of the studies, the WHO Executive Board member from Ethiopia in a moving intervention underlined that the existing health services did not go beyond reaching about 10-15% of the population in developing countries. In the general debate that followed, both the UNICEF and WHO representatives stated that this was a situation that should not be allowed to exist and that we had to think along more fundamental, if not more radical, lines to overcome this grave deficiency. Why was it not possible to reach a larger population group in a more effective way so as to increase the coverage by 25-30% and as a first target reach 50%? That was about the most that we felt one could reach at that time.

From the animated exchange in which both Board members of the two organizations and secretariat representatives participated grew a realization that we should look towards imaginative, alternative approaches to the question of considerable extension of the delivery of health services. This may now ring a bell in your ears. This then became the title of the next study. We did not sufficiently realize what this would mean. A number of new ideas were put forward - you have to go through the record of the meeting. Suggestions included a more simplified approach to the system of providing health centres, use on a much wider basis of auxiliary personnel, the need for a greater involvement of communities through actual participation - main ideas of primary health care. This then all became part of the proposed study. If you look back to the recommendations submitted to the two Boards around 1975/1976, this appraisal contained all the ingredients of primary health care without necessarily calling it that.

During the next stage this was all formulated in terms of a much clearer concept, a clear relation with all the different components. You'll find the same approach in the UNICEF document on the 'strategy of basic services' which came up about the same time.

This is how the idea of primary health care emerged which, looking back, has been one of the most important developments in the history of both organizations. The spirit of close cooperation and jointly searching for more adequate solutions and the firm desire not to accept or feel satisfied with what had already been achieved but to look towards a more ambitious objective and study how this could be achieved - were all part of the atmosphere in the JCHP. The Ethiopian Vice Minister of Health was the main speaker on the WHO side. If my recollection serves me right, I had an important part as the main spokesman in being his discussion partner in the debate on the UNICEF side that led to the agreement to initiate the study for which we made considerable efforts. Newton Bowles, then my Deputy, helped a great deal in steering the preparation of this report.

One of the UNICEF roles was to find non-medical consultants in helping to prepare such a document which could bring field experience, other disciplines and an operational outlook that could complement the more technical, health-orientated viewpoint of WHO. The art was really to get the best of both organizations together and through a process of critical review and joint examination to arrive at a satisfactory degree of finalization of such a study.

Alma Ata

Charnow: What would you say was the role of UNICEF and WHO in Alma Ata?

Egger: I was not in Alma Ata and I therefore only know from hearsay. Mr. H.R. Labouisse, Dick Heyward, Dr. Fazzi, would be better witnesses of this important gathering. Mr. H.R. Labouisse had sent me to represent him at the René Sand Award given by the International Conference on Social Welfare, which was meeting in Jerusalem in the summer of 1978. He wanted to have a number of his own staff to speak on that occasion and also to take advantage of it for a visit to Israel.

The question of Alma Ata was not just the meeting itself but the whole preparation for such an international gathering and the follow through. The idea for a meeting in Alma Ata came from WHO, because we were at that time not accustomed to convening a world conference of that magnitude and going through all the preparations so as to catch the attention of policy makers. UNICEF was then still more concerned with developing its country approaches.

During a visit to Geneva to see a staff member in hospital, Mr. Labouisse discussed his idea in the car with me and asked what I thought of it. I was struck by the boldness, imagination and the willingness of WHO to really bring this up at a conference in such a way that it could be the subject of policy discussion amongst planners, public health people and finance people and could lead to the endorsement of the principle of primary health care at the highest political level. My recommendation to Mr. Labouisse was that we should accept the proposal without much hesitation.

Later, it was more Mr. Heyward who took a real interest in the details of the preparation that required a great deal of attention to

the drafting of the policy document, to administrative, financial, travel questions, as well as diplomatic problems on the venue of the conference, which was in one of the States of the USSR bordering on China. The Russians had not accepted PHC, and China had years of experience with their barefoot doctors. I gave my attention to this and Heyward became the main promoter of PHC for the conference. UNICEF did also agree to the principle of a financial participation to the cost so as to mark our commitment to the idea and to demonstrate for the conference the joint support and sponsorship of both organizations.

