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Interview with Dr. Otto Lehner*
Conducted by Ralph Eckert in Zermatt, Switzerland
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Interview Dr. Otto Lehner by Ralph Eckert: Pre-UNICEF Expe

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Lehner's pre-UNICEF experience

Eckert: We are in the house of Dr. Otto Lehner in Zermatt. A house which is a little bit on the outskirts of this village with an absolutely superb view of the Matterhorn. It is a place which many thousands of tourists visit each year. It is a place where one would like to stay, and my first question is how can somebody who has known such a wonderful place ever have gone to other parts of the world, and Otto Lehner has been to many parts of the world. How did you get away from Zermatt?

Lehner: It is nice to be in a place like here but for your studies you have to go elsewhere, so already at the beginning of my studies I was away from Zermatt for 12 years. I come always back. In the summer I always came back for vacation and I came back certainly because I like to mountain climb. I am of a family of climbers, so that is quite natural that I settled down here finally when I had finished my travel around the world, to have quite a nice life.

Eckert: Yes, indeed, I must agree with you. This is an ideal place to retire and to enjoy the beauties of the countryside. But let's go back to some of the earlier times. If I remember correctly you were, during the second World War, with the International Red Cross

Committee, the ICRC, in Geneva. I remember that vividly, because I too was at the ICRC - that there were reports coming from Germany and from Berlin where you have spent part of the war, and in particular the last days of the war, as well as some time after. Would you perhaps tell us something about your experiences with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Germany?

Lehner: I went to Germany in 1942. At this time I was a medical doctor in a hospital. I was working in internal diseases - surgery and difficult other matters and then in '42 I got a call from Geneva - asking if I would like to go as a delegate of the International Red Cross to Germany. I didn't know why they were asking for me, but finally I decided to go to Geneva and to do a good job and was sent then to Germany.

We had two small delegations there mainly to visit the prisoners of war from the allied side - French, Americans and English; the Russians we couldn't visit. We worked there for four years, and by that time I was chief of the delegation of Berlin. I was there in 1942 when the Russians arrived. It was voluntary. Somebody had to be there. A small delegation had to be there because all concentrated at that moment on Berlin. People from the East came wandering by any means to the center of Berlin. The other side - well the English, the Americans and the French and finally they landed on Berlin. There were lots of prisoners of war, a lot of foreign workers.

We had more than one million there and we, as a matter of fact, were the only international aid agency caring about them. We had also the possibility to do something about the concentration camps - what you could do and I had to go and contact the big bosses at that time of the German allies. So I stayed there until six weeks after the arrival of the Russians, and the Americans, the English, the British troops. They were still not there they were waiting on the Elb. They were waiting about 50 km from Berlin and came only two months later to Berlin. Finally from Berlin I went and over some detour to Switzerland.

Eckert: It is evident that this must have been a difficult time that you have gone through. Situations which are difficult to describe before and around the end of the German Reich. I understand that at the end of your stay in Berlin you made a detour and this detour seems to have led you as far as Moscow. Could you perhaps say a few words about this detour?

Lehner: Yes. When the Russians came to Berlin I got in contact with General Zukof who was leading the armies at that time and I was promised all the facilities to take care as much as we could of the ex prisoners of war, of the civilian internees and of all the foreign people around. It was a million! You can imagine it wasn't easy.

And then suddenly, about six weeks later I was invited by the Russian government, through the KGB - a colonel came to my house. He said, "I want to repatriate you because we think that your business here is now finished. We are taking all, of course. If you want to come later you can. We will go over Moscow." At the same time he spoke in a way that I saw there was no possibility for me to get there otherwise and I was interested to see Moscow. We went with a whole bunch of people - there were delegates of neutral embassies, some people who had stayed there as I was there for the International Red Cross. There were a lot of people - mostly foreigners. There was, for example, a Chinese cook who was very well known in Berlin at that time, and where one went to eat sometimes when it was not too bad because of the bombing. We went with the Trans-Siberian express; or whatever it was called at that time, through Moscow in guarded cars. We were promised to see our embassy in Moscow - we hadn't a Swiss embassy, but the representation of the Turkish embassy had taken over the representation of Switzerland in Moscow at that time. They told me and my delegates we would be taken care of the Turks and go over Turkey back to Switzerland. But instead we were taken by the KGB to a camp. It was a military camp outside of Moscow with German prisoners - officers - where General Parlos had spent his time in Russia. There are a lot of other well-known military people of Germany of the Reich. Inside of that camp there was a smaller camp

we were separate from the prisoners of war and we were put in that camp. Many nations - the Hungarian ambassador and quite a lot of other people quite well known people - we stayed there. We didn't know why.

