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Interview with Dr. Charles Egger

Conducted by
John Charnow
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Interview with Dr. Charles Egger*
by John Charnow
UNICEF, New York, 11 October 1983

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*Charles Egger started his career with UNICEF in August 1948 as Administrative Officer in Bulgaria. A year later he transferred to the Paris office where in 1950 he became Chief of Field Operations and in 1951 Director of European Operations. Later his title was changed to Director Africa, Eastern Mediterranean & European Regional Office and Director Africa & European Regional Office. He became Director of the Delhi office in October 1961, a position he held until October 1967 when he came to Headquarters as Deputy Executive Director (Programmes). He retired at the end of 1981. In January 1983 he returned to UNICEF to serve as Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region on an interim basis for eight months.

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Interview I

Egger pre-UNICEF background

Charnow: Charles, would you like to tell us about your relevant pre-UNICEF background?

Egger: Well, the main point that I would like to stress here, is that after having finished my studies in Switzerland, I was appointed to what was called the Swiss Political Department - which is really the Foreign Office - to an office that acted as an intermediary or as a focal point for all relief activities that Switzerland was engaged in during and after the war, relationships with the International Red Cross Organizations, with voluntary agencies, with Governments, with the problems that Switzerland had during the war to represent the interest of foreign countries with their opposing numbers.

This office was then also concerned with following the post-war efforts first in the field of assistance, reconstruction - UNRRA - and then with the creation of the United Nations and the various organizations.

Origins of UNICEF: Rajchman

And it is in that capacity that I attended the famous meeting in, I think, August 1946, when there was a discussion about the continuation of UNRRA which took place in Geneva, and a big battle that was fought on behalf of the needy countries by Dr. Rajchman, the head of the Polish Delegation. The allied powers were not prepared to provide the resources required for UNRRA to continue so Dr. Rajchman had then an idea - "at least, let's continue in terms of the most vital needs relating to nutrition and health." He did not succeed in this, but as he always had a fertile mind he came up with a third idea "let's continue, an international effort, at least, on behalf of children" that would concentrate, largely, on food, nutrition, health protection and protection against cold.

Charnow: What was the position of the Swiss Government on this?

Egger: The Swiss Government was at the UNRRA conferences only as an observer and I was a member of the observer delegation and was really the one who followed this conference most of the time, I got very much interested, because I met there the various UNRRA Chief of Missions. I met Sir Robert Jackson for the first time, who was the Executive Officer of UNRRA. I met Keeny and many other people that afterwards we saw again in UNICEF.

But the origin of UNICEF is really the hard-fought battles between the allied powers that have won the war and the governments that were, to a large extent, but not exclusively, on the other side of the Iron Curtain in Europe and the southern European countries that

But the origin of UNICEF is really the hard-fought battles between the allied powers that have won the war and the governments that were, to a large extent, but not exclusively, on the other side of the Iron Curtain in Europe and the southern European countries that were devastated by the war, and China. They have made every effort to hopefully continue UNRRA as such. If this did not succeed, then at least, let's concentrate on food and health for the vulnerable groups. They did not win but a compromise, put forward by Dr. Rajchman, as usual very eloquently, and negotiated behind the scene, was that let's at least allow - and that's where the name came from - the UN International Children's Emergency Fund which later became UNICEF to utilize the remaining assets of UNRRA to continue a relief effort across the border for the children and mothers of the countries that had been devastated by the war. And that was then the compromise that went through, first reluctantly, but then I think more positively and the UK Delegate, Noel Baker, I remember had an important role in getting that through, and also some members of the US Delegation. That was the creation of UNICEF, to have a children's agency continue for a clearly limited period to provide essential aid to the war-devastated countries in Europe and China.

Duration of UNICEF

Charnow: I never was entirely sure whether Maurice Pate and Rajchman and some of the other key people did not have in mind a continuation of UNICEF for an indefinite period of time, as it turned out, or really felt we would go out of business after several years. There is nothing in the Legislation one way or the other. What is your impression?

Egger: I remember quite well that this emergency fund for children was expected to continue for a few more years, to allow the children that had been born, or had grown up during the war years, really to get back on their feet.

And I think the views of everybody at that time was that this would really be only for a couple of years, and nobody - and certainly not Mr. Pate - thought of a much more longer term effort.

It is only after the success that UNICEF had with this effort which is a very centrally-directed effort to provide supplementary food, raw materials, and engage in a preventive health action against tuberculosis and venereal diseases, that the idea cropped up, maybe UNICEF should be allowed to continue, and should not concern itself only with the countries devastated by the war. We have already on the UNICEF Executive Board, some representatives from Latin America, and from Asia that had gained independence and that were the advocates of continuation and to change UNICEF from a post-war emergency to an organization that dealt with emergencies all over the world, even of a more longer-term nature. And I remember that Al Davidson -- European Director -- and E. J. R. Heyward were the main promoters of this idea, and in this he was supported by, amongst others, the Brazilian delegate at that time, who played a major role to really suggest that UNICEF as a UN-agency have a wider role than just be an offspring of a post-war allied rehabilitation effort.

Move to developing countries: Rajchman

Charnow: That brings me to an impression I had that Rajchman was really, despite his vision on other matters, not all that optimistic about what we could do in developing countries because of constant changes in governments, and because you couldn't reach the large number of children in feeding programmes. Perhaps it was also to get more for Europe. Also we had quite a time trying to figure out what we could do in Asia and in Latin America under these circumstances, with the kind of programmes we had to offer. So we had various surveys to get an idea of what we could do. Does that conform with your own impression? And, incidentally, I might say that my impression also was that the UK, which had been a colonial power in Asia, was also very much in favour of our moving into the developing countries.

Egger: Well, I'm not entirely in agreement with what you say. Rajchman was in the first place, a very shrewd politician, and as he had a Board on which not only the European countries were sitting, but there were a number of representatives from the underdeveloped countries - the phrase 'developed countries' had not been coined at that time - sitting.