Relations with UNDP

UNDP representatives

Charnow: Yesterday you said something about how you had recognized the importance of working in the country with the UNDP representatives. I have the impression that a number of our regional directors and field representatives have had reservations, based upon their experience, about working closely with UNDP representatives. Would you like to comment on that?

Egger: Well, we all had these reservations at one time or another. But we had to recognize that UNDP had become the major agency in the UN system to provide and finance technical assistance. In addition, the UNDP Resident Representatives were made the coordinators of the activities of UN specialized agencies receiving financial support from UNDP. At a later stage they were also given by the Secretary-General the task to assure coordination of the whole sphere of development, technical assistance and humanitarian aid for all United Nations agencies as a whole. Therefore we could not simply close our eyes to the existence of UNDP. We had to take a positive attitude and try to come to a real cooperation.

The idea was conceived to bring about a real partnership. To a certain extent we have been able to achieve this. It did require a great deal of patience and advocacy, and one had to take account of the personalities and idiosyncracies of some of the UNDP Resident Representatives, who felt that they were entrusted with the task of UN ambassadors. Throughout the Organization contacts had to be established and cultivated with the UNDP Resident Representative to explain the role of UNICEF, to be ready to work with them and utilize plain language where this proved to be necessary. We had, of course, always recourse to take difficult cases up with UNDP headquarters. I must admit that UNDP HQ have always had an open door and were ready to consider difficulties that have come up. Where there was a need to rectify a situation, they were ready to listen and to take UNICEF's point of view into account when they had to arbitrate.

UNDP headquarters

UNDP also went through several financial crises, there were too frequent changes in key posts concerned with programme planning, finance, coordination, etc., but the selection of their personnel.

over the years did improve. They also came to have a more realistic understanding of their own task, realised the limitations of their capabilities and that they needed to develop harmonious relations with the other agencies. The fact that UNICEF had its own resources made it certainly easier for us.

UNICEF field staff views

I did not share some of the reservations my field colleagues had regarding UNDP as such, although they may have been justified in certain instances. UNICEF's own staff did not always demonstrate that they realised that they were part of a system and not just representatives of a free-wheeling separate organization that just happened to carry also the initials of the UN in its emblem. We had an obligation to work with and through the system. There were even advantages in the sense that you could cultivate an interest in UNDP and other organizations, putting forward major problems affecting children and mothers in developing countries, and trying to get their support.

Gradually, we gained ground and over the years there has been a change. Ultimately, a relationship will also depend on the attitude of the personalities on both sides and their willingness to work together. It also equally requires from headquarters a continuous and painstaking effort to maintain and develop a positive collaboration which is seen to be of mutual benefit.

We increasingly felt convinced that major priorities relating to children needed far greater support within the UN system both in New York and in the countries, and that they deserved to be equally applied to the governments concerned; the use of leverages where government policies are influenced was required.

It also meant that the Head of Programme Division and his colleagues, the heads of the geographical sections, had to be in constant touch with their UNDP counterparts. There was, however, a difficulty in the sense that the heads of the UNDP geographical bureaux are highly graded, so that only the Executive Director or his Deputies could talk at the appropriate level with them. Therefore, if a question was considered to be of importance, then the Deputy Director of Programme had to make the effort and discuss such questions directly. It does require an effort of constant contact, some liaison, and regular exchanges, to which I gave a fair amount of time with the other staff of Programme Division. Many UNDP Administrators, e.g. Paul Hoffmann, David Owen or now Bradford Morse, were very understanding and accessible. They were quite open-minded in considering new suggestions and critical observations.

Regional/country office relations

Charnow: Charles, can you elaborate a little bit on how you have seen, over the years, the relation of the regional directors and offices to headquarters and the relation of the field representatives both to the regional offices and to headquarters? What were the strengths, what were the weaknesses of the kinds of relationships we had?

Egger: As you know, this has been a subject that has been discussed endlessly, both at the time of organizational reviews, in meetings at headquarters with regional directors and the regional conferences of regional directors with their own staff.

Regional directors

The trend has moved from a period when the regional directors were almost next to God Almighty, princes in their kingdoms, responsible for all the different aspects of the work and anxious to control everything, to another period, where they were considerably stripped of many powers, with only coordination of the work of UNICEF with other agencies at the regional level, a rather general definition of their role as supervisors and the possibility of offering advice on programme matters that could be taken or discarded by the field.

