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John Manfredi

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Cover Sheet

Interview with Mr. Victor Soler-Sala
Conducted by Jack Charnow at UNICEF Headquarters
on 19-20 January 1984

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* Mr. Victor Soler-Sala started his career in UNICEF in August 1958 as Assistant Programme Officer in Santiago. A year later he was assigned to Bogotá. In August 1961 he took a year's study leave at Harvard University where he received an M.A. in Public Administration. On his return he returned to the Regional Office in Santiago where he was a Programme Officer for almost four years. In July 1966 he transferred to Headquarters as a Planning Officer. In November 1970 he became a Programme Officer for Planning in New Delhi for five and a half years. He then was UNICEF Representative in Bogotá for three years and UNICEF Representative in Jakarta for five years. In August 1983 he became Director of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Mr. Soler-Sala, a Spanish national, refers to his pre-UNICEF experience in the interview.

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19 January 1984

Pre-UNICEF experience

Charnow: Victor, how did you get involved in UNICEF in the first place?

Soler Sala: In 1957 during the time I was studying in the University of Barcelona, I became interested in work in the slums in the city of Barcelona, where they very little known but very impressive in terms of problems. They were the migrants from the South, really settling there because they didn't have housing and also a number of destitute and minority groups like gypsies were living there and I decided that I would work in that particular area with a group that was undenominational professionals interested in assisting their fellow men and there is where I got bitten by the social action bug. I think it was learning by total emergence. Never had I seen poverty like this and I was involved in all kinds of things. One of the projects in which we were involved, a little dispensary that we had there was distributing ointment to people who had trachoma. I had never heard of that word before in my life, the only thing I saw was that people were half blind, they had terrible eye problems and the doctor who was working with us explained to me what trachoma was all about. I was quite impressed by the fact that this trachoma seemed to disappear very quickly when you would put this ointment in the eye, and this would really clear up very quickly. A great many people had recovered there and I worked in that place as a volunteer every time I could take, weekends and evenings. I slept there during the weekends, and during the vacation time so that I would really share and know other peoples' feelings. This was very close to the beach, very humid. Squads of police periodically came and destroyed some of the illegal squatters. It was everything that you could imagine.

Charnow: What year was this?

Soler Sala: This was from 1955 to 1957 more intensively '56, '57. At the same time I was in touch with a friend of ours, Dr. Bosch-Marin, who was the Director-General of Health, and also Director-General, Paediatrics. He was a delegate on the UNICEF Board at the time. In a meeting with him, he told me that he had had discussions with UNICEF, which took the position that trachoma did not exist in Spain. He took the position that it did exist. I told him that we saw quite a number of cases not only in the South of Spain which was supposed to be the most endemic area but also in the surroundings of a city as modern as Barcelona. He asked me for some statistics and I gave him some statistics. He was also very much interested about the work that I was doing in that particular area.

Recruitment into UNICEF

Then Maurice Pate came to Spain and started looking for someone from Spain to join the Secretariat and looked into a lot of possibilities. I don't think they found anybody suitable and interesting. They asked me also if I was interested to apply and I prepared an application with background and so on. I left Spain after that time and I was working for while in Germany and I went through Paris and I had interviews with Charles Egger, Gordon Carter, Fred Hamilton, quite a number of people who afterwards I met in the Organization and I think they were all positively inclined.

I didn't hear anything from UNICEF for almost a year. At that point I had already decided I was going to go into business the right way, by means of a degree in business administration and I had received an acceptance from the Wharton School of Business Administration in Philadelphia and was ready to go there. Then I received a cable from Paris saying they were offering me a position as a trainee in New York. It was the end of 1957 beginning 1958. I understand at that time UNICEF had decided to just look for a group of people, young men just graduated, who really had no past experience, but who had an interest in working in UNICEF. One of them was Heino Wittrin. I think we were approximately 20 who came to New York and after one year were three or four left of us. Heino and myself were among the two who joined at that time. Well that was the way I joined UNICEF. I decided at that point that the kind of career I wanted was in the social field and not in business. I have never regretted it.