The other thing is, don't forget that Rajchman himself had spent many years in China, and Manchuria, and was well aware and well acquainted with problems in the Far East. I know that really to get further aid through to European countries, he needed their support; he needed the support of most of the delegates on the Board and at the same time he realized that there were also problems elsewhere, and he began to think gradually in broader terms.

It is true that nobody did exactly know how UNICEF could apply alternative resources on a purely emergency basis to the other countries, and you remember at that time the idea came up of a survey mission to the Far East, that was led by, at that time the former Chief of the US Public Health Service, and Dr. Eliot shared in this, and the third person I think the head of the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health.

Charnow: Parran and Lakshmanan.

Egger: Yes. There were two important missions - this one went to a number of Asian countries and studied the situation and came forward with the first ideas of really allowing UNICEF, not only to do, or engage itself in emergencies but help in building up of permanent services in terms of training, in terms of mother and child health and in terms of immunization, and I think this was the foundation of UNICEF's extension to other regions, to regions that had nothing to do with the war - places where, many delegates pointed out, there were at least as serious situations as far as child health, nutrition, education were concerned. I don't remember what start was made in Latin America, frankly that escapes me. A similar mission was organized there.

Charnow: The Passmore Survey

Aid to Germany: Eliot, Rajchman

Egger: Yes. I would like to mention another mission. There was a basic disagreement about what to do with Germany. UNICEF, following UNRRA's selection of countries, did concentrate on war-devastated countries, with the exception of Russia and earlier with the exception of Germany. We also had no request from Russia. USSR was in favour of further aid from UNRRA but with no ties attached. Russia began to turn very severely against the post UNRRA efforts, or any efforts of further work in the eastern European countries. The question of the problems of German children came up rather early in the Board, and I must say it is to the credit of the Board that they decided to send a mission to Germany, to all four parts of occupied Germany at that time, which was headed by Dr. Eliot and in which Sam Keeny participated as the practical operator, and it is Dr. Eliot who really swung the views in the Board, when she talked about the problems and the needs of German children, which led to the decision that Dr. Rajchman fought against first, and certainly didn't like, but had finally to accept, to start operation in all four zones - the Russian, the American, the French and the British. This was a decisive step where UNICEF, which started as a post-war allied, relief agency became truly an international agency where the problems of children, without any discrimination, was really the major guiding element that UNICEF decided to follow.

Emergencies/long-term

Charnow: To get back to the concept of UNICEF being a post-war relief emergency agency. The principles that the Board had adopted very early were to help develop countries' permanent institutions within the country, permanent child welfare arrangements. I recall that Rajchman had three major goals, one was milk conservation which was very long-range, the other was training through the International Children's Centre, and the third was BCG vaccination.

I've often speculated as to whether the general impression that UNICEF was solely an emergency agency. Actually from the very outset there was the idea that it would be an agency which would be more than just for emergencies, one that helped developed permanent arrangements and government responsibility. You have any views on that?

Egger: Well, I think you have to distinguish between two phases, the first one really was an emergency operation to provide food and raw materials, and some very simple but important preventive health activities such as BCG vaccination penicillin against venereal disease, which then did not turn out to be such as serious disease in post-war Europe.

Milk conservation

Out of this emergency aid, I think, gradually grew, as you have indicated, something of a beginning of a more long-term nature e.g.

dealing with replacing the delivery of surplus food to children in school feeding programmes and pre-school feeding distributions to try to develop the milk industry in the countries that had been destroyed, or affected by the war but that had potential really to develop.

BCG vaccination

The BCG vaccination, by its very nature, actually did contribute to strengthen the preventive health activities and has led, certainly, in many countries, to really build up more permanent institutions. It was at the beginning of a rather technical operation, in terms of provision of vaccine, the mobility, the cold chains, and things like that.

Training of health workers/pediatricians

Out of this grew then, I think, a general realization that far more attention had to be given to the training of health workers, not just in curative services but in the preventive aspect and with far greater attention to the particular requirements of the child, namely paediatrics.

International Children's Centre

Remember we had a very close relationship with institutes that were developing training in child health and paediatrics - the International Children's Centre in France, among others that Professor Debré and Ludwig Rajchman created. It is said that they did not find the proper recognition in WHO for what they're trying to do, and it was set up as an institution, a little bit in competition, which, of course, was not quite correct. But it looked like that at one time.

The International Children's Centre was only one particular important element of providing post-graduate courses in child health, paediatrics, immunization, in developing, I think, a resource centre for literature and dissemination of experiences. At the same time, I think, UNICEF did take an interest trying to support institutions in the countries themselves, that were national efforts.

Charnow: Well, Charles, I left you some time ago at the UNRRA meeting in August 1946. After that what happened as far as your career is concerned?

Swiss post-war relief efforts

Egger: After the meeting in August I became very much interested in the importance of UNRRA and we all regretted to a certain extent that Switzerland was only an observer country. The whole experience that Switzerland went through had led to the creation of a national effort which was considered to be a parallel effort to UNRRA, but of course limited and tailored to what Switzerland could do. Switzerland put up the funds and created an organization to assist war-stricken countries in Europe, primarily neighbouring countries with what was considered at that time a rather important effort. Ultimately

something like 240 million Swiss francs were collected to provide both emergency aid and project aid and really laying down the basis for some development activities - still at an early stage - to develop training institutions and first reestablish social infrastructures, comprehensive approaches and things like that.

After having worked in the Foreign Office, I was detached to become the diplomatic adviser to the Swiss post-war relief effort. As an adviser I quickly got into operations and became the Deputy Director of that organization.