Finally, to make a long story short, we were repatriated. We - my delegation - were brought to the airport and we flew off on a military plane to Hungary and from there to another camp and from there we were given to the American authorities and went then home to Switzerland. That was it.

I was, of course, not very pleased because in the late days of Berlin, of the Reich, we tried to do everything also for the Russians and I remember quite well we went, during the bombing in the last days, we went to a prison where we liberated - I personally and one of my delegates - about 20 Russian prisoners who were about to be shot. So, indeed, we did something for the Russians and so I was not very pleased more or less interned with my delegation in Berlin. I think we came out through intervention - I still don't know - but I still think we came out though the intervention of General Eisenhower, who knew about our fate. He didn't know where we were, and I think he intervened and I am still very grateful to the dear general for our liberation from this prisoner of war camp. That's what I have to say about this.

Eckert: This is really an extraordinary story and something which few of us can imagine and I'm grateful for you to have given us an insight into these weeks and months which you spent after the war. If I may now move a few years forward, I seem to remember that you were associated very closely - intimately - in situations in the Middle East in the Palestine crisis at the time of the creation of Israel and you had there a very important goal, again as a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Could you tell us in a few words what this amounted to?

Lehner: Yes indeed. I was in Palestine. I was before in Czechoslovakia through '48, then I was sent to Palestine. It was now the beginning of the war - of the 1948 war, the first real war in Palestine between the Israelis and the Arabs. We tried to implement the principles of humanity, the principles of the Red Cross. There were other Red Cross societies, but they couldn't do anything anymore in this battle and we stayed in the middle of it. We tried to erect safety zones for the civilian population - we made some. We went out to the battlefield to show that you have to take kind care of the wounded and these are not enemies. Of course it was an interesting time. It was a dangerous time, I must say it was really as dangerous as Berlin at the end of the war and we waved our Red Cross flags and we tried to tell the people what one can do while in the great name of humanity. I was there one year

at the beginning of the Israeli state and we had no dead in our delegations but we had some wounded and therefore as I said before, it was sometimes rather dangerous to implement human principles when you are between people in war. I say between - I was staying at the government house in Jerusalem which was in between the frontiers of the battling population. I say population, not even army.

Well, one year it was quite a time there. Then after one year I left for Indonesia and then back to - in '49 - that was the beginning of the Indonesian Republic and then from there to Korea with four years in Japan and Korea during the Korean war and then I came back to Geneva and went again to study a little medicine. And so I entered in UNICEF from there.

Recruitment into UNICEF

Eckert: Well, you really had a life which led you to many extraordinary and dangerous situations. As you just said, after you had returned to Geneva the time was not far off when you joined UNICEF and here I think that one question arises - was there anything that attracted you to UNICEF? Did the name UNICEF mean anything to you before you joined this organization?

Lehner: I must say I had heard, of course, the name of UNICEF and I knew what UNICEF was, but I didn't know so well what they were doing and only when I was in Paris I was contacted by the regional directors at the time, Mr. Egger, and he told me would you like to come to us? And I said where to, and he said in Africa; we have not many people in Africa and we just began our delegation in Africa and if you could come there we would like it. I was not quite sure if I wanted to go and UNICEF insisted a little more. I was at that time in Paris, studying cardiology and I thought well, if I do that my medical career is finished, so I had to think it over a little bit and I thought it over for 3-4 months and I had contact of course with the office in Paris

At that time and I had a friend, Mr. Marti, he was the UNICEF boss in Africa. Well the boss is a great word because there were not many people for the whole of Africa and I spoke with him. Finally I was attracted to go there because of the programmes that they had there, also because I knew what UNICEF was doing by then and the programmes in Africa at that time - the mass disease control and this kind of thing - I will go into that later, I will explain why we did that and why that was the first thing that was to be done at that time. So I went to Africa finally. It was in '55.

West Africa: mass campaigns

Eckert: Yes, in fact your name is associated very closely with the beginning of UNICEF co-operation with African countries. Could you perhaps describe some of the country situations which one finds there - the needs which you encountered - countries where you were working during these early years.

Lehner: We had our base in Brazzaville and as a matter of fact we were responsible for the whole of Africa, which is a big thing. At the beginning we were working as I said in the whole of Africa except South Africa and some other countries which were still under colonial rule, Angola for example. Most of the countries, as a matter of fact, were under colonial rule then when we began.

I was mainly responsible for West Africa, because there we had, together with the French and with the British, I must say that, a big disease campaign with WHO and this was for the whole of West Africa. UNICEF insisted on this mass campaign for the eradication of diseases and was sometimes a little optimistic. When we talk about eradicating malaria in Africa, well that was a little too big but we had some success. We had rather great successes together with WHO. For me as a doctor it was easy to work with them because we had the same objectives.

