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Discusses UNICEF's work and needs for its assistance in the region, including the Gulf countries; the work of Prince Talal in support of UNICEF's work; the role of communications in relation to UNICEF's work.

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The Communications Factor

Advocacy in high income countries
and the Development Information Experience

please give copies
to Ling &
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31 May 1982

This is an assessment of the present and future role of communications in relation to UNICEF work and expectations in high income developing countries, particularly the Arab Gulf countries. This assessment is based on the projected activities of the Organization in the Gulf, the human and material resources available both to UNICEF and the concerned countries; and, naturally, what these countries expect of UNICEF.

With the establishment of AGFUND and the relentless efforts of HRH Prince Talal to advocate the cause of children and the role of UNICEF, a unique situation arose for our Organization laden with unprecedented challenge and opportunity, a challenge to continue and reinforce this breakthrough in order to maintain and invigorate the opportunity of tapping a vast source of funding to help the poorest of the poor in line with our belief in global interdependence, thus making UNICEF not only the initiator of this development, but a pivotal point in multi-lateral international cooperation.

Rich in material resources as these countries are, they, their children and women still need UNICEF. High infant mortality rates, illiteracy among girls and women, and in some case spread of communicable diseases and malnutrition, lack of clean drinking water and medical, social and educational services are some of the problems these countries face. The scarcity of trained human resources is most evident in the staggering numbers of expatriates dispensing most of the work in the Gulf including the physician, the clerk, the mechanic and the nanny.

And here lies our dual assignment in the Gulf countries:

Assist them and maintain their interest in providing assistance to the poor via UNICEF, whether thru AGFUND, direct contributions to general resources or adoption of noted projects. It is of prime importance to note that assisting these countries is a key to maintaining their interest in providing funds to UNICEF because that is where and how we can demonstrate on the spot our efficiency, credibility and professionalism. A small effort or project implemented efficiently under their eyes is much more convincing to people than an abstract report on a monumental programme executed thousands of kilometers away. It is essential to make the name of UNICEF a coined term known to the people and associated with development, progress, welfare of children in particular and humanity in general. This can be achieved only by work on the spot, e.g. providing assistance. It is not my purpose to define the kind of assistance we can or should provide these countries; but it is evidently not the classical type assistance like giving equipment, setting up health centers, etc... as is the case with other developing nations. The Gulf countries do not need that kind of assistance because they can more than afford to buy or build whatever they require.

What they need from UNICEF is Expertise, Training and Advocacy. Knowing that the lack of trained human resources is a major problem in the countries concerned, providing expertise and training becomes an obvious need. If we go one step further and establish that the enlightenment of the Gulf populations, including many officials and decision makers has not kept pace with the sudden economic boom and great affluence, the urgent need for advocacy becomes obvious; advocacy thru all channels of communication and on a multitude of problems and themes.

The first facet is public information, whose efforts are already geared toward highlighting the plight of children around the world and the efforts UNICEF is exerting to improve their situation. Public Information was and continues to be a major factor supporting the work of Prince Talal, and the Gulf media in general have been receptive to UNICEF initiated materials, and when approached properly these media have even taken the initiative in publicizing

themes of concern to us. The excellent working relationship established between our Office in Abu-Dhabi and the Gulf press is a sound foundation that should be utilized and put to full use. But, general advocacy on behalf of the world's children should be followed up by an information effort on programmes UNICEF will be supporting or implementing in those countries, touching directly on their own concerns and problems. This will not only explain to the populace the nature and benefits of a given programme, but would also help make the name of UNICEF a coined term in their minds - thus enhancing the image of the Organization as indirect support for fund-raising.

PSC is the second very important facet. Programmes envisaged for implementation in the Gulf countries will most probably contain a major communications factor. Given the low level of enlightenment among the population, PSC acquires a special importance to raise awareness among the people and induce them to change for the better. This holds true for many aspects of work: child care, nutrition, sanitation, breast-feeding, education, training, etc..

Development education is another important facet. If plans to form National Committees in the Gulf countries materialize, development education will be the starting point in giving committee members the necessary knowledge on UNICEF, its policies, working methods, etc.. However, the NC's will be only the first audience of development education because schools should be targeted next to educate the Gulf youth of today on the problems of children, aspects of development, etc., to implant in them at an early stage the sense of global interdependence and make them potential supporters of UNICEF. This is an investment in the future, but it is worthwhile to convert the coming generations of decision makers, executives and professionals into advocates of development and friends of UNICEF.