Links with UNICEF

It is in that capacity that I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of UNICEF - Al Davidson and Don Sabin - when they came to Berne to plead for Swiss support for UNICEF, which we did encourage. We supported this idea. At that time, you may remember, the American contribution was linked up on a matching formula with the contributions of other countries. Al Davidson, Director of the UNICEF group, wanted to increase the Swiss contribution. He felt that there were certain parallel efforts that the Swiss Fund was carrying out, that could be considered complimentary to UNICEF effort and therefore could be eligible for matching. So we worked out certain formulas that some of the Swiss aid efforts, the team of immunization on medical aid, etc. were to be considered as an additional Swiss contribution to further UNICEF objectives, though carried out by the Swiss Organization. This did require, at that time, some detailed complicated negotiations. You had first to know the programmes, you had to have some idea of the set-up of these organizations etc. I met the European Director, Al Davidson several times in order to negotiate such an agreement and bring it to a successful conclusion.

Egger joins UNICEF

At the end he asked me if I didn't want join UNICEF for a period. I thought about it and then agreed. My own government was interested in allowing some of its younger diplomats, to gain experience in an international organization. So they said you can go for a year, it would be useful for your career. In the late Spring early Summer 1948 I joined UNICEF as the UNICEF Representative in Bulgaria. After about an hour's briefing by Al Davidson in Geneva, I was sent to Sofia. I took over from an American called F. Segal who had been the first UNICEF Representative in Bulgaria. That was my entry into UNICEF.

UNICEF in Eastern Europe

Charnow: At that time what was the feeling of Bulgaria or generally the Eastern European countries about from UNICEF? Or let me phrase it this way, I have the impression that UNICEF in Eastern Europe really moved in to take over the mechanisms of UNRRA, the smooth transitions, the feeding stations were there, the supply lines were there, we did not have to set up anything new. This was very welcomed. Then at the beginning of the cold war that we began to

have problems in virtually all the Eastern European countries about observation of supply distribution, visas and similar matters.

Egger: I think that you have described the situation quite correctly. At the beginning it was very much the continuation of UNRRA's best operation in the various war-affected countries, except that UNRRA in essence delivered supplies, and turned them over to the government which maintained the responsibility for distribution. In UNICEF we were more insistent in working out plans of operations with the governments and then following through on the actual distribution and development of the first programmes through regular visits. Therefore it was not just an emergency relief operation; but the beginning of a close collaboration.

I came to this in early summer in 1948, at the end of a period of accommodation in the political climate between East and West, just before the situation really became far more difficult. This was just after Yugoslavia broke off from the USSR and the Eastern European Group, and under the influence of the last years of Stalin.

Bulgaria

At the beginning we had a fairly good cooperation with the Government of Bulgaria. I also remember having seen Traitsche Kosto who was in the Bulgarian Government, in charge of economic planning and later made the scapegoat for a more reformed and realistic approach. He was then demoted, imprisoned and executed. UNICEF had in Bulgaria a fairly long period where we could pursue our work on behalf of children and mothers. The representative of the British Council and the UNICEF Chief of Mission were the only foreigners who could travel around in the country. All other diplomats were restricted within a certain radius around the capital, I travelled a great deal with my Bulgarian staff and was able to see a great deal of the programme and learn also about other problems children were facing. In early 1949, I was replaced by an American lady from Arkansas, Ann Laughlin. She was a much harsher political wind, and not quite trained or prepared to take up the role of an international official of UN and tended to maintain an independent posture.

Difficulties: phasing out

From Bulgaria I transferred to the Paris office, and became Chief of Field Operations having had it must be admitted not more than three quarter-year's experience in one country. I was put in charge of the various UNICEF missions, to oversee the field operations, assist in the preparation of the basis of future plans and to help out in the difficulties that increasingly towards the end of 1949 and through 1950/51 began to develop with the socialist countries that clearly revealed a basic inability to agree on the basic principles of international cooperation.

We came to realise that this period of UNICEF emergency assistance following up on UNRRA was going to come to an end in Eastern Europe. It ended as a result of policy decisions taken by the USSR to

terminate the last links with what they conceived to Western-orientated agencies.

But it ended, however, very differently, in the various countries. It was influenced amongst others by the attitude of the different governments, the type of relationships our staff had been able to build up during the years. We had the worst case where a Swedish UNICEF official in Romania had to leave practically within less than 48 hours; he was practically thrown out of the country. It was quite a different situation in Poland where it took far longer. There it was based on a gradual reduction of our activities on the basis of a mutual agreement to terminate the cooperation with UNICEF. This was largely due to the warm hearted, interested and skillful way in which Mrs. G. Lutz, our Representative in Poland; a Swiss, with some help from Dr. Rajchman, the Chairman of the Board, was able to bring the operation correctly to an end and get the Polish Government to continue some of the activities with supplies that had already been donated. In between these two we maintained all shades of different arrangements to being the relief operations to an end. It was quite clear that orders had gone out from Moscow to terminate the collaboration with international relief agencies because in the period of growing suspicion against all foreigners, the impossibility of travelling in the country to really observe the operations and agree on the basic premises of distribution without any discrimination to all in need. By the end of 1950 or the middle of 1951 at the latest, UNICEF had withdrawn from all the Eastern European countries and continued then to Yugoslavia, Germany the Southern European countries and China.

Charnow: Let me ask you about our emphasis on plans of operations and observation -- a difference from UNRRA. Am I correct in my assumption that on one side there was Rajchman, who thought we were too rigid, and Al Davidson on the other hand who was for adhering to planned supervision and control. Perhaps Dick Heyward was somewhere in the middle. I am not quite sure what Maurice Pate's position was, I would suspect more with Al Davidson but he had problems of trying to get US appropriations.

Were our desired controls and this kind of friction really necessary, or wouldn't the material and food have gone to the children in any case?

Egger: It is difficult to say with the passing of time what exactly had happened with our work in Eastern Europe. Irrespective of the tougher or a more complacent attitude that some in UNICEF might have taken in UNICEF, it was quite clear that UNICEF's operations were going to come to an end in Eastern Europe. In any case we simply did not fit into the political concept of the Communist countries - they considered UNICEF to be just another Western organization under the American influence.