Yaws

We had for example, I wanted to mention only one disease where we really had success - that was the control of yaws which is a horrible disease, and which can really be cured, with control afterwards of course, by one injection of penicillin.

You have to organize it. It was organized like a military campaign and I must say the French and the British, they did really what they could at that time. And we had big success. If you imagine the teams - they had to make these injections to all the people in the villages - that means going from one village to the other and giving a penicillin injection to everybody and if you didn't do that then control of the disease was impossible. It was also very much in favour of the children because they were much affected by that disease.

Leprosy

We had other campaigns - and there I would mention leprosy. And in leprosy we had success of course. You can treat leprosy and leprosoaria - you treat a few hundred people - that is all what you can do. But if you have a medicament where you can arrest leprosy and really attend all the people in a certain country, then you

have done something. Of course the installation of health centers, mothers and child welfare and all these things, that came later and had to come later, because people didn't know much about it. You had to propagate the effectiveness of modern medicine and what we did mostly by this campaign against yaws, against leprosy.

Logistics

If you can imagine we had in West Africa, which was at that time controlled by the French, leprosy control of millions and millions of people - of the whole of West Africa - which was organized by the French military authorities, by the sanitary service of the French army. And they did it well. I can remember I went nearly over the whole of West Africa with a French general and we went from place to place. It took months and it took months, because even there you have to get the people, you have to come to the villages. You have to come the next time with your control teams, you have to find where the people are, you have to time your circuits. Circuits which were done mostly not by doctors - there was from time to time one doctor with them, but by sanitary personnel, and that was a great success.

Basis of health centres

It was a great success because it showed the people what you can really do, and from there on to create health centres, to create modern care care centers and all this.

The first step was it is no use to have a health center somewhere if you have malaria patients, if you have yaws patients, if you have leprosy patients, they are not even there. And thousands and thousands. You cannot cope with that. You have to control at least to some extent the communicable diseases first. And that was the beginning of UNICEF in Africa. The other things come later and through this campaign we could create then the health centers and the whole structure of the health centres, hospitals and all that.

We were also in a time where there was a transfer of sovereignty . This took place in Ghana, and in a lot of other countries, and mainly in Lagos where I was stationed later on. There we had to cope with that and to assist really the African people, the African cadres. That was the beginning really of UNICEF in Africa. I think one could tell a lot of things about that, but it is very difficult to go into details.

Eckert: Yes, indeed. During these heroic pioneering years in Africa I'm sure that the few of you - I think there was you, Roland Marty and perhaps a few others taking care of all of Africa. This must have been a situation which is difficult to imagine today, where we have people all over Africa in East and West Africa and even offices in Bamako and Ouagadougou, etc.

Relations with agencies

You have mentioned that your relationship with WHO has been an easy one, has perhaps benefitted from the fact that you being a medical doctor, Roland Marty being also a doctor, that it was for you something which didn't present many problems. Could you perhaps say a few words about this relationship with the specialized agencies and in particular with WHO? Has this worked all the time? Has UNICEF benefitted from the active support and advice and what has been the general atmosphere of the relationship with the specialized agencies?

Lehner: It is a difficult question. I can only speak for myself personally and I never had any trouble with the specialized agencies. We worked very well together and we worked very well with WHO together and later on with all specialized agencies. We never had any difficulties. Later on, with some had some difficulties with the organizations for the development in the United Nations. It was not real difficulties but the problem was to maintain UNICEF as an entity and not dependent on any other agency.

We accepted advice from everybody where we could, mainly from the specialized agencies, but also I must mention that also from the people who were in charge of the services there. We worked very

well together. Of course it is not so difficult because I had advice from WHO, from UNESCO, from specialized agencies as regards material assistance, and the material assistance they needed, and the planning went very well with specialized agencies. We generally made the plans of the programmes we assisted, and specialized agencies gave their advice. We submitted them to all the specialized agencies, but we made the plans. It worked quite well. But I must say one thing. UNICEF must and has to preserve autonomy - its identity not to be looked at as a part of a specialized agency - WHO, FAO or whatever, even if they give us their advice. But we bear the responsibility of the programmes and we helped them carry them out. And that is what I would like to say about the relations with specialized agencies.

Relations with Regional Office

Eckert: If I may turn to the relations inside UNICEF. In the early years the Regional Office that had responsibility for Africa was located in Paris. There was no regional office in Africa at the very beginning, it was created later. Was this relationship with the regional office something which was of benefit to you, which helped you, or were there also moments when perhaps this relationship turned out to be somewhat of a handicap.

