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Interview with Prof. Boguslaw Kozusznik

Conducted by
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INTERVIEW WITH PROF. BOGUSLAW KOZUSZNIK*

BY R. FREIBERG IN WARSAW

ON 5 SEPTEMBER 1984

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*Dr. Kozusznik was Poland's representative on the UNICEF Board for 22 years — from 1957 to 1979 — and was Vice-Chairman of the Board for the last eighteen of these years. He was a founder and subsequently Chairman of the Polish National Committee. He was Deputy Minister of Health and Social Welfare from 1946–1959 and in this capacity was responsible for Poland's relations with UNICEF.

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haemoglobin. It was also very important for our children in this time. Those production factories are at work today in Poland.

Very useful and very fruitful also was the collaboration in the cooperation with the many specialists sent to our country by UNICEF in the field of health and in the field of milk and food conservation and health, and also the participation of specialists, consultants of UNICEF, in elaborating the Six-Year National Plan. At this time I think perhaps the question of programme for conservation, especially in milk factories, was elaborated in close cooperation with the consultant. Mr. Sabin, was here few times. Also there was the question of how to establish new kind of health centres in the field mainly in the ??.

The mission was officially closed in December 1950 on the basis of a mutual agreement between the Polish Government and the Fund. At the same time a liaison office, headed by Mr. Pavlic, was created, attached to the Polish Ministry of Health, to handle remaining UNICEF matters. The last contribution of UNICEF was a symbolic one in 1976 for a health centre which is a monument for the children victims of war — for the memory of all children, not only the Polish children, all children wherever they were in distress, or killed during the war.

Polish National Committee

Creation

KOZUSZNIK: In December 1962, the Polish National Committee was established.

FREIBERG: Why was the Polish National Committee established only in 1962? What happened in the period from the closure of UNICEF's office and its transformation into a liaison office in the Ministry of Health and 1962? What led to the establishment of the Polish Committee for UNICEF?

KOZUSZNIK: Until 1962 all issues connected with co-operation with UNICEF were concentrated in the Ministry of Health in the liaison office. The collaboration with UNICEF was very close and useful and also very fruitful. We discussed the possibility of creating a Polish National Committee as the body for cooperation with UNICEF. This is now the case.

Mixture of government and social organizations

KOZUSZNIK: The Committee has the character of the situation in our country, a

I think it was very useful because of our experience from the time when we had very bad conditions, and had to organize health services and food and nutrition programmes. In this time very often our conditions were similar to those now in the developing countries. I think our contribution to UNICEF was very useful.

Training of planners

We also organized the courses for participants sent by UNICEF in the field of planning. These were was organized in the School of Planning in Warsaw.

Family planning

In our country was established an association for motherhood, a special society for enlightenment of motherhood.

FREIBERG: What do you call enlightened motherhood?

KOZUSZNIK: It is a question of enlightenment, education in the field of family planning, and the term "enlightened motherhood" was used by Maurice Pate.

FREIGBER: Just as we now use responsible parenthood rather than family planning?

KOZUSZNIK: And I remember the discussion of this problem with Maurice Pate in New York during the Board session in 1966. This problem had been raised at a number of Board Sessions since the Minister of Health from India was there to discuss this problem. She had attended the General Assembly of WHO, and afterwards she came to New York to discuss the problem of family planning. It was a very delicate problem. Many members of the Board hesitated. It was a problem for UNICEF. It was discussed not only in the Board meetings, but privately between the members and staff. It was very friendly. It was one of the best climates between persons working in UNICEF with the representatives of Government.

Kozusznik role in Board consensus

FREIBERG: Yes, UNICEF has escaped a lot of the bickering and politicization which has happened in many UN agencies. And I think now that we are speaking in 1984, when the international climate is far from being very encouraging, it is very interesting to go back to the initial period of UNICEF and to the difficult periods of the fifties and sixties when there were major tensions, but when the Board always managed to work harmoniously together.

Private discussions

And I know that you have played a very important role in

explaining, particularly to some of the East European Governments, certain views expressed by other delegations and reached consensus. Maybe you can speak a little bit about that experience, which is the fine diplomatic work within the Executive Board.

KOZSUZNIK: I had very good relations with all the people, not only with people from the Eastern countries, but also from the Western countries. Often if some question arose during the session and could not be openly discussed during the session, I discussed it perhaps with Mr. Labouisse and some representative of the Soviet Union. And so, because there were quite different possibilities than to speak publicly, it allowed me to have success. I never had any difficulties. A few times it was necessary to discuss it several times to get to an understanding by many persons. I had interesting discussions with Dr. Conzett from Switzerland. His merits are very big in UNICEF activities. He was one of the most important persons in UNICEF. I think this human climate - which was really human in the UNICEF - was very helpful for us for understanding the philosophy of UNICEF.