A much more balanced situation exists now. Based upon my experience both at headquarters and having again had the role of Regional Director during these past nine months in the Middle East, the balance in my opinion is about right. Regional Directors are not burdened with the whole supervision and follow-up of programmes and acting as the main channel of all communication with headquarters. They have a supporting role, visiting field offices. They are to provide advice on both programmes, organization and management. They are freer to put their efforts where they are most required, and their advice will be considered and weighed according to its merits and real significance. A good Regional Director with field experience, initiative and imagination can do a great deal to support programmes at the country level and see to it that the capacity of field missions is being enhanced. One has to find a reasonable balance, so a Regional Director can keep himself informed so that he may choose and decide where he wants to put the emphasis.

He has personally to meet a number of criteria in terms of experience, knowledge of UNICEF, and knowledge about the process of development. He must have a clear basis for his authority. He also has to have the wisdom to know when to utilize authority and how to develop a collegial relationship with his colleagues in the field and act as a senior professional colleague.

Programme reviews in the field

Charnow: Would you say that there was a fundamental change in the character of the responsibility of the Regional Director when, as Deputy Executive Director, you shifted programme reviews to the field? It was possible to discuss directly with the field representatives their programmes rather than, as before, where most of the carrying of the ball and advocacy or knowledge in a personal way had to come from the Regional Director, who might not have been in the country for months preceding the time the programme review was carried out at Headquarters, and in any case could not have depth of knowledge of a programme that a country representative could.

Egger: Yes, a shift did take place to an extent that, during the reviews in the respective regions, the Regional Director was no longer the sole

sole authority to decide which programmes were to go forward to HQ and to the Board and which would not. He had to join others together around the table and demonstrate that he knew something about the policies and their application to programmes, that he was familiar with the background of the country through previous visits, that he had acquired experience in the execution and review of programmes, and thus could make a substantive contribution.

Sometimes our Regional Directors were chosen on the basis of criteria other than familiarity with the social development and programme field. They were assigned to represent the organization, to coordinate with the other agencies, to make official visits to governments and represent the broad characteristics and trends in their regions. There are some which I could mention with all the values that they had - who really were not in a position to make much of an important contribution to a programme discussion because they didn't have the field experience, and in some cases, the interest or willingness really to put their knowledge to good advantage. Some lacked a flair and keenness for productive field visits.

In the programme reviews, however, the Regional Director was in competition with other staff members. He was part of a wide-ranging dialogue between the country representative who, if qualified, could himself put forward his programme and plead for it, and a number of other staff from headquarters, the region etc., that were sitting together as a group to analyse the background of programmes, to bring up questions and to try to imagine what the output and impact of a programme were likely to be, etc.

This meant more substantive work for all, which put the Regional Directors on their toes. Many had enough background, the desire to gain experience, but others increasingly became a kind of figurehead at these meetings and felt themselves to be in an uneasy position. So the Regional Director became a member of the group and no longer the decisive element who could, by a stroke of his baton, decide what was going to go forward and what not.

We wanted a consensus with a pooled background, field experience, knowledge of the country, etc., from the group as a whole. Some had special responsibility for the overall policy, others were specialists in their respective fields, while others were able to compare developments within a region or subregion. Some tried to get a consensus from all these various experiences and views, and by and large, it was shown that in the majority of cases we came to the right type of decision. That doesn't mean, however, that we were always right, that one could not have improved the analysis of a given situation or had not sufficiently anticipated the likely course of a given programme development.

This, therefore, represented a marked change in the role of the Regional Director. When I was still an active member of UNICEF, Regional Directors by and large were able to make important contributions to this process of review and analysis. The really important role of the Regional Director is not so much at the review itself than in exercising this influence on all the steps leading to

the formulation of a first programme outline. He has to look into the questions of the organization, management of the offices. He has to assess the personnel. He has to interpret and help to apply the broad policies of the organization. He can interpret regional trends and draw on experiences and sources of technical or other assistance from countries.

He is also a senior professional colleague in his region to provide advice, encouragement and correction where required. That is where really the Regional Director can make the greatest contribution in the places before and after those reviews which in any case are only an intermediary stage.