Let us also remember that at that time, almost 70 percent of our total resources came from the U.S., that there was a US Director in New York, and a European Director who was also American, and quite a few additional staff were Americans. For many of them this was another theatre of Cold War that they could not accept.

A less tough policy, I think, would not have mattered in the end. However, we did not do much to avoid this or take a more flexible stand. It may have influenced the cooperation in different countries. When the thaw came in 1956/57 and in some of the countries, we were able to start up operations again. Many people in Government did remember how programmes had been terminated.

Al Davidson

It is true as you say that there are differences of opinion in the Executive Board, and quite naturally, also within the Administration. I personally felt that Al Davidson, who in the McCarthy period afterwards was criticized for having been far too lenient towards the communist countries, was quite fair and a stickler to following the relevant provisions laid down in the plan of operations. He had also been a lawyer. As an American he was probably also under considerable pressure. He may have opted for not making distinctions between what were really basic principles that had to be adhered, and a question of detail where they could be more flexible. This was a difficult decision to be made at that time.

Maurice Pate

Maurice Pate in his inimitable way tried to exercise his wise judgement and arbitrate. He may not always have been in agreement with Al Davidson and tried to follow a firm line on questions of principle, but greater flexibility on questions of modality and detail. He tried to concentrate on what were really important provisions and not make a casus belli on every violation and there were many that occurred.

Termination of aid

Quite naturally there were differences within the administration, but the fact that different opinions were discussed and in the final outcome pursued a kind of middle-line policy and proceeded with the withdrawal on as orderly a basis as could be worked and in each case. There were the abrupt departures taken, like in Romania. In Hungary, we could in an orderly way, finish our operations in a few weeks. It was rather a quick termination in Czechoslovakia. Poland was the one country that took the longest period; it was done the most orderly. I think it was an agreed termination, a friendly separation on mutually acceptable terms.

Charnow: If it hadn't been this political atmosphere, could be have continued usefully in the Eastern European countries for a period of time or was recovery so far advanced which is what the official UNICEF literature said, which warranted our withdrawal.

Egger: If there had not been this political climate which came quite clearly from Moscow, UNICEF would have been able to continue but the content of the programme would have changed quite considerably, as it was possible to do late in some of the countries, and would have led to concentrate far more on developing national capacity in terms of training, institution building, in bringing in new concepts in public

health, welfare and nutrition, and in terms of helping them to both develop more up-to-date models of approaches to social development.

It would have been quite a natural process with partners where a mutual respect and cooperation had developed, that UNICEF had gained considerable credit and a place of confidence in most of these countries by those who could exercise their own judgement and were not under the influence of the political centres in the East. There is no question that there would have been a quite different development.

Charnow: This story of the sour terminations in most of the countries never really surfaced publicly in the Board to any great extent. As Secretary to the Board I was only peripherally aware of the underlying problems. In later years our relations with Eastern European countries were quite good and they say that they appreciate our help, that we help save a generation of children and so on. So I wonder how much the terminations, aside from the fact that we might have continued longer and moved into some different kinds of cooperation, affected the future of our relations with Eastern European countries.

Attitudes of delegations

Egger: First, as you say, that it never surfaced in a formal way at discussions of the Board. It didn't find its place in the documentation. But I can recall many heated discussions that took place within the Secretariat and between members of the Board and the Secretariat, not only with Dr. Rajchman. Remember Dick Heyward played a role while he was still the Australian delegate to the Board. New Zealand also took an important part; Switzerland with Dr. August Lindt was equally active. There was often a Swiss-Australian alliance. The U.K. had a sort of middle role, France because of the prominence of Professor Debré and his group was very much aligned with Ludwig Rajchman but was concerned about the problems of children; the same in Italy with Au. L. Montini.

The U.S. delegation, I must give a lot of credit to them, led by broad minded people e.g. Dr. Martha Eliot, Katherine Lenroot who took a very practical, humanitarian line really always asked themselves what are the needs, how best can we help children, not getting bogged down with political and other aspects. The U.S., with other countries, played a very important role I think to maintain a line that UNICEF was a children's agency, and not a political arm of the United Nations.

It is true that with the passage of time we found that the some people that we used to work with and disappeared then with the toughening of the Russian line under Stalin, appeared later on the surface and remembered the more positive phases of UNICEF cooperation. It was quite clear that the people realised that these were political considerations that had nothing to do with the Organization as such. However, we may also have faulted or been too rigid or had staff too much influenced by the cold war atmosphere. I think it was very interesting in later years to note that countries

themselves took the initiative to reopen contacts and expressed the wish to renew the cooperation; this was quite marked in Poland.

In Yugoslavia we had always continued, but Yugoslavia in its own way followed to some extent this trend. This was never held against UNICEF. In fact Yugoslavia had been trying to maintain an open channel, to try to find a way at least as far as children were concerned. This was by and large considered to be a period where UNICEF attempted to follow a policy of cooperation and stick to basic principles.

European office/Headquarters relations

Charnow: During this whole period what would you say, was the relations between our New York and Paris offices in terms of autonomy, direction, policy and so on?

Egger: Well, you know that at the time of the operation during the post-war emergency was quite different in the sense that the Paris office was really not involved in the formulating of the programme. The programme was determined in relationship to the resources available, in terms of allocating the funds in accordance with certain criterias for each country. The Chief of Programme Division, Mike Schmittlinger, at that time had the secret, Mike Schmittlinger and Jules Perlstein his assistant, and the nature of the programme was very much predetermined.. There was so much available for supplementary child feeding, so much for raw materials, wool, cotton and leather, through BCG and tuberculosis campaigns. We were concerned more with the practical application of a programme which had been worked out at Headquarters and submitted on a very schematic basis to the Board.