Lehner: I wouldn't say handicap. But we thought many times that it was not very necessary - the regional office. Sometimes we would deal directly with headquarters and sometimes we didn't see the necessity of a regional office. The relations were good because we were all friends you see. I was a friend of Mr. Egger in Paris and Roland Marty also, and when I was later on in Tehran also the relations were excellent, but it was a little bit, as Mr. Middleman, the regional director, told me sometimes, "Well I will be like a grandmother. I come from time to time just to visit, but I will not interfere with your programming, with your work." And so it went best.

Eckert: Well it is interesting to me the reference to a grandmother being a regional director. I'm sure that some of the regional directors today would not use the same kind of label.

UNICEF policies in Africa

In the early years UNICEF was active mainly in the field of health and nutrition and you have very eloquently talked about the disease control of yaws and leprosy and others. Today we consider the UNICEF policies as they existed in the late '50s, rather restrictive. Did you consider the UNICEF policies at that time as too narrow or too restrictive or were they adapted to the needs as you found them in Africa.

Training

Lehner: I think in Africa they were adapted to the needs. We did a lot of the training of mothers and children, general training of the midwives, training of health inspectors and training of people who were not at the top. I think that more training should go to the people of the top including UNICEF, like they are doing now, as I understand.

Child survival

But at the beginning you had to lay the basis first before you go into the whole structure of health, of social welfare, of education and all that, which you knew exactly - you knew in Africa in the beginning - these are matters which are very important. But first you have to see that children stay alive. I think that is the first priority. The others are questions of priority.

Of course education is very, very important and we knew that also in Africa and other matters, social matters, these are very very important. But at the beginning you have to keep people alive. If they are not alive - I mean if you come to a country or a place where 80% of the children died in their first years, my God you have to do something about that first or you have nothing to

educate later on. You have nothing to give them later on. These are rather complicated matters which of course UNICEF has to take up, but I think what we did at the beginning was correct.

Eckert: This is interesting to hear, and considering the enormous problems which existed in Africa in the field of health, you have referred to the 80% infant mortality, and I can very well imagine that the policies as they existed at that time were considered to be adequate.

You worked there during your early days, and you have just told us that you considered the policies existing at that time as adequate. Was there something in these policies, however, which you would have liked to be different - that is were you faced with any limitations or constraints.

Image of UNICEF

Lehner: We were sometimes regarded as a transport agency, or as an agency distributing the milk from the United States, or something referring to material matters. This was sometimes rather annoying.

Insufficient attention to cadres

I think in the general training of persons of the cadres, UNICEF even at that time could have gone farther but that was not the policy that we had. To give stipends to certain people which are really good, I think that is most important matter. Only then later on, of course, with the infrastructure built up, then all the people could be taken care of, but sometimes the cadres are also important - most important. Now in health they got of course, some got their training through WHO fellowships and so on, but I think UNICEF could have done better than that - more. We did later on, but that is just a field where one could do more.

Taking account of the family

Eckert: The programmes carried out in Africa needed the preparation of recommendations which were probably an important feature, the field work, the planning of programmes and the preparation of the recommendations to the Executive Board. Could you perhaps tell us how problems were identified? How one came to a decision to assist governments and then how the recommendations to the Executive Board were prepared.

Lehner: Well before the planning there was of course a setting of priorities. What can you do with limited means. We hadn't so much money as we have probably means. But what could you do with limited means for the best of the children - I say children and not the general public. But it is so closely related - if you work for children you have to work for the families, and if the family is starving, well you have to nourish the whole family not only the children.

Importance of water

One regret I have is that we couldn't really do more about simply water. How about having safe water for all of the population, mainly for the children. But it is a rather expensive business. You have specialists. If you are in northern Africa, in the desert it is very nice to give milk, or milk powder to the children, but you have to mix it with what? Water. If the water is infected then the child will be infected and the child will die. That was the first thing - water. And as you know in all these countries dysentery is a very important disease. Quite a lot of children are dying of that in the first year of their life and there is where you have to really do something. But that is a problem, safe water. And education, not only of the cadre, but of the mothers, of the fathers, of the whole family. That is what health is concerned.

Eckert: You have just referred to the fact that in these years it was not possible to do enough in the field of water supply. I wonder whether there are other fields where you think, in retrospect, that UNICEF should have done more?

Priorities

Lehner: I think that UNICEF could have done more. It was always a UNICEF principle to reach the most of the children, the most of the people the cheapest way. In mass campaigns of course, if we take the whole campaign it is an expensive way, but for reaching individuals it is a cheap way. If you can cure yaws with one shot of penicillin it is a cheap way. It leads to organization of course, which is expensive.