Charnow: I think what you have just said in a way points to a lesson for the future about the kind of person we need to recruit as Regional Directors. It is very useful to have your experience set down in this way.

Use of expertise

Let me ask you about the use of specialists and consultants — the short-term consultant who goes out for a specific task, headquarters specialists such as Titi Memet for family planning and Tony Kennedy for urban activities, who gave advice and support as well as specialists in the regions and national expertise.

Value

Egger: We have to understand that UNICEF, as mentioned earlier, was a real pioneer in broadening the range of sources of its regular staff recruitment through the creation of the National Professional category, and its desire to broaden the traditional sources of technical assistance of advisers, consultants, etc., who came from the specialized agencies, and to look toward national resources.

This proved to be a decisive step in a new direction. This was an absolute priority for UNICEF that we broke through this strait-jacket and were able both to make use of the best that was available in the agencies and also go beyond that to look at the countries, to look at other agencies that were not part of the UN system in a narrow sense, look at resources that were available in the private sector from voluntary agencies, etc. I think this has been to the good. There is no question about it. UNICEF could never otherwise have been able to assure the necessary preparation, assessment, reviews, collection of data, to have specialists in terms of building up national capacity, management, looking at the training components, elements of working with local administrations, etc.

Where I feel we have not done a good job is in terms of the systematics of it. Experts can be very useful. They are costly and they must be related to a specific job that needs to be done. I do not think we had taken at that time enough trouble to clarify the terms of reference. What did we need an expert for? What did we expect from him? What is the control that we exercise over his activity? How did we rate his work? And what follow-up was there

going to be with the particular contribution that he was making?

This has been a learning process. With the authority that the country representatives gained, helped by the considerable increase of their respective country ceilings, with the flexibility in the interpretation of UNICEF policy, with the resourcefulness of many of our colleagues, they made increasing use of consultants and advisers for the preparation and review of programmes. I understand that there are now somewhat stricter criteria to be observed.

Insufficient appraisal of results

What we may have neglected is to record the result and appraisal of a particular consultancy and expertise in fields of interest to UNICEF for which there could be a repeated demand in several countries. What had been our experience with a particular source of consultancy, how useful had it been to UNICEF, what were the results that could be used on a systematic basis for the organization as a whole? Unfortunately, we have not done that sufficiently.

That is where our planning colleagues fell down, because they were concentrating so much on promotion and development that they neglected a more systematic follow-up of expertise and consultancies that were contracted. A great deal of money was spent on studies of all sorts without always determining clearly their objectives, what use would be made of them, to calculate the cost in relation to results, etc. Of course HQ in general and Programme Division in particular, had a fair share of responsibility for this.

Headquarters specialists

Another reason for this was the realisation that the advisers of the UN agencies and some specialists of our own were not enough, and not always suitable. The rarefied atmosphere at HQ, with working hours of 9 to 5, makes the staff so preoccupied with many other things, they have often also a more relaxed approach to the work. There are many other distractions, social obligations, etc.

Expertise should be more easily available from the field, first perusing national resources, then others from bilateral aid, voluntary agencies, etc. All these need to be examined and the best, or those available, tapped.

I am afraid that Headquarters is again in the process of building up a super structure of advisers, focal points and specialists in New York, largely with focus on elaborating the new policy and messages of CSDR, rather than relying also on resources in the countries, putting these technical and other resources to use, reviewing their performance and going back to them for follow-up. Expertise really must be more directly related to the problems UNICEF is facing in the field. It must, if possible, be near enough to understand the type of problems UNICEF is facing in the field. It must, if possible, be near enough to understand the type of problems they will be concerned with. We are equally making a contribution to strengthen the country's own technical and research capacity. Many of these

consultants and experts come from institutions and different agencies and go back to them, and thus enrich these agencies.

We have not always given enough attention to the details of the contracting arrangements that had to specify the type of work required, to nail down the details of the performance required and relate the remuneration to the output.

In my recent assignment in the Middle East there was a vast number and type of expertise and consultancies with often interesting approaches in the various countries, which quite impressed me. It was a question to make intelligent use of it for the region, to try to work out a system of evaluation and recording that would make it available to other countries as well, and to pursue these arrangements also from the point of view of their practical application, with all the difficulties that implementation will encounter.