So New York decided, in accordance with the decisions of the Board. We then executed and were more concerned with the question of administration, personnel, developing cooperative arrangements with Governments, trying to overcome the difficulties, field observations and following through on the distribution and use of supplies. At that time procurement of supplies was split between New York and the Paris Headquarters were Sam Keeny was functioning as the Director of the supply operations in Europe. So there was relatively little delegation of responsibilities except to a certain extent, for administration of personnel, but certainly not in programme development. When a decision had to be taken, it was taken in New York or when the New York people flew to Paris. It was a period of predominant influence of New York HQ.

Charnow: When you came to Paris, what was your function?

Egger: Well, Davidson asked me to join UNICEF European HQ in my first period in Bulgaria. I was appointed as Chief of Field Operations which was really the nucleus of the Programme Division in terms of overseeing the programme execution rather than be concerned at that moment with programme formulation. We had a very strong Supply Division; that was really the important division because they provided the supplies. We had to review the mechanisms, and channel the distribution.

Relations with WHO

Medical advisory group in Paris

In Paris there was also an important medical advisory group office, headed by Dr. Borislav Borcic, the chief medical advisor from WHO with Dr. Michael Sachs and Dr. Louis Verhoestrate as assistants. This advisory group was responsible for the liaison with WHO to provide medical advice to UNICEF. They were instrumental and very helpful at a stage when we moved from a purely distribution programme to a stage of helping to develop services, institutions, train people and to make a beginning in strengthening national capacity.

Charnow: There was then, at least at that level, no friction with WHO?

TB/BCG

Egger: Well WHO at that time had to find its feet and organize its work. There were some frictions of course. They looked upon the International Tuberculosis campaign as something that they had very little influence on and were quite happy when it came to an end so they could take over the responsibility for a wider approach and with a longer term perspective. They were basically quite right because if you deal with tuberculosis the BCG vaccination is only one of the elements but it is not the total tuberculosis programme and has to fit into a policy that was gradually being developed.

International Children's Centre

The creation of the International Children's Centre - was another bone of contention. WHO was at the beginning extremely reluctant to agree to this rather anomalous creation. They went along because of a lot of political pressure from France, Poland and other countries. They felt that training, research, etc. ought to be done by the countries concerned, and with WHO's collaboration.

McCarthyism

Charnow: Do you want to go on with the rest of your experience as head of our Paris office?

Egger: I was nominated head of the Paris office, if I am not mistaken, in '52 when Al Davidson decided to leave. Among others he was one of the victims of the McCarthy psychosis which prevailed in the United States UNICEF lost a number of extraordinary qualified people being made victims of earlier ideas or writings where they had sympathized with causes of progress, socialism etc. This was not a very happy period. I certainly feel that UNICEF HQ. could have taken a stronger stand to defend its own staff members. I had to write many affidavits for people that I've come to work with, and respected. I had followed their work very closely and certainly didn't come across any leanings in their practical work toward the Socialist countries or that influenced them in a way that affected their duties as international civil servants. This was not a very glorious period for UNICEF.

Egger as head of Paris office

Now as I look at the period when I was head of the Paris office, what were the achievements that marked this period -- I was there from 1952 to 1961.

Europe in the '50s

It was in the first place the transformation of our cooperation in the countries in Europe where we continued to work. We perceptively moved from an emergency operation to one that concerned itself with a more long-term objective, namely the long-term needs of children in each major sector.

Start of National Committees: Willie Meyer

It was also the beginning of mobilizing interest of the public at large, and to a certain extent representatives of voluntary agencies, through the National Committees for UNICEF. One staff member contributed most to it, that was Willy Meyer. He really developed the idea that we could not simply rely on the existing voluntary agencies - concerned with child welfare, with their own fields of interest, their own financial sources. They could not but consider UNICEF as kind of competition. Willy Meyer indicated that "we must build up our own supporting groups at the grass-root level". In country after country he went on to mobilize people and get them together to form a nucleus of what then became the UNICEF Committees.

UNAC: Ording

Some were an extension of national committees that had been created at the time of UNAC, the United Nations Appeal for children. As a result of the initiative of a Norwegian public figure Aake Ording a major effort was undertaken to raise funds all over the world and draw attention to problems of children with the support of the Secretary-General Trygve Lie. His movement was, however, not sufficiently co-ordinated with UNICEF. In some sense it was a pre-runner of the International Year of the Child. Between the United Nations and UNICEF far more could have been done in encouraging UNAC to develop its real fundraising potential in a direction that would have allowed UNICEF to be the main recipient of resources to be utilized abroad.

On the other hand UNICEF had difficulties to understand the unique approach UNAC was pursuing. The personality of Ording simply was rather difficult and a hindrance to good cooperation, and I think Maurice Pate was far too much of a gentleman to wanting to fight about such a cause. I think a valuable opportunity was lost at that time.

Some of the UNICEF Committees were grafted on the old UNAC committees, some were newly created, some had in some embryonic form existed and it was Willy Meyer who really moulded these and gave them life. In Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK and Ireland, they became powerful forces

in support of UNICEF. In Europe the Committees represented a major element in support of UNICEF and helped to change the agency from a post-war relief emergency agency to one that concerned itself with the long-term needs of children on a worldwide basis.

Africa

The second important element was Africa. UNICEF was one of the agencies that took the lead in taking an interest in African children.

Ralph Bunche: colonial powers

There was one man at the UN in New York who had a great influence on this decision, that was the American Undersecretary, Ralph Bunche. Schmittinger had raised this question first, "why we were not dealing with Africa?" I had no experience of Africa at that time whatsoever.

Colonial powers

In Europe one felt this was primarily a responsibility of the Colonial Powers. The only independent countries were Liberia and Ethiopia. Well one came to accept the idea of working with the Responsible Powers.