Initiation UNICEF sabbatical leave policy

I had an opportunity later on to study in an American university. That was when I was in Bogota and the preparation for the Alliance for Progress was starting and everybody was talking about economic development, the cultural economics and areas in which I knew a little bit but not enough. So I decided to take one year off, leave without pay. At that time there was no such thing as helping anyone who would be interested in studying, taking leave, or any support. Fortunately I got a scholarship from Harvard University and I really put that together with some savings I had and it was enough for me to get a Masters there. When I came back I wrote a memorandum which I think was the basis for the first training policy of UNICEF. If you remember, a number of people took the year off for the first phase, everybody took a sabbatical. People went for six months, for eight months, and I was very happy to see my experience in a sense had been quite useful to initiate this policy in the Organization.

Charnow:

What degree did you get?

Soler Sala: I got a Masters in Public Administration at the Kennedy School of Government. At that time I was very happy to notice that among the prior students there was Julia Henderson. What I did there was to really think about all the issues in terms of development planning. It was made to see how little there was in social planning and social development and there was nothing on planning for children in the social development terms, there was some in social welfare terms. This was extremely important for me when I came back because it gave the opportunity to again start looking into these areas in the context of UNICEF's work.

As you know, afterwards I was quite involved in this whole movement of building in planning for children what meant literally to bring in policies and programmes of children in the development planning process. Concretely having the possibility of building in the country's development plans priorities for children.

Start of Basic Reference Library

I think the first step in fact was probably a month after I returned from Harvard was list of reading materials that the very incipient UNICEF library had at the time. I don't know if you remember what UNICEF's library was in late fifties, it was just a couple of book shelves outside of Newton Bowles' office and there were a few books piled up. That was when we established the basic reference library which Dick Heyward supported very strongly. We brought the first books, six basic books on development economics. I still remember Arthur Lewis, Rostow, Timbergen and Hirschman and the Harbeson and Meyers books on planning of resource development. We had also the issues of Scientific American on economic development. It was distributed to our UNICEF offices. This was an area in where I was quite involved. I was very pleased that Gerda Ruehl who was a secretary had moved to the library and was working together with me. And I am very pleased to see what has happened to these two book shelves, because you know the library at Headquarters is a major affair. I was very involved from the very beginning in the development of the library.

Planning for children takes hold: Support by Pate, Heyward, Davee, Bowles

Charnow: I take it that your going on for further education was on your own initiative and, as a result, you became very much interested in planning and its application to UNICEF. Who besides Dick Heyward was interested in that in UNICEF at that time? Was there anyone else?

Soler Sala: I think Maurice Pate was from the very beginning aware of the importance of it. The importance really of development planning in particular in the context of human resource. The other person who was very supportive was the Regional Director for the Americas at that time, a Frenchman called Robert Davee who was really a tremendous personality and really a brilliant

intellectual and very organized, a planner by sort of birth, without really having gone through very technical training of this. He was a man who really was very very supportive from the beginning and who encouraged me to really go ahead in this field, who saw the importance of UNICEF moving in that direction. Of course, Newton Bowles was also somebody at that time you could in the Organization talk to in conceptual more than operational terms because most of the other people I think in the Organization were very pragmatic; they had been driving ambulances in China and had been in Berlin, and had been in the action elsewhere, and anything smacking too much of the intellectual was really a little bit questioned.

The Social Welfare influence

Of course you, Jack Charnow were much supportive. You were always very much involved in social welfare approach from the social work and schools of social work approach, which at that time was the most advanced form of social planning that you could have, even if the whole social work approach did not develop in a governmental sense. While still case-work approach it was moving towards community development.