I think we did at that time what we could. I don't think we could have done more. We did not have enough personnel. That is one thing. But we did not have enough midwives, not enough means. You have to set your priorities and you work on your priorities, and that is it.

Reporting requirements

Eckert: You have been working in Africa in various parts. You have

referred to Brazzaville, to Lagos. You visited all countries in West Africa and probably elsewhere. UNICEF being an organization, of course, also has its administrative and set-up, it has certain requirements with regard to personnel, with regard to finances. I don't know whether you were too much involved in these aspects, but did you feel that the procedures which were enforced at that time were adequate and were conceived in a way to facilitate your work.

Lehner: I would have one criticism - that was a little too much bureaucracy. Either you write or you work. The way of a programme from the recommendation to the fulfillment of its working out with the governments or with the agencies was a little complicated. Sometimes a little long, and too much in details. For the details we were there to think about - not the headquarters neither the regional office knew them. We knew them. We were supposed to know them. So if you have x questions, you need 10 cars or you need 9 cars and then to give I don't know how many explanations about that - about a single car or a single item. That is too complicated. That takes a lot of time if you do not have enough people. If you have a lot of people doing that kind of thing it is alright but with a few people it is too much. And it was too much in Africa.

Living and working conditions

Eckert: While you were in Africa - and I think those who have been there

know that it can be a fairly hot and at times a demanding assignment - while you were there did the administration show any concern for your living and working conditions, and if so was anything done to change or improve them?

Lehner: I must say we had some difficulties. Not too much, you could live with it. You were young, not an old man as I am now. But we had to work in Lagos, which is sort of the hottest place in Africa, without air conditioning. We bought fans finally ourself. They are small things, but they are small things that headquarters or the regional office should care about. If you have to justify an air-conditioner which costs a few hundred francs, in order to have living conditions where you can work really. It cost a lot to send a representative to a place. So these small things you have really to give them, and not annoy him with these kind of things.

Eckert: Yes, that sounds familiar. I must say that today, one is much more generous with air-conditioners and other equipment which now is considered indispensable.

Pate

During these years did you ever meet Maurice Pate?

Lehner: Oh yes. Maurice Pate engaged me, more or less. I met him when he was working for the American Red Cross and the International

Committee of the Red Cross during the war. So before I went to UNICEF I had a long talk with Maurice Pate in Geneva and told him about my opinion at that time about international organizations. I met him several times later on; I met him in New York, in Iran. He didn't come at that time in Africa, but I had quite a lot of contact with Maurice Pate.

Field manual

Eckert: If I may turn to something entirely different. You certainly remember that during the early years we had a field manual - what we called the black field manual - which gradually lost its standing and its importance, but nevertheless may I ask you, was the field manual, as it existed at that time, of any use and help to you and would you have any suggestions based on your past experience concerning the way a new field manual for programme matters should be prepared?

Lehner: Well, the field manual was of course of some help to us. There was a certain basis, but I think now we have to forget about it and I think a new field manual would be necessary. There are many more matters that UNICEF is dealing with and at least the general lines in the field manual could be changed I think. I can't remember exactly the words of the field manual and I can't remember that we consulted it from time to time. It was some help, yes, certainly. But it could be better. At least now I know it could be changed.

Eckert: I think an attempt is made to change this manual.

Plans of operations

You will recall that we had, since the early days of the organization, we had so called plans of operations which were prepared to indicate the objectives, the plan of action, the commitment, the target, the time schedule, etc. These plans were signed by the national authority concerned, by UNICEF and possibly a specialized agency. In your experience, were the plans of action taken seriously - in particular by the governments concerned? Did they try to implement these plans or was there less of an interest in the plans of operations?

Lehner: Well, we insisted on plans of operations. I think plans of operations are necessary. Schedules are necessary. Aims of the project have to be spelled out. I think it is very necessary and I think that we should insist that the governments and specialized agencies - but mainly governments - that they are also - they were always - co-signators of the plans of operations. That they take it as a document. It was not always the case, but mostly yes. I must say I had good experience with that. But there is one thing. You have to go with your plan of operation to the highest authority and you have not just to take some people in the Ministry and let them sign and nobody knows about it.

When I was in Iran I went to the Shah. And I must say I had a lot of help from him because he was the absolute authority. Well, that doesn't exist in all the countries, but for us it was very good. At least I want to say that about the Shah. That was really a great help for us because he knew personally what we were doing and how these plans of operations were worked out.

You cannot ask that from every government. At least the minister concerned should know all the details himself. Now it was alright with the British general, the French also. It was more difficult when the African governments were ordering the country. It was more difficult. But you can't always have it. It needs some personal contact and on as high a level as possible. I mean you have to go to the minister at least, and talk with him and talk about these things. Specialists and specialized agencies are not always doing it - they are too specialized. And I think that is the role of UNICEF, and that is a big role for UNICEF to do that.