Viet Nam

On the question of political discrimination and so on, you know

the very difficult time in UNICEF on the question of Viet Nam. We from the East countries worked for the assistance also for the children in South Viet Nam always.

FREIBERG: That is one of the success stories in the UN history - that we had been present in North and South Viet Nam before the reunification. The countries on the Board, although politically their governments were on different sides, managed to agree on that.

KOZUSZNIK: I was in North Viet Nam to discuss the possibility of assistance and the method of assistance which we could arrange. And we were successful.

FREIBERG: How would you consider this experience of Viet Nam, which is one of the milestones in UNICEF's history followed by the next milestone in Kampuchea? Would you consider this as one of your most successful experiences?

KOZUSZNIK: Yes, I think I must say that the discussion in Viet Nam was very delicate at this time. On one side there was China and on the other side the Soviet Union, and it was very delicate. But we succeeded. Recently when the Director of the European Office discussed the possibility of greater use of the Red Cross. In Viet Nam the assistance was given by the Red Cross of the Soviet Union for the first time.

FREIBERG: Which means when an intergovernmental organization like UNICEF cannot operate directly and cannot be seen, we can work through non-governmental organizations or any other group that can reach the child. That has always been our policy.

KUZUSZNIK: Yes, through this the Viet Nam problem was solved. It was a success.

Involving the socialist countries

FREIBERG: What would you consider as your least satisfactory experience? What really caused you some serious distress in your experience with UNICEF? What would you concede as either a failure or something which you really wanted to achieve and have not been able to achieve?

KUZUSZNIK: It is very difficult to say. The problem I would like to solve fully was the question of how to involve the Eastern socialist countries in the activities of UNICEF. Earlier their interest in other countries was small. I mentioned earlier that Dr. Sicault involved me to work together with him on this.

Effects of the Cold War

FREIBERG: But why was this so when it was the Eastern European countries

which were among the first beneficiaries of UNICEF? Why was that climate like this?

KUZUSZNIK: I don't know. I think the problem arose at the time we called the Cold War. During that time the Eastern European countries were not very interested in collaborating with the international organizations - the United Nations and its agencies. It was that period 1950-1956, when we were not a member of the WHO nor did we collaborate with UNICEF.

Poland resumes contacts in 1956

In 1956 Poland started again, not only with UNICEF but also with the other United Nations organizations. In my opinion it was some kind of mistake that we did not participate in the activities of the United Nations organizations and specialized organizations such as WHO, FAO and so on. I remember that we discussed this problem in the Conference of Ministers of Health. We in Warsaw decided that we would start again. It was a good step in this time for a problem which arose from a political climate.

My experience indicates that to approach a problem on the basis of dialogue is most important and not only useful, but often very fruitful. The only way to understand men by men.

UNICEF an outstanding UN example

I have this experience in the work in UNICEF. After discussion between us, we were always able solve problems arising in UNICEF. UNICEF is one of the best examples how by dialogue, by discussion, by personal contact we can solve many problems for the benefit of the human being in the world. In my opinion UNICEF is a unique organization. In the framework of the United Nations, its human climate is one of the best. I think my work in the UNICEF is the most constructive and positive in my life. I am preparing some memoirs in which I will illustrate the UNICEF organization as the best example of cooperation between all peoples and between the nations.

FREIBERG: UNICEF is probably the organization, or among the few organizations, which have really taken seriously the Charter of the United Nations, which starts, as we all know, not with "we the Government," but "we the peoples". We have always been a people-to-people organization. That aspect has been the most important in our work from the highest policy-making body, the Executive Board, down to all the million of individuals who are involved with UNICEF by buying greeting cards or by promoting greeting cards; by spreading information, etc.

KOZUSZNIK: In my opinion, UNICEF is also a unique organization unlike the specialized agencies or the United Nations, because UNICEF is dealing with the human being, taking consideration of all aspects of the development of the human being, whether education or nutrition or mental and moral being.

We discussed very often the question of education for peace, before this problem was discussed in the framework of the General Assembly of the United Nations, not only during the session of the Executive Board, but also by the National Committees. I remember we discussed this very often, with Mr. Eggink and Mr. Thedin and others.

UNICEF is one of the outstanding human organizations because of the people working in UNICEF and with UNICEF. It is not only a question of normal work, but, I think, a question of devotion for human beings.

Kozusznik's field experience

FREIBERG: Prof. Kuzusznik, could you tell us about your field experience? You travelled widely in the context of your UNICEF activities. What has been most impressive to you, and what has positively or negatively impressed you during your travel to developing countries, witnessing the work of UNICEF?

UNICEF close to local authorities and the people

KOZUSZNIK: I must say I was very surprised often being in the developing countries. I saw very close and good contact between the UNICEF staff, and not only with the local authorities but also with the people. The staff wanted to realize, to implement the programme with the people. Not without, but with the people. It is the example how it is necessary to work. Because if you work with the people, for the people, you get always success. I saw this approach in Kenya, during our session in Addis Ababa and in Egypt also.