Also in the UN itself, as you remember, there was the Division of Social Affairs which afterwards became the Division of Social Development. I think it was interesting to see how we were following what they were doing, although we followed our own course, in a way we probably moved faster than they did in that field. But we were always in close contact with them, particularly in two areas, one of them was, at the end of the fifties, planning for social welfare and then the whole question of community development. You remember at the time the tremendous support and thrust in that area in the UN. We moved into the area of social development much later.

Sicault

Initially I think in the Organization you could count the number of people who would actually understand the books in our Library. Of course, Sicault had initially moved in that area and he was there actually at the time. He was very supportive and initiated many of these developments. He himself was in touch with some of the French institutions who were working in these fields Francois Perroux in France and other groups who were interested in social development and planning. Some meetings were organized on early child activities.

ICC - French influence

At that time many activities were in relation to the International Children Centre. The International Children Centre was sort of the intellectual forerunner for many of the things that we were doing with very strong influence of the French professional community paediatricians and social workers. I think they made a very important contribution to the development of this planning aspect of UNICEF's work.

Evolution of Planning for Children

Charnow: On the subject of the planners versus the doers in UNICEF, was there not for a while a sort of two cultures, of which the planners were looked upon as somewhat theoretical? Would you comment on the subsequent evolution of that, of the two the extent to which you think it became integrated. Do we now need some specialists back?

Soler Sala: I think that it was Sicault who really brought about the change in thinking. You remember his book "The Needs of Children". We stopped being an Organization very emergency oriented, very supply-oriented, in meeting immediate needs which was essential and started thinking a little bit further of the child as a whole.

Classification of needs of children in different groups

Then came the next approach which he also initiated but which Dick Heyward put in a paper which classified the needs of children by different groups: the early child group, the under-fives, primary school levels, school children and then secondary post-primary children, and also children in the subsistence areas, in the remote areas, in the poor urban settings, in the rural areas, etc.

Human resource development

Then came the question of how could you do this in the context of human resource development. In order to carry out development plans you really need to have necessary human resources at all levels and to think about how you prepare these human resources. There is where we latched on to the human resource development. We said well, after all, children are not healthy if they don't get the proper nutrition, if they don't get the preparation at the pre-school level and so on, the country would not have human resources which will be able to staff, carry out and direct and be leaders of the countries development plans.

This is where that role of UNICEF was a little bit more understood by the planners than by the economists, who thought there was something in that but it was still seen in terms of how many children you could provide with primary schooling, etc. We were even looking into secondary school at one point and pre-vocational and vocational education. We were still very much in that area and we had to find a more specific focus.

Bellagio and regional follow-up meetings

I think that Bellagio was a very important watershed in this whole thing. It was a very important timing because after all it was bringing together the people like Timbergen, Tarlok Singh and many others who legitimised the relationship of planning and children. A series of papers was presented. In

front of the professional community of planners the question of looking at the child was legitimized as not only an object of development but also a subject of development itself which would aim at maximizing the return on the investment on children. In the development of the human resources, the idea that the child had to be protected was an important part of the planning. I think this might be analogous to the child survival revolution.

At that time, planning was in the forefront and development plans had a tremendous push forward. No country could expect any assistance unless they prepare the development plan, which in many cases was really a strategy for action. It was a combination of sectoral ministries' budgets put together and wrapped up in a document.

But I think the fact that we did have Bellagio and then we had regional meetings in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and in Asia meant not only looking into development planning but focussing into some of the priority needs of children. The question of women, of the preschool child, of many nutritional problems, of specific needs of children were really documented by the series of papers.

I think it was the first systematic intellectual effort to really to look at the child in context of UNICEF work beyond providing supplies and equipment. On the other hand you had to realise that you were talking about the sixties in which UNICEF still had a major thrust in malaria eradication. But there was an increasing awareness that we really had to do something else, we had to open up to the social field. The social field meant meant going beyond health - malaria eradication, MCH, specific vertical campaigns. What do we do beyond health?

We started thinking in terms of education field, then nutrition as another field and social services as another field, then the whole area of social development and planning came as the last field.