Post-independence programmes

Eckert: You have just referred to the very new situation and circumstances which you encountered after the many African nations had acquired their independence. No doubt this must have had a strong influence and repercussion on the co-operation with these countries, perhaps

they were not as well equipped as the former colonial powers to carry out certain activities. Could you perhaps refer to the way in which programme planning and implementation took place during the early days of independence in these countries.

Lehner: Well generally it wasn't too bad, except in countries where the colonial powers did nothing about building up of an administration. They did something about it in English controlled territories, I will say that for the British. They did something about it in French controlled territories.

They did nothing about it in Belgian controlled territories. They had very good services themselves - they were working themselves - but if I tell you that at the independence of the Belgian Congo they had not one really good native doctor for all the country - it is a shame. I was very African when I was in Africa. I was not colonial. We are Swiss here and Swiss citizens know nothing about colonialism and it is easy to talk with the Africans - at least if you are coming from a country such as mine, you talk with them very easily. It reminded me very much of some people that we have here in our own country still - or had 50 years ago in the mountains and it was, for me personally, easy to talk with them.

And they'll listen to you if they think you will really help them and if you really want to do something about it. They do not listen to you if you are on a big horse and talking to them as some colonial powers did before. And I think it is a matter of personal connection. I think that is very important because you can have the nicest programme or talk to them about the American way of life or something that they haven't experienced and they'll want to imitate it, and they do it badly. But if you talk to them really as Africans, then you'll get your results. It takes longer. It takes much longer, but you finally will get your results. Maybe not as good at the beginning as from the former powers, but finally you can do it also. But you must understand them.

Eckert: I think that many of these newly independent countries in Africa were very much concerned, perhaps concerned in the first place with their economic development. Did you find, if one can generalize, in these newly independent countries, a concern for children and a concern for the type of work which UNICEF has been trying to promote? And here I am referring to the higher levels in government.

Lehner: I think yes. They are certainly concerned about children. But there is one thing. At the higher levels of authority which are there now, they have been trained by the old colonial powers, and

there is a chasm, I would say, between the general population and the elite of the country. They were in England, they were in France - maybe some of them were senators in France - and well you can easily think they are in general terms they are very intelligent people and they understand the need of the people, but sometimes they have lost their contact with them. It will become better and better, but that is one thing that one has to take into consideration.

Urban/rural problems

I'll give you an example. We had this big programme on disease control - the leprosy programme. The leprosy programme in West Africa on the whole began very well, was carried out for a few years very well, but it nearly closed because the medical staff was not ready to go out in the bush. I mean I understand that - if a whole family is taking their money to send someone to study to be a doctor in France or England - well if he comes back he must care for his own people, for his family and where he is there is money coming in. He must be really be a big idealist to go out in the bush in the country to work there for nearly nothing. He will stay in towns, and he will stay in towns where he can get money and a good living and can pay for his own people also, to give something back for what they have done for him. And that is, at least at the

beginning, that is the big problem and that is the problem with all these programmes which are out in the field and not in town. It is very necessary now to have programmes in towns because it is the general trend - as everywhere in the world - people from the country go to towns and we have big problems in the towns - we have as big problems in the towns as out in the bush. But as I say there is this tendency of the intelligensia of the general people which is not too easy to overcome. It is not a criticism of these people, I understand them very well, but it is just a fact.

Eckert: You have referred to the activities which UNICEF has supported in rural areas and you have just mentioned also that perhaps in the urban areas more attention should be given to a number of problems. I think this is the case at present. The Board has decided that emphasis be given also to this aspect.

While you were in Africa what do you think should have been done in the bigger cities? I mean you have been in Lagos, in Abidjan and others where there are millions and thousands living under very difficult circumstances. Could anything have been done - provided money had been available, in the early years of independence?

Lehner: Well, you see the problem was not as acute as it may be now. It was still beginning but I think you should have this government set

up the services - all kinds of services for the people who are coming from the countries to the towns. One other thing is to put these services in the country. If there is something in the country itself some of them may stay there. Some of them may anyhow go to town. But in the towns you have to do something, and this is a very big problem. It is the problem really of the governments. I think it is one of the biggest problems of these countries. Now it was beginning at my time, but it was not so acute, but if you see the slums in African towns - and in all parts of the world now - but I am speaking of African towns - it was later on a problem in Iran also - but then you have to do something about it. For UNICEF I could only say to assist these services which most of the governments are really creating, but are not too much effective. And also in training the cadre people beginning at the top, or at least talking to them and especially people for mother and child welfare for social services, for all these kinds of things, for education. There UNICEF could do something. But it is a trap, it is not really solving the problem. The problem has to be solved by the government itself, as most of the problems.