I remember in Egypt discussing family planning from the point of view of religion and the possibility to solve this problem. I saw the very brave move on the side of the UNICEF staff, who discussed, who explained the problem to the people, not only to the Government but directly with the people.

I think that one of the best way for success, that is if you want success, is if you work with the people.

If you want success in political matters, you must always discuss with the bureaucracy. I want success in practical matters in the implementation of programmes. You can have success only if you

work with the people. Local government is also very important, but it is not enough. You must involve people. If the people are really engaged, you can do much more, double, triple times more.

FREIBERG: Can you remember any concrete example of when you had witnessed how UNICEF got involved in promoting community participation, the involvement of the beneficiary in the programmes in which UNICEF is cooperating?

KOZUSZNIK: I saw this in Egypt, perhaps. It was very nice and a success in cooperation with the workers, the authorities and the people.

Another example was in Kenya - in the cooperation of UNICEF in the field of agriculture. I saw this very nice farm, very well organized by a farmer in Kenya in a small village, with great success. I had discussions with this farmer. The results of my contacts were very often with the people, the staff of UNICEF because of the question of education in agriculture. The question of production of food is very important in many countries. A small example was the organization of agriculture in India, the small gardens, etc., with the assistance of UNICEF and it was a great success. Not only by adults but also by children. The children were educated in the schools with the assistance of UNICEF.

Education of women

I think one of the most important programme is the question of education of mothers in developing countries because the mother plays a very important role, not only in domestic problems but also in the education of the children. I saw the same thing when I was in Thailand. I was always surprised by the great achievement in Afghanistan; I went there with Dr. Sicault. I was able to see the women involved in normal activities for children in agriculture. At that time I had the opportunity to see the graduation of six women doctors in Afghanistan. It was very good not only for the six women, but also for the other women because it was the first time that they saw this was possible for the women. You know this climate between the men and the women; to be doctors and other high education, it stimulates them. It was a very great success and I was very satisfied.

FREIBERG: The greatest stimulus is always, as I witnessed it in many field situations is when a women from a community can acquire the knowledge and technical skills and go back to her community to work for them, because she is accepted; she is admired and she is a symbol and an example.

KOZUSZNIK: I think it is very important, and in this field UNICEF plays a great role. It is part of UNICEF's philosophy to involve women to all problems of life, to the family, economic problems and so on.

FREIBERG: Do you have any other examples - I think the Afghan example is an excellent example - about how women learned to be proud of their own achievements, rather than being in the shadow of men? Do you remember any other examples of that kind?

Agricultural production

KOZUSZNIK: What I said about the example of the farm in Kenya. Many women and other people admired this farm because this farmer really had great success, cows, fruits and so on. It was on the highest level of achievement, especially this one farm. It was a good example how it is possible to have success if you want, if you are engaged to serve. It was encouraged by UNICEF staff. It was the same in agriculture in India, in one school. Very small gardens which children were engaged to solve some problems, plant trees. I think it was orange trees as well as peas and mangoes. It was all done by the children in the school.

Shantytowns

In Mexico I saw also some problems in the shantytowns. How to solve the housing problems? I saw this problem during the Board session in Manila. We saw in Manila very small houses constructed and built by the people directly, very small rooms, but enough for them. They constructed these houses with great enthusiasm; similarly during our session in Santiago, Chile.

FREIBERG: I remember I was there. That is now an example of fifteen years ago, May 1969.

Field staff

Reports at UNICEF Board

KOZUSZNIK: I must say I have great admiration for the UNICEF staff, which is always very engaged and had good contact with the people. I must say that always during Executive Board sessions, it was a pleasure to listen to the report of many field people. The reports of the people working directly with the field were always different from those working in the regional offices and headquarters - not only in UNICEF but the United Nations specialized agencies.

Importance of direct contact with people

In my opinion, the contacts of UNICEF staff working directly with the people, for the people, is one of the most important method of success and also is fruitful for the people and also for the satisfaction of staff. If the staff see the result, it is one of great satisfaction. You can see the result.

FREIBERG: UNICEF has also been very fortunate in this because when you work in the field — that is UNICEF's great strengths — you can actually see results of your own work. You're not the paper pusher as you might sometimes believe you are when you are working in headquarters, New York, Geneva, etc. As you know now over 80 percent of staff is in the developing countries),

Importance of field experience for UNICEF staff

KOZUSZNIK: If somebody wants to work really with success and to have the success, he must know the problems directly in the field; and the experience in the field is the basic condition to accept him as a worker in the general offices or headquarters.