Interregional Fund for Programme Preparation

I think it was then that the interregional fund was created for programme preparation. For the first time we had some money that was not just for material things, we had some money for initial studies. We could really have some seminars, we could sit and think beyond the hand to mouth kind of thing.

Evolution of Staff acceptance

In the Organization you had immediately tremendous resistance mostly from oldtimers who thought that this was humbug, just an interference from a group of people who really had not had the baptism of fire, who really didn't know what it is to be there, what was a really serious emergency. They felt that we did not have experience and were coming up with things which would

really not result in anything practical. It was a very serious conflict.

The resistance was tremendous until they realized that this was really there to stay. Some of them were convinced progressively by attending regional conferences on seeing what was going on there. Then some of them started realizing that it did have a return, that increasingly the governments were interested in this approach. They were convinced then and they realised that it meant something more than speaking about it, that it meant doing some practical studies at the country level, to get into evaluations. It meant really assessing what UNICEF been doing in a particular sector, and moving away from this and starting other activities having a more direct impact on children, looking into the whole question of programming, planning and programming.

Annual project submissions

At that time we started looking at the cycle which related to the development planning. We moved away from the famous one year submissions. I was involved for Latin America alone forty-five, fifty submissions at each Board session. Requests each year for each country in the Caribbean and each country in Latin America and for each sector.

Country approach

Then we started moving towards the country approach. Looking to country as a whole, looking at the needs of children in the country and seeing what we could do in terms of basic services. Really what UNICEF did before provides very little discrimination in services for children - it was all children. A lot of the assistance that we gave to the governments were to establish the infrastructure for children in the capitals as well as children in the major cities. There was no systematic effort to try to assess who was being benefitted or what which group.

Of course, economic evolution at the time was on the upturn in a number of countries, the GNP were going up, increasingly the basic problems were being dealt with.

I think the UNICEF's country approach came as very very important strategy when you look at all these needs as a whole and also related to the development cycle. Still there were great reluctance at one point to go for five years submissions. I think at that time the maximum were initially for three years but for a country as a whole. We really didn't have sectoral planning programmes but we had programmes with certain major goals of providing basic services for children and we strengthened very much the inter-sectoral relationships which were concerned with the needs of the total child. It wasn't just a question of health. After we finished with the health, we had to look into the education, the we had to look

into the needs of social services where the family of the child needed additional support to really bring that child up in a healthy and developmental context, and then looking into the child's future.

Pre-school child

And, of course, we also emphasized, very much at the time, the initial needs in the early pre-school period, particularly the field of nutrition. You recall Scrimshaw and others were coming with some yet inconclusive but important information that if you didn't do anything to a child when he was in his very very tender age, that he was lost completely for development and that, therefore, you had to really concentrate on the pre-school years that were the most formative and most tender years. And, programmes started going into that direction and I think that really was a major development.

Iwaskiewicz

The issue finally was absorbed in the organisation, and there people who contributed very much. After Sicault we had Edward Iwaskiewicz who took over. He was a planner, a man who had great experience, as you know, in Poland in the national planning board, and who really had a tremendous sensitivity for the human resource factor, being himself exposed during the Second World War to the particular problems which the population in Poland had been subjected and having had himself to plan very carefully with limited resources that they have, and really aiming at these vulnerable groups.

At that time, you remember, we coined that "vulnerable group" phrase, which was very important. It was really the children at particular times in particular areas who were most vulnerable, and that's where we should address our systems. I think he was extremely important in our work because he really had a development planner's economist mind. He, as you remember, was also very supportive of all these conferences and he was also a great diplomat. He knew how to sell some of these ideas persistently and how to move into the economic commissions and initiate some of these activities, and how to start supporting some research in the many parts of the world -- in Asia and Africa, Latin America, the Middle East. I think he made a tremendous contribution and impact to really diffuse these ideas and to disseminate them.