Travel in Africa

Eckert: Before we move to another part of the world I wonder whether you could tell us something about the conditions of travel in Africa.

I remember that in certain countries travel was something of a problem. Also in Africa the North/South connections between Africa and Paris and London were always much better than those which lead from Dakar to Brazzaville, but I presume that when you were there before the advent of the jet planes, that travel must have often been extraordinary and extraordinarily difficult.

Lehner: Well, it depends on your attitude. Travelling was difficult. It was interesting at the same time. Of course it was difficult because you had not much to go on when you were out in the country. You had your landrover and your driver and sometimes you had a lot of help from people working out in the field, but it is always an adventure, and if you are not ready to take this adventure you should not go there. That is a rule. Difficult to exist in mountainclimbing, but you do it anyhow.

Eckert: Yes, I see what you mean, looking out of your window.

Middle East

Now Otto, if you don't mind, let's move to the Middle East, an entirely different environment, and entirely different constellation of circumstances.

Iran

What struck you most when you arrived in Iran in terms of the situation and needs of the children?

Lehner: I knew the Middle East before I went there for UNICEF, but I didn't know Iran. I knew the Middle East from the International Committee of the Red Cross. I knew some parts of it quite well. In Iran, where children are concerned - they do care a lot about children. They like children. I don't think they neglect them. They do what they can and they did what they could for the children, but anyhow, like in all Eastern countries - I was responsible also for Iraq - the infrastructure was lacking. The infrastructure of education, health, social services - all that was lacking. I must say, at the time when I was there, the governments did a lot about that. I was talking earlier about the Shah. One says a lot of not very nice things about the Shah, but where we were concerned he took our advice. If it was given in an intelligent way not as criticism.

I remember only once about sending people for the health infrastructure - health centres. They had a big programme on alphabetism; they did quite a lot about that. One day I saw his majesty the Shah and he said to me, well, what about you now? We had a malaria programme which went well because we had 4,000 people

working on that, and quite good people. And from there out we could create the infrastructure of health, but only with a lot of personnel. And one day we were talking about it and he said to me well, what do you think, could we send medical people out in the country? I told him, your majesty they will not go. You know your people better than I do. But he said well, we will see about that ... what do you think if you would send medical people before they have finished or when they are about to finish, giving them the final examinations, send them out for one year in the country. Send them to places where they have health centres where they could do other things also, they could educate the illiterate people and so on. Well some of it was for propaganda, but the health matter I was very much interested in this and I told him, well if you can do that it will be a great thing. But I doubt that people will go. He said we will see. And he did it. He had a health corps and they did quite a lot of good work. This is an example of what you can do and how you can help a government and advise them on matters. I must say it can be better done in a country which is directed in a dictatorial way. Well they had their emperor for 2000 years and it was nothing new for them. But in general I must say they like children, they care for children. Also in Iraq. They like children very much. Generally they keep also the programme we were working out - for example I was only thinking about the milk factories and the park which was used for children - they did that. There was not much trouble about that. I had good experiences in the Middle East.

Iraq

Eckert: Did you find that, on the whole, the problems encountered among children and their needs were as acute in Iran as they were in Iraq or were there differences in the needs?

Lehner: I think really not much. They had about the same problems, like in all the countries of the Middle East, some countries more than others. Of course things may have been different in Iraq because at that time there was a civil war against the Kurds and so on, so that was the reason why problems were different and more difficult, but in a general way there was not much difference.

Relations with Regional Office

Eckert: You have referred earlier to the regional director, who was Mr. Middleman to start with, and later there was Mr. Gurdian Dillon. Was your, how shall I say, working relationship with the regional office functioning in a way which facilitated your work, which helped to overcome certain difficulties or was the regional office an entity which at times, as I felt, created more difficulties than benefit?

Lehner: Well I said before I was working with the regional director, Mr. Middleman, and later on with Stewart Sutton. I really had no experience with Mr. Dillon, because I was leaving there, but with Middleman and Stewart Sutton, we worked well together. I mean I did what I could and what I thought was the best to do and generally they approved and had no trouble. I think with Dillon it was different, because when I left the first thing he asked about - I come to visit to Iran, I want to be presented to the Shah, I want to talk with him the first day, and when I told him, my dear friend I cannot promise you that because the Shah is not there for everybody, if I can do it I will, but I cannot promise you. We had some trouble on that. The matter didn't pursue itself because he never came before I left, but I do not think that I would have worked well with the regional office headed by Mr. Dillon. It is not an accusation, I don't think that - maybe it was a clash of personality, but I don't think we would have worked well together. That was one of the reasons I left.