At the beginning the Colonial Powers neither wanted the UN to interfere with their responsibilities in Africa, nor did UNICEF at the beginning, take an initiative. Schmittinger arranged for me to meet with Ralph Bunche. It was the first time I had met him. He was so genuine, so friendly, so sincere and interested and he raised the question not only as a matter of principle but from his own knowledge of the African aspirations because he was dealing with the trustee territories and other colonial territories and had accumulated a great deal of knowledge of these questions in the UN secretariat. In view of the gradual process towards liberalization, autonomy and then independence it was important from the UN point of view that the ground be adequately prepared. It is after this meeting - I met him once or twice thereafter - that I became really interested in extending our cooperation to Africa.

After preliminary soundings in which some of our prominent Executive Board members took part, the major Colonial Powers mainly France, UK and Belgium took the initiative to see if it were not possible for UNICEF/WHO/FAO to assist the colonial governments in meeting some of the health and nutrition problems that were of primary concern to children and mothers. For political reasons, the governments decided not to open the gate to all the system of the United Nations but to unite technical and humanitarian organisations -- mainly UNICEF, WHO and FAO.

West and Central Africa

They also decided that, in West Africa, they should concentrate on fighting malaria and help with new methods of malaria control developed by WHO, and in Central Africa they should concern themselves with the problems of child nutrition and health. The

basis of this decision was not very clear, because malaria is as much a problem in Central Africa as child nutrition. Generally the problems of inadequate nutrition in its various forms is equally very serious in West Africa. Basically, however, this opening of Africa was an extremely important stage for UNICEF to generate in one of the most underdeveloped continents.

Charnow: What about North Africa?

Egger: In North Africa we followed the same policy. France had the responsibility of Algeria and was the protective power in Morocco and in Tunisia. We agreed to provide aid at the request of France and in consultation with the local technical departments, in certain very specified fields - the problem of eye disease, trachoma and conjunctivitis, preventive TB control through BCG and the beginning of strengthening MCH services.

Palestine refugees

Another important element was our association with the efforts to assist the Palestine refugees after the early struggles over the partition of Palestine which then led to the exodus of more than 1-1/2 million of the Palestinian refugees from what became Israel.

A special UN organization was erected which operated through three voluntary groups, namely the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the Quakers.

We were asked to associate ourselves because children were concerned. At the beginning we refused to do so for the reason that the task was too big and essentially a vast emergency and operational venture. We then agreed to participate for those groups that were not in the strict sense considered refugees, as they had lost their homes, but could not cultivate their land which was in Israel. We also took an interest in children in Lebanon, Syria and in Egypt. These were the countries in the Middle East where in the wake of the war we started work. The Paris office was made responsible for the first extension of UNICEF's work in Arab countries from around 1949 and 1950 and extended not only to the Arab "host" countries and Israel but also to Iraq, Iran and to the two Yemens.

It was probably the right decision for UNICEF not to extend our limited resources to thousands of refugees of all age groups for which a special UN agency had been created. It was really our first experience in working with developing countries outside of Europe and we had a great deal to learn about it.

These were the main points that have characterized my period from 1952 to 1961 in Europe. There have been, of course, many other developments during this period but these were the main four points that I would single out as being important at this stage.

UNICEF characteristics in the 1950s

What has characterized that period further is that from being purely a supply agency providing material aid to countries, relying on other UN agencies to offer technical advice we gradually moved on to the field of project support in the sense that we took an interest, in the project as a whole, in helping to define a strategy and work out an objective. We began to be interested in building up national capacity, to begin in sectoral fields, training of manpower, struggling national institutions, and trying to utilize modern advances in scientific knowledge particularly in the public health field, communicable disease control and as part of the support to a specific project.

It was still rudimentary and everybody believed in the success of modern scientific advances without much regard for the sociological and cultural environment. It was at a time when training people in the technique was considered to be sufficient. One believed in the invulnerability of the doctors along with the presence of the nurses, midwives, and sanitarians as aides.

We hardly looked at the question of management; we did not care much how to utilize national resources economically. We underrated the possibilities to provide training in the countries themselves that most related to the countries' needs, possibilities and cultural aspects. We were too easily satisfied with available information in terms of statistics as social indicators and had not developed aid for interpretation of basic data. Community participation was perhaps touched upon as necessary but not really sufficiently thought through as to how such participation could be enhanced and better prepared.

However it was a period of basic change, from a purely supply-oriented agency to one that began to concern itself with all the elements that can contribute to the success or failure, of a development effort. It was also the period that we began to depart from relying blindly on the advice of our sister agencies. UNICEF began to ask questions on how to relate technical knowledge to operational situations. We began to take an interest in the question of the best possible utilization of experiences of experts' knowledge in a country's situation and started to think in terms of dealing more on national operations.

Charnow: You're talking about UNICEF, as a whole, not just a European operation?

Egger: Well, I'm talking about UNICEF experience at that time as applying to Africa, the Middle East and Europe, as it was this incredibly large area that the Paris office was responsible for, but similar experiences were made in Asia, and Latin America. I remember when the first development programmes were discussed with the Alexandria office of WHO for the Eastern Mediterranean. The WHO Advisers with us wrote the plan of operations in the train between Cairo and Alexandria, between squeezing the WHO adviser with questions relating to Bejel, of a type of venereal disease typical in the Shatt el Arab

in Iraq, - now an area of contention between Iran and Iraq. When I came back from the first visit to the trust territory of Libya in 1950, helping to strengthen the training in MCH of their auxiliary and paramedical staff that the Italian and French Trusteeship participants had developed for Tripoli and the Fezzan. These were the first programmes where we really sat down and had to figure out how to really develop a project with the national authorities that aimed at working hard to strengthen a service. All our later thinking has flowed from these early beginnings.

Staff

Charnow: What was the character of the UNICEF field staffing at that point, in terms of the experience of the people and the numbers?