If somebody works perhaps in the National Committee for long time, and has the opportunity to see how the programme is implemented in the field and he is also involved in all problems, then it is possible to be engaged from the beginning in the Regional Office or Headquarters. In our country, Mr. Pavlic was directed to Mr. Brahov (sp) and they knew very well all the problems, they had the possibility earlier to see the activities of UNICEF on tour. I think the result of the staff which has the experience in the field had much success and was more fruitful than somebody who came directly from Headquarters with no experience in the field.

It is the same situation in political work. If you have only the picture from the newspaper it is very difficult to understand many problems. If somebody starts as a politician during his life with the people and grow up in this situation, it is different and his work will be much more successful and fruitful than a politician who know only from the newspapers, TV and so on. It is the same problem with people working in information and newspapers.

Now in our country many people must go directly to see the work in the field. It is important for the right work, professional, social work and so on. Perhaps in UNICEF there are many people who started as a voluntary worker in social field in developing countries or perhaps in a developed country. They have very good success and they can very often show how to solve many problems because of their experience. It is very important for professional work. If you finish high school perhaps, you don't know much. In my opinion three or four years of hospital practice is the basic condition for good practice in the professional work of the physician.

FREIBERG: In UNICEF, we have a rather strict rotation system with a core maximum five years in one place before going to another duty station. That means that there will no longer be people who will

only work at Headquarters, but that everybody has to have field experience. UNICEF work in developing countries is widespread, not only in the capitals of developing countries but also in provinces, and that is also very important. Thus UNICEF is always one step closer to the problems of the individual, and that has helped us to understand better what is required.

KOZUSZNIK: Yes, as I said the personal contact is very important. If you want to understand somebody it is only on the basis of the personal contact, discussion and dialogue.

FREIBERG: So your theory and your practice has been proved right, and all the input you have made into UNICEF's policy thinking has been along lines that have borne real fruit.

Education

KOZUSZNIK: My father was a miner and I started as a boy working during my vacation. The mother of my mother had 18 children. My mother had only two; it took one generation to educate.

FREIBERG: But then their children only had two or three children.

KOZUSZNIK: Yes. It is the experience from life. It was also a question of family planning at this time.

FREIBERG: And education?

KOZUSZNIK: Education always. At the beginning many representatives were against UNICEF involvement. The problem was discussed at the session of the Executive Board in 1959 in Geneva. It was also the last session in which Dr. Rajchman participated. The problem was discussed for a long time, many people were against involvement, and at the end of the discussion most people accepted the resolution, but it was restricted to nutrition education. As you know, the task of UNICEF is not only to save lives, but it is also to prepare for life. This is also one of the most important problems. But in 1959, many people were against education.

CSDR

FREIBERG: Even now, we talk in UNICEF about a child survival and development revolution. We never wanted children only to survive. Physical survival is the first duty, and second is to prepare a world in which conditions would allow the child to grow up in dignity and love and education.

KOZUSZNIK: Yes, this is also one of the fields of UNICEF, it is very important.

State of World's Children Report

That is why I have a great interest in State of the World's Children report. I think it is one of the most important documents in the history of UNICEF, because it indicates the method, how to do it very simply.

And you can do it with very little money but you can do much more with it; I think it is very great.

FREIBERG: That is Mr. Grant's great challenge to the world.

KOZUSZNIK: Very interesting, because it is in simple methods. I think it is very important that we translate the document in Polish and it is widely read. It is very useful to the staff working with children because there are many problems.

Value for developed countries

This document is not only for the developing countries but also the developed countries. It is a question of the weight of the child, the breast-feeding. Do you know that with women who smoke, the weight of the newborn child is always about 200 grams less than a non-smoking women? It is the same problem with the

alcoholic people. I think this document is an example in this experience. It can be used also in the developed countries. Breast-feeding is one of the most important problems. Also the question of smoking is now a very big problem in the developed countries, but this problem is also danger for the developing countries.

Concluding note: Poland and UNICEF

FREIBERG: It is nice to come back to Poland and see all the extraordinary efforts that have been made; to see a completely rebuilt city, which was in ruins; to see what you have done for your own children; to see the success; to see a healthy new generation. We say that UNICEF has played its part; there is real hope also for the countries that have not yet reached this level of development. Thank you very much.

KOZUSZNIK: I am convinced that UNICEF assistance for us was not only useful but very fruitful, because in the beginning this assistance was very important for us. We saved many, many lives and many children, and I think the cooperation with UNICEF is one of importance and has always been very good until now. UNICEF has a very good opinion in our country, I think, one of the best, especially in institutions affecting paediatricians and so on.

And it has been very greatly appreciated by all in Poland. And we are very grateful for all what UNICEF has done for us not only in the past, but also now. Its assistance to the National Committee has also been very good.

FREIBERG: I am looking forward to seeing you in Rome in October at the thirtieth reunion of National Committees for UNICEF.

KOZUSZNIK: Thank you very much. It was a great pleasure to see you at my home.