Suggestions for future emphases

Our search for expertise - this is typical for a whole period of development - was in the first place more concerned with the technique itself - how to introduce a new technical development and not enough with the framework and structure as a whole, how to make better use of existing resources, of building national capacity, of developing a greater degree of participation of the users, to learn more from attitudes expressed by the community. There our demand for expertise needs to expand and learn how to think through an entire process.

In a period of scarce budget resources, weakening structures, less priority given to social development, difficulties of maintenance of structures and plants, etc., one has to obtain the required expertise not only for innovations but to extend it to other aspects of the delivery system, in the actual development and adaptation of existing structures, of strengthening the capacity for local production, for the right type of training, etc., and all this within the framework of the constraints, the difficulties and scarcities now existing in many developing countries.

A great deal more attention needs to be given to the type of management organization most suitable for these countries, how best to deploy existing resources, streamline budget procedures. More attention seems to be given to these aspects. It is not enough, however, and more attention needs to be given to discover the resources in the countries to take account of national sensitivities and explore schemes of exchanges among countries, to concentrate on regional centres and make the countries a part of such development. For the future UNICEF will undoubtedly have to emphasize this far more. It is not enough to concentrate on the most carefully worked out world messages; it is equally important to bring such messages down in the form of concrete plans, mesh them with their own endeavours to the level of where things are happening in the countries at the grassroots village levels, the shanty-towns, etc. where you have to deal with the precarious conditions, minimal

possibilities of administration at the local level and the socio-economic situation of the communities with their own power centres, rivalries, and different perceptions of development and what it means to them.

Charnow: Thank you very much for your elaboration of this important subject.

Contacts with UN Missions

In your position as Deputy Executive Director, how much consultation did you carry on with the ambassadors and key people at the missions in the UN? I assume when you went on field trips, you certainly saw all the principal government people related to us.

Egger: This includes the contacts with the members of delegations that were on the UNICEF Board or interested in our work, with delegations that came through New York to attend other meetings, etc. Through my experience in India I learned how important these contacts with representatives of donor countries can be. One could use social gatherings, cocktail parties, receptions, openings, official addresses, etc., to cultivate such contacts, to promote ideas, express concerns over problems the countries were facing and seek opinions.

In New York I just carried this on because I felt this was part of my responsibilities. I had the impression that UNICEF at headquarters was primarily cultivating the representatives of the donor countries but in some way neglected the Board members from developing countries that were stationed in New York or came for UN General Assembly gathering, UNDP Governing Council and other meetings. I did spend a considerable amount of time on these contacts and encouraged the members of Programme Division to assist in this as it cannot be vested in one man only.

Hospitality

It did require an effort of time and money, and you had to be hospitable and invite them. Staff at a certain level have regular entertainment allowances, but others have to claim for each hospitality, and this has been a kind of drawback. Some people have a natural gift to do this, others may have financial commitments to family, education of children, rent, etc., and have found it difficult to entertain. They may also not be at ease with such obligations. This requires therefore some considerable efforts, and you have to do it not only during your working hours, but equally at home. Delegates as well as UNICEF field staff may, after a certain period become sick and tired of restaurants, official gatherings and all that, and therefore may enjoy meeting in a private home. By and large, the senior staff at headquarters have made a real effort in this respect. Such efforts are important with the humbler and more silent representatives of the UNICEF Board. We tried to organize regular working lunches for all the members belonging to one region.

Labouisse

Mr. Labouisse was extraordinarily hospitable and generous in this, and made it a point to invite all the Board members and not just those he had a particular interest in and hopes for increasing their financial support, although this was of course important. I know that members of delegations have been very appreciative of this.

In this way, one could prepare discussions of important topics on this and mobilize their interest, and gradually build up the support from delegates from developing countries and encourage them to take a wider interest in the work of UNICEF. This may have been one of the elements that has contributed to a feeling of sharing a common interest in the pursuance of UNICEF's objectives. It is undoubtedly time-consuming, it costs money. One has to make an effort to put a delegate at ease, to take an interest in other matters affecting his country or his range of interest. One does not always have to thrash out UNICEF topics from morning to night. You can enlarge your range of common interest and thus establish a personal rapport. This facilitates greatly the deepening of a relationship when you have to ask something, or mobilize interest in questions that have a real priority for the organization. This is so obvious and I am sure this effort is going to be continued, perhaps in a different style suited to the personality of the Executive Director and his staff.