UNICEF publications, posters, films, etc.. play an important role in this communications effort, be they of general PI nature, or related to PSC and development education. However, using the available and highly developed media in the Gulf is even more important. It will be necessary for UNICEF to establish with the media, whether privately or state owned, a formal and systematic working relationship. It will be our duty to give orientation to their staff and help in the planning, writing and/or production of features, programmes, messages, etc.. because the local staff usually lack the knowledge in the fields of advocacy. The Gulf media should be encouraged to undertake with UNICEF joint ventures outside their area, like the recent mission which we arranged for Gulf journalists to visit Sudan and report on the situation of children and UNICEF's work. For efficient advocacy work it will be necessary to pool local resources and streamline the communications channels and content of messages.

A good example is the Development Information Department in Jordan which was established in 1976 and began work in early 1977.

As in most other countries, every ministry in Jordan had its own "Public Relations" office with direct access to the media. All ministries dealing with the public and occasionally NGOs, had messages directed at the population or segments of it. Very often these messages were contradictory in content and timing, and thus caused confusion instead of a better understanding. In 1976, the Jordanian Ministry of Health was holding a "week of immunization against polio", and the Ministry of Interior was holding at the same time a "week of safety in traffic". Both ministries arranged with the media a series of messages, each on its particular concern, and these were carried throughout that week on radio, TV and the daily press; in addition to posters and banners in cities and towns. Theoretically, each of the two ministries did a good job, but the coincidence of both campaigns had extremely negative results. A small scale survey among low-income sub-urban and rural populations revealed a great deal of confusion. Some people even mixed up the messages of both campaigns to the extent of believing that "immunizing" the child meant its protection from traffic hazards. That experience was the motive that led finally to official action at the highest level to bring order into the maze of responsibilities and prerogatives of advocacy work. The Development Information Department was established to coordinate and actually carry out all advocacy in the media.

The staff recruited for the new department consisted of 22 people: 11 communicators with skills in press, TV, radio, photography and theatre; and 11 experts from all ministries dealing with development. Thus knowledge of the subject matter was put together with communications skills, all under the administrative responsibility of the Ministry of Information, but with a considerable amount of freedom of action and a minimum of bureaucratic restraints. UNICEF was requested by the Jordanian Government to support the new department, and this officer conducted a four week training course for the staff, both in theory and implementation. UNICEF provided some basic materials and supplies and UNESCO provided a consultant in audio-visual aids. The Government gave the new department space in newspapers and time on radio and TV. All ministries were instructed to entrust the new department with the dissemination of all messages of developmental character addressed to the public. Furthermore, the department received two mobile projection and public address units (Land Rovers) for advocacy work in remote areas, especially among the nomadic and semi-nomadic population segments. The department developed rapidly into an effective instrument of supporting development projects, raising general awareness on problematic themes and advocating better practices in health, nutrition, sanitation, use of water resources, etc..

Cooperation with UNICEF continued through the years since the department was established, and this officer recently proposed to the Jordanian Ministry of Information to hold a two day meeting in Amman with the Deputy Minister, the Director of Development Information and his staff to assess the achievements and failures of the past and set the course for the coming few years. The meeting will be held next September and I hope it will result in a renewed commitment on the part of the Ministry to further strengthen the department and infuse it with fresh talents, and a rejuvenated spirit of initiative and vigor on the part of the staff.

The Jordanian example, since it became publicized outside the country's borders, attracted much attention in countries of the Region, but also as far as West Africa. These countries, including Syria and Lebanon, undertook some steps to establish a similar course of action, but no tangible results have materialized yet.

The Jordanian example could be copied, with modifications, in Arab Gulf countries who face problems in advocacy campaigns similar to those faced by Jordan. UNICEF, in its dealings with the Governments of the Gulf countries, should draw their attention to the problem and suggest the Jordanian experiment as a model case. If such departments are created, UNICEF will have an effective partner capable of carrying out advocacy work utilizing national resources, both human and material.