Labouisse

When Mr. Labouisse came -- I still remember -- he called me to his office one day and he said, "Look, why don't you explain me (you know his style, very frank, very straight) in plain English, what does this planning mean? What is it all about, because I really cannot make head or tail out of this thing. I really cannot understand how this can contribute to our work." And, I don't think that I convinced him at that point but I

gave him good arguments, but he still wasn't convinced. But he certainly, I think, understood the practice of it and that really was an important ingredient - that planning didn't mean talk about children in political and policy terms. It meant that you really set the basis in which progress for children could be more rational and based on hard data. I think he understood it very well finally and he was very supportive.

Now, it really moved from a group of people who were selling an idea and tried to propagate these ideas to institutes and -- even in the U.N. we had very strong debates and finally we managed to convince the Division of Social Development at that time, the Social Commission, etc., etc., that this was a line that was here to stay.

Planning staff in the field

The structure at Headquarters then was dismantled and we strengthened the regional offices and the country offices with planning staff. But it was again a group of people, supposed to have a good experience in this field who were helping their colleagues to bring in this perspective. Initially it took a little bit too much of attending meetings and seminars and preparing papers and there was no clear reflection of this in the UNICEF activities per se. This was in the early seventies.

Planning in India

Since I had been talking and preaching about planning so much I was asked why didn't I go to the field. I was given the opportunity either to go to the Bangkok Regional Office or India and, as you know, I selected India. And, I had the opportunity, for five and half years, to translate some of these ideas into action. I think the first time that we put together five years submission, which you know at that time was astronomical figure. Our country programme was \$67M. We did that based on time frame, a position paper, a systematic analysis of all the different options on different sections looking at the different age groups, etc.

Planning becomes part of Programming

Then, the next phase was, alright, this is something that every programme officer should do and that planning functions should be planning in the context of programming. And I think this is the phase in which we are now. Every programme officer has this function and, of course, in the Regional Offices we still have regional planning officers who are very concerned with the situation analysis, with the statistical work and providing an input on specialized aspects of programming/planning. There is no doubt in everybody's mind these days that when you're working in UNICEF you're working in the context of the countries of development plan. When I told this to Robert Davee when I came from Harvard in '62 -- "Look", I said, "one day every development plan will refer to the children

specifically". He laughed and said, "Well, you probably will not see this while you are in UNICEF". It took, I would say, probably 10 years, 12 years. But now it would be the other way around. First thing you do is look at the country development plan. This is basic ABC.

So, it's interesting from the time perspective that this was a cycle that took such a long time to really be accepted, but I would say, that it also coincided with a whole new generation of people who were joining UNICEF and who really came from strong academic backgrounds who were really very much aware of this, who were both comfortable in conceptualization and implementation and operation, and who were more amenable to accept this kind of work. So, it got to the point where they were in senior positions and realized that they could only operate with the assistance of these other more technocratic people. I think that is the stage in which we are in now. Maybe new ideas, as you know, are difficult to permeate but I think we now have in the organisation, the talent to really be able to discuss at the conceptual level, and the same way at the operation level.

UNICEF relations in planning with other agencies

Charnow: Well, this very interesting account of the evolution within UNICEF. Could you now discuss the same evolution from the standpoint of the way we either influenced the governments and the international agencies or the impact of others on us during the same period.

Soler-Sala: Well, I think we were responding and open to developments in this field. We had very close contact with a number of research groups and organisations. Sometimes we tend to forget this. We were very close to the Hague Institute of Social Studies which at that time was very innovative in that particular field, to the group of Francois Perroux in the Sorbonne, the International Children's Centre, with UNITAR, with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. We were very much involved in the work that they were doing and supporting some work that at that time was considered very innovative, which would now seem to be regular kind of work. We were very close with the Division of Social Development. In fact I was, for example, the resource person in the first three courses with Gloria Scott from Jamaica on social development. It was clear that those courses on social development did include a very strong component on children in development planning.

