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REPORT ON THE ECLA/TAA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING PROGRAMME

1. Origin and Purpose of the Programme

The Programme originated in resolution 4 (IV) (document E/2021) of the fourth session of the Commission, held at Mexico City in June 1951. Member Governments at that time recognized the common need of all the Latin American countries to carry out fundamental research and to train Latin American economists in the field of economic development. The delegates laid special emphasis on the need of governments to formulate over-all, clearly-defined economic development programmes, and on the shortage of economists in the region with the necessary training to draw up and implement such programmes. The Commission, aware that research plays an essential part in professional training, recommended that training facilities should be provided within the secretariat as a functional part of its research and practical activities.

The Programme was established in order to provide opportunities for training under the above stated conditions for twelve to fourteen Latin American economists and engineers. The trainees spend eight months, from April to December in Santiago, working with the secretariat and under the supervision and personal guidance of the economist who is Chief of the Programme.

Work on economic development calls for specialists in programming, statistics, fiscal policy, foreign trade, the assessment of natural resources, agriculture, industry and transport, as well as many other specialities. Since it is not possible to cover such a wide range of topics in a limited programme, it was decided to concentrate the work of the Programme in the field where the shortage of personnel is greatest and the need most urgent: that is, to the training of economists who will be able to have an over-all view of the problems of their countries and to integrate the recommendations of different specialists into realistic economic development programmes. This is at present the specific aim of the Programme.

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2. Nature of the Programme

With the main objectives of the Programme in mind, a syllabus was drawn up to meet the requirements of Latin American economists who are actively participating in finding practical solutions to the problems of the region, as well as those who, with a leaning towards research, can make original contributions to investigating and interpreting these problems.

The introductory part of the syllabus includes basic statistical techniques, in particular those relating to national income accounting, wealth accounting, inter-industry transactions and accountancy relating to sources and uses of investment funds. It goes on to an analysis of the techniques of programming economic development, including such topics as global programming and programming by sectors, projections, priority criteria and the preparation, evaluation and presentation of investment projects.

Training in statistical and programming techniques is complemented with the study of economic policy and organization for development programming, analyses of factors which foster over-all development and an examination of the historical experience of different countries.

Training in these subjects is carried out by means of a selected intensive reading programme, by lectures and round table discussions and by practical research work. The reading of economic theory and the lectures and round tables discussions, provide the theoretical background which is necessary for an interpretation of the special problems being studied by the participants and ensures a thorough knowledge of statistical tools. The selected reading matter covers all the points contained in the syllabus and includes works on research which have not yet been made public.

The lectures are of two kinds: those dealing with general and those dealing with specialized subjects. General lectures on the theory of development are given by the Chief of the Programme. Special lectures, devoted to the presentation of specific subjects, are given by technical specialists, most of whom are on the staff of ECLA. Round table discussions give the participants an opportunity to bring up and examine problems arising out of their reading programme, lectures and practical research.

/Each participant

Each participant spends approximately half his time applying development programming methods to the specific case of his own country. Year by year the work of the participants has been more closely integrated with that of the ECLA Economic Development Division, under whose guidance the trainees are taught to apply their academic training in practice.

During the eight months which the participants spend in Santiago they receive about 1400 hours of effective training, out of which 700 are spent on research, about 190 on round table discussions, 60 on lectures and the remainder on reading.

Shortly before the termination of the Programme the trainees sit for an examination on the subject matter covered during the period. This test shows up any weakness and gives an opportunity to strengthen them. During this final period the participants visit industrial installations, hydro-electric plants and other development projects. The following year the two best participants in each course are sent to complete their studies at first class universities and at programming centres in the Northern European countries.

3. Results of the Programme

The Programme will this year complete its fourth year of operation, having been initiated in 1952. During this period 43 economists and engineers from the Latin American countries and two from the Middle East (Egypt and Iran) have received and are receiving training. Fifteen out of the twenty Latin American Republics now have one or more officials who have been trained under the Programme.

Out of the thirty-six Latin American graduates, twenty-nine have returned to their respective countries, three are at present carrying out post-graduate studies at North American and British universities, one has not returned and three have been contracted by international organizations.

Those that have returned have received expressions of confidence in their knowledge acquired through the Programme, which is evident in the fact that more than two thirds of the participants have on their

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return been granted posts of a higher official category and greater responsibility, and some of those who have remained in the same category nevertheless carry out more important duties than they did previously. In two thirds of the cases, promotion has been directly due to participation in the Training Programme.