Hospitality reimbursement

Charnow: Are you suggesting that our system for reimbursement is not a good one and therefore inhibiting, that perhaps we should have our own particular system, not necessarily related to the UN, which doesn't have quite the same situation that we have?

Egger: Well, I'm suggesting that this ought to be looked into, because I found that this was a difficulty. A programme officer at a P-4 or over P-5 level can find it difficult to cope with this arrangement because our system of reimbursement is somewhat complicated. I don't know the correct answer to it, but it has had an inhibiting effect. People react differently, some are ready to go out, put out some money on their own and are willing to make an effort. Others are turning every penny in their hand. You could, for example, imagine a hospitality fund that a Director of Programme administers and makes available to his senior staff. Heads of geographical sections should have their own hospitality fund.

Participation of developing countries in Board

Charnow: It was always been a matter of regret to me that for many years that representation on our Board of delegations from developing countries was relatively poor in terms of leadership and continuity. Would you have any comment?

Egger: It is undoubtedly true that many delegates have often been rather passive. For someone who does not know the UN conference technique who has not been in the US before and confronts this wild city of New York for the first time, it takes some time for adjustment until they

feel free to participate more openly, constructively and critically. There is also the ability to see beyond their own country, not only the experience made at home, but to interpret certain trends of development, characteristic of a group of countries, not just to analyze them and relate them to UNICEF policies. To discuss the implications of certain assistance, policies, etc., does require a certain freedom of mind, an ability to synthesize and the ease to put them forward. This is always done in front of a large group of important donor countries.

One suggestion had been made to adopt the UN practice and pay for the travel cost. UNDP has also followed this procedure. They issue an invitation to the annual meeting of their Governing Council for two members of a delegation to attend the meeting, covering travel and per diem. UNICEF has resisted this. This may probably be too great a reservation and it might be well worthwhile to look into this.

The second condition is for the UNICEF representative, and good progress has been made here, to become more active in assisting the government to identify the right type of person to attend the meeting, and then to make sure they are appropriately briefed, received background information, etc. Then the delegates have to be taken care of at this end also in New York. I understand that there has been quite an improvement in obtaining a more active participation.

The increasing level of resources UNICEF is now making available to countries has contributed to it. Countries feel that it is worthwhile to make the effort and send a delegation. The interest our own field staff have taken in helping in the process of briefing has equally contributed to it. Furthermore, the discussion at the Board seems far more orientated toward policies, which makes it easier to have a meaningful debate.

The subject of children in development has also received far more attention the world over, and a widening range of disciplines have recognized its importance. This makes it also more interesting for the delegates to take part in the discussion. The Group of the 77 has made an effort to mobilize a greater sense of participation. They have realized that UNICEF is not just a nice little humanitarian organization but represents an organization with more recognized mandatory resources and an ability to promote its policies that go far beyond the tradition existing before. I hope that this positive trend will continue.

Staffing

Disproportionally Western

Charnow: Over the years the core staff and the power structure in the secretariat has been from Western countries rather than from developing countries, a situation which is now very much recognized and the trend is to remedy it. Would you like to comment on that?

Egger: These are different elements that you touch upon in your question. UNICEF has enjoyed the advantage of its senior staff staying far

longer in their respective position. This gives you an advantage of continuity, of making use of accumulated experience and drawing on the rich contacts established. It has, on the other hand, the disadvantage of a certain immobility, a certain lack of rejuvenation with new ideas, fresh outlook and demonstration of new styles.

Looking back, the respective leaders of UNICEF could have given more attention to building a more diversified staff drawn from various cultures, languages, socio-economic structures, etc., so that these regions in the world would be better represented. I'm afraid that we are at the present moment slipping back again because the composition of the senior staff is predominately Anglo-Saxon and Western.

Non-political emphasis

On the other hand, the positive element has been the erection of a certain style and working atmosphere, which has been the legacy of a succession of Executive Directors who, through their own example, demonstrated a personal style of integrity, of deep concern for children, of devotion and commitment to the objectives of UNICEF. They had deep regard for the true nature of UNICEF. They were successful in never allowing the organization to be misused for political purposes and jeopardizing UNICEF's concern for children in a wide context of humanitarian objectives and development framework.