Annual senior staff seminars

Also, the ideas in UNICEF were picked up by the annual senior staff seminars that Dr. Stein organised, and we really were exposed to many of these institutes. We went from Yugoslavia to Holland, to Berlin, to Paris, and afterwards it moved to different field locations, which gave an opportunity to

brainstorm about these things. I think we were very responsive in the organisation to these new ideas and we were also in contact with different groups here including the faculties from Columbia and other Universities. And I think there was a great deal of exchange and receptivity of new ideas.

Developing UNICEF's own identity

It was at that time also that we developed an identity of our own. You remember, it started probably in the mid-sixties when we started moving away from having to have their approval of our plans of operations to having to have their concurrence. And we moved ahead in many fields in which they had not even considered and which they were not ready to move and on the basis of some study at a university or some new idea which we really wanted to further. You know, in many cases we were ahead of where the specialized agencies would have wanted us to go. I think that that was an extremely important factor in our role of new ideas and corporate development.

Unconventional UNICEF stance, role of material aid

Charnow:

You earlier mentioned Social Affairs and the way their ideas, which in the early days conceptually seemed somewhat in advance of us. Would you say that the problem was their impact on Social Affairs, and the specialized agencies to the extent that they thought about this, was limited because they did not have the material aid to bring with them, as we did. Would our advice, our advocacy have been as accepted unless we had been able to bring in some material resources?

Soler-Sala

We relied very much on their technical input until we realized that many of the ideas they had were rather conventional and that they really were not ready to move beyond what was established procedure. It was UNICEF's willingness to risk and to move ahead and to sponsor people in the Economic Commission from Latin America, people who would really move and look at the big issues and look at questions straight like poverty issues, which before had not really been addressed directly. We had country meetings, focused on the planning approach. We had one in connection with the Board session in Santiago. We had a seminar earlier on issues of poverty and we talked with Father Veckerman about ideas of marginality in Latin America - looking at the question of sheer poverty and those who were left out of the development process.

We were much more daring and willing to move ahead and it wasn't just a matter of assistance. It was a matter of risking some money, or investing or supporting those kind of ideas which were innovative and which were really different from the conventional. I think the UN, maybe because they were much more bound by the committees that they had to report to, were much more conventional than we were with our own consultants and our own technical assistance.

This was an important move. I still remember the big debate between Julia Henderson who was very supportive of UNICEF and Harry Labouisse where at one point she said, "Look people, you are now starting to provide technical assistance in areas which are our competence. And I remember there was an exchange of memos in which she said that this was not in accordance with the initial agreement. Harry Labouisse said, "Look, that's something we believe we have to do because of very valid reasons. You don't have the people, it takes you too long". I think that this was a very important position.

Charnow: But also, in addition, when you were working with the government and could go to a planning commission and say, "Look, UNICEF has an X amount of money to give for MCH or nutrition or some other thing with an emphasis on children, if you take account of that in your plan". Didn't we have something which other agencies did not have?

Soler-Sala: Well, had we been preaching without providing any support, it probably would have been a much more difficult task. But if you look at the foundations, for example, they were very successful many of them in providing and supporting innovative ideas with very little money.

I think it was the fact that we were supporting those things which were not conventional, which were totally new and therefore were in areas where you really needed to have encouragement with some support from UNICEF. But I've never been sure that it is because finally we came with 150 vehicles that we really managed to get the ideas through. I think the ideas were accepted in their own right. And I don't think we "bribed" anyone because most of the new ideas were not necessarily reflected immediately in vehicles or in supplies.

However, it is also true that if we initially wanted to do something which was not started, and we did provide the funds, there was a much greater willingness to really try it than if we would have said, "Look, you have to use your own budget and your own money". I think this was extremely important and I think many governments did certainly do this. They were really willing to let us try if they were convinced but they also knew that we had the money to help them do it.

20 January 1984

Soler-Sala experience as Regional Planning Officer

Charnow: This is a continuation of the interview now being held on January 19th. Victor, do you want to say a little bit about your experience as a planning officer in the field in India. Up till now we have been talking about it from the Headquarters point of view.