Ex-participants have collaborated in varied and important tasks. In one country a development plan relating to agriculture and transport was undertaken under the direction of one ex-participant, with the collaboration of two others. In another country ex-trainees have taken an active part in the preparation of a hydro-electric development plan. In four countries graduates from the Programme have participated in the drafting of laws to create planning bodies or have collaborated in their organization. One ex-participant was instrumental in drawing up a plan for basic statistical research in his country, which is serving as an incentive to this type of study. Another, is assisting his country in preparing a plan for basic technological research directed towards economic development. Graduates from the Programme have also participated effectively in the fields of price policy and agricultural taxation and in work relating to financing and the channelling of investments, in trade and tariff policy, in the drafting of legislation affecting development and in a number of other activities.

All the ex-participants have expressed their view that the training received and the experience in the solution to problems acquired through the Training Programme have been very useful and have enabled them to offer realistic solutions favourable to economic development in their respective countries. In response to a query as to the ways in which their participation in the Programme has helped them to discharge their professional duties, the majority of the ex-trainees have stressed the fact that the broad view of problems acquired at ECLA, the new criteria for evaluating them and the working tools with which they became familiar, are the factors which have been of the greatest practical assistance.

However, the efforts of the ex-participants have extended beyond the relatively narrow field of their official functions. Nearly all of them have endeavoured to pass on and disseminate the knowledge, techniques and

/viewpoints acquired

viewpoints acquired through the lecture-room, press articles and specialized publications and to direct instruction to their subordinates. At the present time about one third of the ex-participants are teaching at some university college, and an article written by one of them has been adopted as a subject for reading by two international training programmes and a university. Through their initiative economic reviews have been founded in two countries and a professional economists' association in another.

Notwithstanding the fact that the work carried out by ex-participants has up to the present been satisfactory and fully warrants the efforts made, it must be acknowledged that full use is not being made of their knowledge and working capacity. Of all the graduates from the Programme one quarter are of the opinion that they are working to the maximum of their capacity, but about two thirds state that full advantage is not being taken of their training, while a few feel that no use whatever is being made of them. Most of those who believe that only partial advantage is being taken of their ability attribute this fact to the lack of government bodies or agencies whose purpose it is to co-ordinate economic policy, as well as to the absence of any group of specialists in development problems who would make possible the team work necessary to this end. They also speak of the lack of understanding of their immediate supervisors with regard to the nature of development problems and programming and the lack of salary incentives, which would enable them to devote their full time to the work for which they have been trained. These obstacles are worthy of mention because their discussion may serve to suggest ways in which the participating countries and the bodies which sponsor the Training Programme can benefit more fully from one of the scarcest resources in the region.

4. Prospects and Problems

The Programme has in the period since its inception come to be regarded as a valuable contribution to the economic development of Latin America and its usefulness has been recognized by those who have had direct contact with it.

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It has been endeavoured to improve, year by year, the training which is being offered. In accordance with experience gained, the time spent on the reading of economic theory has been reduced and more time has been devoted to lectures. A greater number of hours is spent on discussion; the reading list is being improved continually and, as mentioned above, the research work of the participantes is being integrated increasingly with that of the Economic Development Division and of the ECLA secretariat in general. The opinion of post graduates has been sought in connexion with possible improvements to the Programme. Their suggestions have concurred in the need for greater integration with the work of the secretariat, reduction of the reading load, more lectures and extending the programme to ten or twelve months.

Efforts to achieve greater efficiency are also being made through other channels. One of the biggest difficulties lies in the lack of literature on theoretical and practical problems of development. In order to meet this deficiency ECLA and TAA are preparing a Manual on the preparation, evaluation and presentation of investment projects. This Manual will not only be useful for teaching within the Programme, but will also be of service to technicians everywhere who are working on problems of economic development. Reading material on the theory of development is also being compiled and some of the work done by the participants themselves on problems of the technique of programming has been reproduced.

Every effort has been made to improve the Programme along the lines in which it was originally conceived. However, experience has shown that additional training facilities are required which cannot be provided for in the present Programme, the value of which is largely dependent on the practical experience in the field of research provided by the regular work of the Secretariat. The nature of ECLA's work programme will not allow for the training of more than fifteen to twenty participants at most each year, which is insufficient to meet Latin America's need for economists specializing in economic development.

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The present Programme must be maintained for training of top-ranking economists. A means should now be found also to provide training for a larger number of professional economists - even if these do not achieve such a high level of training - whose role would be to constitute teams to collaborate with the nucleus of highly trained specialists. It has been thought that this problem might be solved by means of intensive training programmes to be carried out in a specific country for a period not exceeding three months. The first such programme will be carried out in Bogota, Colombia, from September to December this year. If it is successful, such courses may be adopted as a permanent feature of the Training Programme and could be repeated regularly in the different Latin American countries. The United Nations hopes in this way to fulfil more efficiently the mandate of resolution 4 of the fourth session of ECLA.