Under the American system that the UN has adopted, a great deal depends on the style and authority of the leader at the top. UNICEF has been generally known as a committed organization with staff members respected for their loyalty and committed to UNICEF's ideals, much less open to corruption and ill-famed practices. However, we are not entirely immune from it. With the growth of the organization, the process of decentralization and opening up the organization to a wide range of people, one might have to watch out for this in the future. This is inevitably bound up with the growth of the organization and a lessening of standards which you observe everywhere in the UN.

I would also state that the UNICEF staff, particularly in the field, have by and large been able to stand up against undue influences, and have not in most cases been party to encouraging the use of aid for personal and political purposes. We have certainly been subjected to pressures of this kind.

We may have, knowingly or unknowingly, agreed to certain compromises in our dealings with governments, but by and large the capacity for resistance, the willingness and courage to say no, the desire to negotiate and drive a reasonable bargain in terms of conditional support for programmes, have been added to the reputation of UNICEF. I consider it one of the finest attributes for which UNICEF has become known. Such a feature needs to be constantly emphasized and followed. It is very much influenced by the attitudes taken and examples given by our colleagues at their various duty posts.

Coming back from the Middle East, I became impressed again that the majority of our staff have this sense of responsibility, the moral

fibre that makes them both accepted and respected members of UNICEF that have always gone out of their way to promote the ideas of UNICEF and find ways to put them also in practice. They have also shown that they have retained a certain tact and a certain sense of modesty in their practices. They have displayed an attitude that they are here to fulfill a mission. Our staff are living up to these principles. Where it doesn't exist, there is some kind of mechanism to correct it. Sometimes it works rather slowly, but it is there. Colleagues that are not ready to live up to these standards will not be able to stay too long in the organization. This is one of the reasons why UNICEF is generally respected, and looked upon as a serious partner by Government. I truly hope this will remain so.

Compromises in programming

Political considerations

Charnow: Did you suggest that sometimes we have had to make compromises on political grounds in our programming or programme allocations? And if so, can you give illustrations of what you mean by that?

Egger: Well, the answer to your first question is easier. It is inevitable that in the type of work that UNICEF is pursuing, with growing resources, a great deal of flexibility and a real commitment to major policies, you have to come to an understanding with the government you are working with. An understanding means that you have at times to come to a compromise, and to find ways to satisfy the various partners. This is what the art of negotiation is all about.

The important question is that when negotiation take place you know how far you can go in your flexibility in making concessions. You should also retain the right and firmness when some basic principles are being abrogated to say no, or to recommend that UNICEF not accept an unfair or totally unsatisfactory compromise.

Cyprus

Now with regard to concessions made for political purposes, I will give you a positive example. Recently, I was several times in Cyprus. Cyprus is a small country, with a relatively high GNP on the Cypriotic side and less on the Turkish occupied side. We really should not provide medical aid to Cyprus; we could do a minimum of promotion, or give technical assistance in certain fields of importance to children. But Cyprus happens to be one of the countries where the UN has a special responsibility to keep the peace in the island and explore the basis for a political settlement through the office of the special representatives of the Secretary-General, who is trying to find a 'modus vivendi' between the two separated communities. It is, however, also important that the UN shows an interest in the development aspect of the island, in children, etc. I had to assist in Cyprus several times and met quite a few people from Cyprus. The very capable UNDP representative told me that UNICEF was one of the agencies that could probably bring

representatives of both communities together, for a non-political purpose, the organization of a national manifestation for children, leading to a greater interest in the problems of children. He said that it was very important for people of both communities to get to know each other. It was really worth making a modest investment for. This, in my opinion, is a positive compromise, and we should support it.