Changing requirements

Egger: It was not a bad group that we had. We had people that had all gone through the war, in one capacity or another, and had been moulded, had been influenced by the war, and like all of us, were looking towards putting their minds and experience to work to help create a new world. At least the motivation was there. These were people that had often a considerable experience in the operational aspect of moving and utilization of supplies.

Gradually, we realized that that was not enough. You had to have people that had not only practical experience but also the educational background and professional competence which would permit them to become partners in the development process. We were looking out for people that had therefore so much wider experience and the appropriate level of higher education. We therefore had a considerable mixture of different people.

In Africa: Marti, Borch

I remember one colleague who had been the pioneer of all our work in Africa, Dr. Roland Marti. He had been the chief delegate of the International Red Cross in Berlin throughout the war years; He was an extraordinary, warmhearted, sincere, interested and concerned man. Thanks to his medical knowledge, he had a very good understanding of the problems of children, but was somewhat more conservative in his approach of programme development.

Another one, Carl Borch, a Norwegian, an extremely intelligent economist, was the first one to head our East African office, who developed programmes that gave far greater weight to the development of people. It is there where we learned something about the principles of community development and the need to train people that originated from the community.

Women's activities: Bureau of Social Affairs

We had a famous argument with the then Bureau of Social Affairs, and Miss Aida Gindy, who was horrified that UNICEF allowed itself to venture into the social welfare field. They considered this to be

their prerogative, and were in particular critical of our taking interest in supporting women's activities, in the training of women at a very practical and auxiliary level, in simple skills relating to welfare and nutrition, to the family household. They felt that it was a somewhat retrograded process. But this activity had been developed over many years by enlightened European and African women in Kenya, Tanzania, (Tanganika at that time) and Uganda, and had met with a great response with African leaders and by women who considered this an important part of the self-development of women that included not only preparation for this role as mothers, but as head of families and members of Committees.

During my travels I had opportunity to observe much of this work and I became extremely interested in it. The best thing we could do was to support these activities in order to learn more about this development, and through a process of participation, review, feedback, etc., to enhance our knowledge involved and gain a new insight in these women's training activities, gradually also add new dimensions - to encourage women to deal more efficiently with the problems of children in their homes, to face the household tasks in their families and take advantage of their their environment through appropriate technology. Later on the Bureau of Social Affairs came round to our view and indicated that they thought we were on the right line, and provided more appropriate technical advice.

Learning from experience: basic health services

This is to show how UNICEF often learned a great deal, simply by associating itself with an interesting, new type of development, which UNICEF absorbed in due course and was able to develop it further.

Some of the first efforts in support of a more modern concept of basic health services, have come through a close association with the Nigerian Public Health Service. We opened one of the first offices in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. Other interesting approaches were being developed in East Africa primarily in Kenya and Uganda. They were giving far more attention to Public Health, and were anxious not to promote the construction of new, large hospitals, but encouraged the creation of smaller health centres, not just doctors but medical assistants and public health nurses. They were also emphasizing the training of paramedical and auxiliary staff. Sanitarians also were not just sanitarians in the local market, but were concerned with improvement of water supplies, with public hygiene, with excreta control etc.

We did not learn all this through technical cooperation with WHO. We absorbed it through contact with the countries who had introduced new concepts. Enlightened European and African doctors, public health people have spearheaded new initiatives and applied such concepts in practice. They also developed new schools of thought in order to win over the public and the local authorities. They were our masters and we learned from them.

This is something that has always struck me, you can learn far more from the enterprising people and openminded authorities that have initiative, a sense of enlightenment, that have tried out something through practical research and were able to initially review their work.

UNICEF flexibility: Board and staff

Charnow: Well that brings us to the question of flexibility in UNICEF. The extent to which Board policies in these early days allow for this kind of experimentation and the interpretation of these policies by field people who had the vision of working along the lines you have just mentioned.

Egger: Well, you rightly underline the importance of 'flexibility', but I would explain the process in the following way. It is not necessarily the Executive Board which will determine the degree of a certain flexibility. It is within a range of an established Board policy that field staff take part in experiments, associating themselves with new pioneering work.

They took part in new fields of development which were not necessarily a reflection of national policy - they were often pilot schemes, or represented a local or regional application of a national policy that we learned already took part in it and brought back to the Board for further refinements of an accepted policy. My philosophy was to learn what was going on in fields of interest to UNICEF. To associate yourself with such work then go back to the Board. In your reports to members of the Board, you point out that in the application of certain policies there were certain ways that this could be done more effectively with such improvements which had already been experimented with, and that we should try to learn from this process, follow it through and then come back again to the Board, formulate a policy and apply it on a broader basis that could find wider application.

The Secretariat as well as Executive Directors have always been broad enough to encourage such experiments, and search for new forward-looking approaches. The Board itself was receptive to new ideas. They often took a real interest in it, and if you were able to present a convincing case you got their understanding and even their support. They did want to see how such proposals had been worked out, what information we had and study it. This has been done, as you know, on a regular basis.

The essence of UNICEF's flexibility was that there were colleagues in the field that were prepared to take risks to learn about new developments, to try out something new, examine it, bring it back and renew it. If you were convinced, then try to defend it in hard discussion at HQ and the Executive Board. I remember the endless discussion that we had on new proposals. You have, of course, to argue your case, to present it in a systematic way, to assemble facts, and value them. UNICEF then had the staff that was prepared to do it. Often we told Headquarters only part of the story and agreed intending to take some risks. We just continued in trying to

develop the things that we were interested in and felt they could advance UNICEF's cause until we had enough experience, data, etc., to have another go, and then argued for it. I must admit, I've done this throughout my life in UNICEF.

Material aid and other UNICEF inputs

Charnow: Was the fact that UNICEF had large supplies and equipment to give an important factor in promoting our influence along broader lines, rather than just advice and technical assistance?