Soler-Sala: As I said yesterday, after so many years at Headquarters and almost four years in planning, I was given the opportunity to try to get things done instead of just suggesting that others should do it. I took the position of Regional Planning Officer in New Delhi. When I arrived there I found that most of the planning establishment which had been created, was dismantled and very, very little, was left. Even the files had disappeared and there was very little which was left of what had been done in terms of creating a planning approach in India, working with different organisations, etc., etc.

Building planning into the country programme

So the first thing I had to do is to try to build this planning into the India Country Programme. Initially, this took the form of looking for follow-up into a series of studies that were commissioned.

But then, as the submission for five years for India was being prepared, it was clear that, at that time Gordon Carter considered that planning had a very important role to play. In fact, we used to call the section there, Planning Research Evaluation and Monitoring, which in Hindi means love, so it was an interesting acronym.

We then started assessing what was going on in the country and what was worked on by foundations who were very prominent there, like the Ford Foundation, the Cultural Development Council, the World Education Group, and then, of course, all the Indian foundation groups: Gandhian Institute of Studies, so and so forth. We familiarized ourselves on who they were and where they were located and what kind of activities they were undertaking - the Council of Social Development, etc., etc.

So, we managed, in the country programme, first of all, to have a systematic approach. And I think its the first time that we used the word -- we prepared a position paper, including the basic parameters by which were going to prepare the country programme which referred to the UNICEF priorities at that time. And, not only this was to be reflected in terms of sectoral priorities but also in terms of regional differences.

I remember we prepared a plan for the tribal areas of the drought prone areas -- almost a map of poverty in India. We had a two-prong approach - one which was the sectoral, dealing with the specific sectoral needs and national programmes, and the other specific, on a regional basis. At that point there were not yet many offices as is the case now where every state has a large UNICEF office.

Research, evaluation, monitoring

But I think what is important is that we not only recognized that in addition to the action activities we had to have a component of research, evaluation and monitoring. At one point it was rather difficult to have this accepted by the donors who really could not understand why we have to go with large scale evaluations.

I remember we went into the water problem and we worked there with the Institute of Public Administration in New Delhi to develop a protocol for evaluation. Also, we were very much intent in having a child-centered child studies centre, an institute that would concentrate on assessing and studying everything relating to the child. This was welcomed by the Government and finally it became an institute of voluntary organisations which afterwards was really changed to child institute and voluntary organisations. What we were trying to do was to have sort of like a children's bureau but just for research study, observation and monitoring and everything that related to the child, again in a holistic way. It was called the Institute of Public Opinion, of all things, and we gathered together a number of NGOs.

Sponsoring innovative thinking

We also sponsored and suggested a number of people who were innovative thinkers and Prof.N.T.Nyack who was in the Indian Social Science Research Council started with a series of booklets called "Alternatives To"... alternatives to education and health and looking into non-conventional approaches leading to these and so on. We were looking at people ... in fact, they were invited like Ivan Illich, Prof. Faure. Those people gave lectures and really stimulated further thinking on looking at non-conventional approaches to deal with the massive problems that we thought a linear programming basis could never solve in India.

Programme Information Management System

Of course, when I was there, there were a number of crises, particularly the exodus of the then East Pakistan which became Bangladesh, when we had 10 million people coming to West Bengal, and certainly it was a tremendous operation. Again, an emergency operation. But again the elements of monitoring were included and we even initiated a system called a Programme Information Management System, PIMS. I think that all of this

really created and stimulated a great deal of thinking. And I was really very pleased when one of the old timers in UNICEF, Harry Lucker who really was a doer said, "You know at the beginning I really thought that this whole thing of planning was nonsense and now I realize how helpful it is". And he was very supportive and very convinced that it was very helpful to programming and very supportive of everything that had to do with the evaluation of the child and studies and so on.