Sudan: water

Another example. I have this summer been in the Sudan, where UNICEF is involved in a very important water supply development programme in creating boreholes in desert areas and assisting in building up the hafirs — earth dams where rain water is being retained after the rainy seasons. UNICEF has contributed in a necessary way to strengthen the public works department with machinery like huge bulldozers, cranes, drilling machines, lorries, etc. I was surprised when I saw the machine parks that had been planned and procured by UNICEF, largely for important public works projects in the water field. One could feel that UNICEF should not have concentrated so much on large-size projects but seen to it that UNICEF programme aid was more related to other public health activities of direct concern to children, e.g. to assure that the quality of the water in these rain-fed hafirs can be improved by a system of chlorination and passing it through a series of filters, to make it safe as drinking water. We should also go into health education of the people. Well, we had to accept a certain compromise. The government and the people felt it was of great importance to have water for drinking purposes for them and their animals in the first place. Other related effects would follow from this. On the other hand, if you wait until the desirable water supply has been built up and then you have to educate the population, you have to be assured of the proper quality, the proper maintenance of these waterworks to assume the link with primary health care, etc. All of this will take a great deal of time and, if you want to develop a packaged approach, then the number of boreholes, hafirs, etc., that you can include may go down. One has to find a proper balance between the two components.

These are positive kinds of compromises.

Cuba: central kitchens

I remember also that we had long discussions in Cuba about their desire to establish large central milk kitchens for the feeding of pre-school children for which the Finnish Government was prepared to make a special contribution to UNICEF. We looked at the designs for these enormous milk kitchens that were almost small factories. They were supposed to provide from a few central points special supplementary food for the children's crèches that were set up in Havana in order to allow the mothers to spend more time at work.

From a management and economic point of view, these kitchens were probably monsters. It would have been better to allow for small kitchens with local aid, volunteers, etc., to prepare the meals that could easily be distributed to a large number of different children's

creches. But the government was determined to free as many women as possible from having to look after these individual kitchens and to involve them in the labour process. So, we agreed with the Finns to go forward and use the Finnish funds for a reduced number of two or three larger non-food preparation centres which were almost industrial factories for the preparation of this food. I was invited by the wife of the Vice-President of Cuba (she is actually the wife of the brother of Fidel Castro) to inaugurate the first of these milk kitchens. They were undoubtedly prepared to make a major effort, which perhaps did not make much sense from the purely economic and management point of view, for it was also quite costly and did not help to bring about a closer relationship between the crèches and the mothers but were really more of an industrial undertaking. From their point of view, however, it served the purpose. They constructed the milk kitchens, put them to work and organized a system of distribution.

It again was a kind of compromise where, after a great deal of analysis, we finally accepted what the government wanted after some necessary improvement. Not all our fears were equally justified, but after they started to function some of the difficulties prevailed. There was a question whether these kitchens were even going to be built or nothing would happen. We met with the Finns, the Cuban officers, and our own engineers and tested out what could be regarded as an acceptable compromise. There were of course also political aspects relating to the continuation of our aid to Cuba, which was, from certain governments, much criticized.

Noted projects

Charnow: Are we more likely to make programming compromises in the case of "noted" projects where the donor has a special political interest?

Egger: Not necessarily. If we have capable people in the field and if we are able to come to a fair understanding between the potential donor and the receiving country on a "noted" project, I am not so concerned about it because the position of UNICEF is basically quite strong. It is for UNICEF to make sure that the proper application of its policies and criteria are maintained. The final decision rests with UNICEF. It does not have to follow the wishes of a donor for a certain project and its implementation if UNICEF is not satisfied that its own principles have been observed.

Charnow: Well, Charles, I know you have another commitment now. I'd like to repeat what I have said about the enormous richness of material you have given us. In a sense you've given the Charles Egger version of the "Overview", but in a much livelier and franker way than could ever be written down in a public document. While I am concluding this series of interviews reluctantly, we understand that there are four or five topics, including your recent experience in Lebanon, that we have not yet pursued but which you will tape yourself when you are back in Europe and send to us. In the meantime, let me say that this has been a very revealing experience. It reinforces my belief that those of us who have been restricted to seeing UNICEF from the documents and headquarters side have missed an awful lot. This has been a learning experience for me.

Egger: Thank you very much. I don't think you've been fair with your role on overseeing the UNICEF documentation. Otherwise you could not have taken such a direct interest in what we were attempting to do and have the knowledge and the feeling for some of the problems and orientations on which you were seeking views on. Your questions and your interest have clearly demonstrated this. I have enjoyed doing it.

Charnow: Thank you.

End of series of interviews