Turkey

Why I went to Turkey. Another reason I went to Turkey was to be near Europe because I was not in very good health at that time. Neither was my wife. We wanted to be as near as possible to Europe.

Eckert: You have just referred to Europe, and I believe at that time the regional director was Dr. George Sicault. I think Dr. Sicault has been largely responsible for the profound changes that have taken place in terms of UNICEF policies in 1961. Have you met Dr. Sicault? Had you any experience working with him?

Lehner: Oh, I can call Dr. Sicault a good friend. He asked me once before I went somewhere else - before I went to Turkey - he asked me if I would consider working in Paris as his deputy. I said I'd rather not because I am not used to this kind of work. I like to work in the field. I never did it with the International Red Cross. I refused to work in Geneva. I wanted to be in the field, I didn't want to be at headquarters, because not all of the people work, there are a lot of questions that I didn't like too much. Probably I am not able to work with a lot of people. I like to go my own way.

Eckert: Turkey is again another case. I'm sure you have found a country which, of course, is Near Eastern, familiar to you, a country which shows enormous differences in terms of the conditions and development between east and west. What were the main sort of problems in terms of needs of children you found and were interested in in Turkey?

Lehner: It is a completely different in town, Ankara and Istanbul, then it is out in the country. You see there are some places in Turkey which one could call lost places where there is not very much and where some work has to be done. We tried to lay the groundwork of the health build-up, and we had a programme of course of mass control, we had a malaria education programme which was working more or less well. It was working well also because malaria was not so acute in Turkey as it was in other place. Otherwise, not much different from other Middle East countries, but the people are different. People can be very nice, but you must be careful, you must be consider them. They like to be considered as Europeans. They don't like too much to be considered as Middle Easterns or that kind of people. They like to be in the European community on these kinds of things and since Ataturk I think are really much going on that side. Otherwise it was not too difficult to work in Turkey. Not really. Of course there is also the question of personal relations.

National Committees

Lehner: I really believe the National Committees in those countries are not much use to UNICEF. They rather hamper the work of the delegation of UNICEF - the bureau of UNICEF, because they want to be UNICEF. I have nothing against that, but the work we have to do is with the

government and not the national committee and that is the problem. That was my trouble in Iran where the sister of the Shah was the great patron of UNICEF - I didn't like too much that assistance and I told her personally. And in Turkey it was a little more subtle but also there were interferences and I think it hampers the work of UNICEF. UNICEF committees are well in the country where they are needed for the propaganda of UNICEF, for the assistance of UNICEF, but where UNICEF has to work, they are not much use. They are rather raising difficulties.

UNICEF in retrospect

Eckert: We have made a journey leading from the days of your departure from Zermatt to Germany, to the Middle East, then to Africa, again to Iran, Iraq and to Turkey. This is a very full life, a life devoted to help to the others and very often help under difficult circumstances in a selfless way. Perhaps at the end of this recording, would you mind saying something about UNICEF, its mandate, the kind of basic principles on which it is based. Do you still think that they apply today. UNICEF today is a very different organization in many ways; how do you think that UNICEF could further evolve in the future.

Lehner: Well, it is all far away. You forget things. And I think at this age you don't become wiser. Maybe you see a little from the distance what UNICEF does, what I have done, what all the representatives in the field at least are doing. But I don't know how the organization is now. I think it has changed quite a lot, for the better or worse I don't know, but it should be for the better. They have more people, they have more money, I suppose the staff they have are still dedicated to the general idea - to help the children of the world. And in this sense I think UNICEF is a very necessary organization of the United Nations. I think it is probably the best, or one of the best, of the United Nations. As long as they hold up the principles of aid, of education, of social welfare for the children and for the families - these are the basic things in the whole world.

How it should be furthered it is difficult for me to say. I think as I am not any longer in the organization it will be only a little, as we say in German, it is arrogant and presumptuous to speak about that. But as long as they stay with the principles that are laid down they cannot go wrong.

Maybe sometimes you are getting a little irritated about propaganda, - a little milk will help a baby not to die and these kinds of things - one shot of penicillin costs 20 cents. But I suppose you have to talk in this manner with the people in the industrialized countries. I think that is alright.

All that I can think is that UNICEF has given me much. They are always some regrets and something one has not done. But as a general matter, I am very satisfied that I could work with UNICEF on this part of my life, which I'll never forget. UNICEF cannot go wrong. They will get the assistance from countries which can do it - that can do more. That is my wish.

Eckert: Thank you, Dr. I think it was a privilege to hear you talk about UNICEF and I am sure that I speak for many when I say that the organization owes you a lot.