Applied research

Charnow: If it had not been for UNICEF, and the encouragement and some of the financial support which we had given, would not the Indian Government have done the same amount of research evaluation and monitoring?

Soler-Sala: Well, as you know, India has tremendous human resources and institutes covering the whole continent. But what they really lacked was a focus in practical, applied research. And I think what we brought in was to say, "Look, lets look at one particular aspect and lets try to just not make a research to be published in the London School of Economics and the American Sociological Review, but lets do something that we're going to apply immediately in the field. For example, we did that research project on the function of literacy in Andra Pradesh and out of it came a tremendous amount of information in terms of who were the literate women who were taking this functional literacy programme and why was it a question of knowledge attitude and practices which afterwards were reflected very much in our programme.

We assessed programmes that had been going on for years in India like the famous child welfare programme. We had the School of Social Work of New Delhi which did the assessment and we found out that by and large, all the workers who had masters and PhDs were those who in the field were the most inefficient -- and that motivated mothers who really were trained in a short period of time were much more effective and were accepted by such a communities in the villages and they were able to be very efficient in their work.

India's receptivity to new ideas

So, I believe that a combination of ideas and thoughts were really very acceptable. One of the myths I was told on arriving in India was "they are really very closed, will not accept new ideas, they will really be very introverted even in terms of the bureacracies. On the contrary, I ended up being a member of committees by name and were accepted and invited and participated in very very many of the Government of India so-called, "close meetings". I think it was a matter of approach and of mutual respect and acceptance of new ideas. And, the desire of India of trying new things -- I mean a country whose community development programme, for example, had been a forerunner in the world and who almost gave up on

community development in the conventional way and it was trying to get into new approaches -- integrated rural development projects, etc., etc..

Handling sensitive programme issues - East Timor

Charnow: Well, Victor, this is all very useful. Can we jump now and ask you about one question. Using your experience in Indonesia in Timor as an example, and generalizing if we can from that - what can an agency like UNICEF do in the case of a country where there is a child population group that the Government may be less interested in. How can we work in a situation like that?

Soler-Sala: Well, in Indonesia, I wouldn't say that the Government was less interested in East Timor. In fact, the investments of the Government in East Timor were very very large after they annexed East Timor. But the question was, what to do? Again, it was the same thing. The first Vietnamese boat people arrived in the islands in the north of Indonesia and before the UNHCR moved in, we had already moved in and provided a water system and whatever was necessary in a developmental way. I think in that experience they were welcoming UNICEF practicality in getting things done in remote, very difficult areas.

My experience was that one cannot go without the political footwork that goes along with it. And I think that once you established your credibility - and people should understand that establishing one's credibility doesn't mean giving up one's ethical principles, the whole operation of UNICEF in East Timor was maintaining, always, a very clear-cut line of work and we stood on certain things. We were seen as being very fair and not trying to portray negatively everything that the Government was doing.

Using facts to prevent malnutrition

One of the days of great satisfaction in my professional life, was having established growth monitoring systems in two remote areas. We detected through that system that it was a drop on child weight areas, the death of a child was attributed to severe malnutrition. Immediately we sent a team to investigate and we confirmed it and I quickly made representations to the Government requesting that immediate action had to be taken or possibly a famine could occur. And I got a telephone call from the ICRC representative who said, "Do you realize that this has really probably saved many children's lives because of the fact that you faced them with these facts". Now, I reiterate the word "facts". Before we had only to talk about heresay and impressionistic observations.

And I think that the moment that we can combine facts based on realistic assessments in the field and monitoring, plus a -- I don't know -- the word is brave but -- an open approach to

presenting this to the Government, I think we can do our duty. And I think in Indonesia, we have that opportunity.

Charnow:

Well, Victor, I hope we'll have a chance for more sessions. I appreciate your taking the time out while under great pressure to give us the time you did. I hope you have a successful tour of duty and a very enriched one in the Middle East. We'll be talking again. Thank you very much. -

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