Egger: The answer is that it's the combination of the two factors that counts. The fact that we were able to provide some considerable material assistance, both for more immediate consumption and then also to help develop local production (drugs, insecticides, sera, etc.) within the countries which have been affected by the war or if it were really at a low level of development, or new to the LDCs combined - has undoubtedly been an important factor. We were able to assure that there would be such support over a certain period.

Changing emphases

We learned not to be stereotyped, to recognize the need for a dialogue, and participate in the development of a plan with our main partners. This has been facilitated by the initiative and the missionary spirit that characterized many of UNICEF staff.

Secondly, we were able to back it up with some investments, which perceptively moved from the provision of assistance to be consumed to develop the capacity of the countries to produce a fair amount of this aid in the countries themselves.

Thirdly, we increasingly learnt to utilize technical assistance from a variety of sources from the system of the UN agencies, from bilateral aid, from private agencies, most important from the countries themselves, and make it part of the plan.

We came to see that we had to give far more attention to the problems of strengthening structures, to management organization. It was not just a question of technical intervention, but how one could improve the administration of such a programme.

Lastly it was a question not only to utilize resources from outside, but to help review national resources, internal resources were to be more adequately applied for the purposes of the programme objectives.

A further important element was to find the support of the people in the countries that were prepared to exercise some degree of leadership, were prepared to take initiative, that led to the openmindedness, to try out new experiences, review them, and then support them within vis-a-vis their own authenticity. There is a proverb in French "Cherchez la femme" but what we were doing was looking for persons - men or women - that displayed the kind of leadership, that were convinced of the value of a programme they

initiated. We often gave them moral support, primarily we helped to promote some of them. We gave them, often, the tools they needed to work with, and this was certainly, in this development period, one of the secrets of how UNICEF succeeded.

Programme control by Headquarters

Charnow: Wasn't there a period when Adelaide Sinclair was running the Programme Division, when there were programme reviews solely at Headquarters, in which only the Regional Directors participated, and my impression is that many of the field people felt -- the Country Representatives felt -- that people were making decisions about programmes and were being sometime overly rigid without really being directly involved, or knowing the opportunities that you have just described, and sometimes cutting important elements out of the programmes. The Regional Directors may not have been around in that country for months, and might have had no current idea of what was going on. I believe also that Mrs. Sinclair herself had a feeling that if you provided something unusual or new in one country, then you had to have resources to apply it in all, and that would create a financial problem. So that there was, at the Headquarters level, and probably some of the Regional Directors' level, a certain inflexibility built in. Am I wrong in this impression that I have?

Egger: No, you're not wrong. But I think you have to put it into certain historic perspectives, in order to explain why this feeling had come at Headquarters.

Prior to 1960

Until roughly 1960, we were really dealing with specific projects, where the technical ideas had been laid down e.g. in those meetings of WHO and the WHO/UNICEF Joint Committee of Health Policy, and especially discussions amongst the Secretariat, where the approach, the type of programmes had been determined by the two Headquarters. The field officers would then be approached to carry out the policies they were given increasingly at a greater degree of autonomy in how this could be applied. But Headquarters retained a considerable degree of control.

Changes in the 1960s

In 1961 came this very important change in that policy which Dr. Sicault, with the help of Dick Heyward engineered through the formulation of the Strategy of Children. The Board would no longer decide on specific policies in relationship to individual sectors, but through the introduction of an open-door policy became the responsibility of the countries themselves within a new set of guidelines. They have, of course, a far better knowledge of their own problems; they also are more aware of their own priorities. They also know where they are willing to insert their own reserves. This was at that time a monumental decision, the implications of which we became only gradually aware and that there was a certain fear at HQ of opening a kind of sluice-gates for all sorts of activities, which was only natural.

Earlier UNICEF had to take a decision on each individual project. Now the country had to develop a broad country-orientated programme. They could take up education of children; they could interest themselves more in management training, organizational questions. It did to some extent appear to represent a kind of free-for-all, and UNICEF at HQ had no longer any direct influence in the kind of individual projects that were coming up.

Before a country programme was presented to the Board, HQ naturally wanted to review a new proposal. There was a fear that what would be approved for one country could influence UNICEF policy and then granted as a precedent by other countries. It is possible that this centralized review system was developed too far. We did not sufficiently realise that various countries have different levels of development, and look at their problems in a different way. What was right in one country, was perhaps not justified in another for some very good reasons.

Headquarters also wanted to exercise some influence on development projects for children but at the time we had no funds. It was a time of rather sluggish growth of our resources. The initiative for a more imaginative and more daring approach to increase the level of resources came only in the middle of the sixties.

When Mr. Labouisse, in Addis Ababa, in 1965 put forward the first ambitious plan of doubling UNICEF's resources within the period of five years, we just shook our heads, and had serious doubts. This was too bold an approach, and we may never reach it. We didn't realise then that there were really considerable opportunities to increase our resources. So the question of concern for scarce resources - the risk of widely expanding the range of assistance as a result of the country approach led inevitably to keep a more narrow control over the acceptance of new programmes. At the time there were only Mrs. Sinclair and two of her immediate aides, who had possibly had grasp and the necessary overview on development in the field.

Decentralization starts

Later when I joined Headquarters in 1967, I tried to modify the system to permit a greater decentralization of programme execution as well as the authority to review programme developments at the Regional and field level. We have to see all of this as part of an evolutionary process, with each phase having its own justification and rationale.

Charnow: Was there not another justification, could not Headquarters sometimes act as a buffer for the field person, who was under pressure from either the agencies or countries to move into too fancy or too expensive types of assistance?

Egger: Yes, this was true in some ways certainly. A capable representative was able to withstand the pressure from the agencies through his own personality and way of collaboration with other agencies.

In putting the discussions not so much within the framework of agencies than in the context of a system of collaborating with Governments, I think we did develop also other means to counteract these pressures as time went by. This does not mean that in certain instances it was helpful to obtain the endorsement of HQ from certain decisions that had to be maintained vis-a-vis other agencies and naturally also governments.

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