

ARTICLES

The Colombo Plan with Special Reference to Ceylon's Food

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THE COLOMBO PLAN is the sum of the development plans of the countries of South and South-East Asia. It has always been clear that these are national plans and the effort that would go into implementing them would largely be national effort, but the statesmen who gathered in 1950 to consider economic development saw that the citizens of a country are likely to be stimulated by the sense that other countries are interested in their progress, and that there were possibilities of useful interchange of technical assistance and capital aid. In the past six years substantial benefits have been realized, and the Colombo Plan has become a symbol of co-operation among free peoples. Not only is the Plan as a whole worked out by individual countries, but the co-operation which is an important part of it is negotiated in every instance between a requesting country and a donor country.

It is a happy feature of the Plan that many of the countries of the area are both donor and receiving. Ceylon, for example, is providing training for Burmese and Malaysians in the organization and administration of co-operatives. Village workshops for the production of brick and tile in Ceylon are being organized by an expert from India. India again is providing a superintending irrigation engineer for the Gal Oya

multi-purpose project. Ceylon is training Asians in engineering technology at the Gal Oya Technical Training Institute, and a group of Vietnamese local health personnel in a project supported by the United States. However, since the partners outside Asia have the largest available accumulation of skill and capital, the greater part of the Colombo Plan assistance to countries of the area still comes from the west.

Under the Technical Co-operation Scheme of the Colombo Plan places are provided for trainees from the area, and experts and equipment are sent to the countries of the area. With sound choice of the fields of activity, skilful selection of trainees and of experts, and provision of the conditions necessary for the effective work of experts and ex-trainees, the Scheme means much for development.

There are at the moment in Ceylon 68 experts brought out under the Scheme, of whom 31 come from Canada, 16 from Australia, 9 from the United Kingdom and 7 from New Zealand. The ideal project is of a self-liquidating character, in the sense that Ceylonese carry on after the foreign expert has left, rather than in the sense that the project terminates. Thus the fisheries biologist who has come to Ceylon under Colombo Plan does not find the places where the fish are, and their habits, and set these

results down for all later generations of fishermen. He rather develops a method of investigation, obtains some preliminary results, and trains a Ceylonese to continue the work—perhaps to do it better. To help raise the level of skill of Ceylonese, and so facilitate their independent work in the future, is the object of all technical assistance projects going forward here.

Through its agriculture, Ceylon has achieved just about the highest standard of living in Asia. National income per capita is not an accurate measure of this because it is biased towards market production as against direct production for subsistence, but it provides a rough indication. Ceylon's average in 1953 was Rs. 540 against India's Rs. 285. It might be argued that it is sufficient to hold this high level, and that further development effort is unnecessary, but for several reasons it is impossible to take this view. The most obvious is that democracy and nationalism in Ceylon are associated with aspirations not satisfied by present income. Secondly, an economy based on the export of tea, rubber and coconuts is subject to much fluctuation, and diversification is a means of defence against undesirable repercussions of outside market changes. Thirdly, because of technological change the products and methods developed in one era may not serve in another. In rubber, for instance, synthetic is a new market factor that must be faced. Even if synthetic is disregarded on the ground that natural has stood up well and world sales in 1954 were 70% greater than 1937-39, the competition of natural from other countries demands increased efficiency in Ceylon. Fourthly, population is growing rapidly, and an increase

in food production is required if people are to eat as well as they have. More than 300,000 births are each year balanced against less than 100,000 deaths, so that natural increase is over 200,000 or 2½% of the population. Official figures for national income in 1951 are Rs. 4,619 million and in 1954 Rs. 4,772 million. The apparent increase, however, compares with a growth of population from 7,742,000 in 1951 to 8,385,000 in 1954.

There are features of agricultural practice in Ceylon as elsewhere which have been described as inefficient and indeed irrational. I prefer to think of some at least of the practices as rational enough, but aimed at short-run objectives. Thus the individual peasant regards his coconut trees as permanent and the benefits of replanting as distant. The individual may adopt short-run objectives but the nation cannot afford them; replacement of old trees by younger ones is essential for effective competition in world markets. It is in this weighing of long-term consequences that the outside expert can be useful, if he combines an intuition of market prospects with knowledge of the local techniques and conditions of production. He can even help in implementation by suggesting a change in the conditions which frame the calculations of the individual peasant so as to align these calculations with the long-term interests of the nation. In the replanting problem two of the theoretical possibilities are taxes on old trees or subsidies on new ones; Ceylon has for some time maintained a subsidy in the form of sales of seedlings below cost.

However, the task is only partly one of changing the framework in which the farmer makes his decisions; it is partly a matter of educating him to his own

interest within the existing framework. This means agricultural extension work on a large scale. Foreign experts cannot conduct such work themselves—because they are few and do not speak the language if for no other reasons. But they can train Ceylonese extension workers along lines that have been successful both here and abroad, and this is an important part of technical assistance. A lecturer in botany, a professor of agriculture and an adviser on agricultural education have all worked in Ceylon under the Colombo Plan Technical Assistance Scheme.

Colombo Plan technical assistance in the field of agriculture has included support for mechanization. Tractors have been used in the opening up of new lands and Ceylon's methods of forest clearing are a model for the region. Experts have included managers for tractor stations in which equipment is maintained as well as a man working on the mechanization of tea cultivation. A Commissioner on Alienation of Crown Land has been helping on legal problems involved in adding to the land in use for food production. An expert in soil conservation has dealt with problems of productivity of existing soils. Attention to livestock includes provision of an adviser on veterinary science and a sheep-raising expert. Specialized crops on which outside technicians have worked are silk, rice, citrus and honey.

Ceylonese have been given training abroad in all of the fields mentioned above as well as in tobacco, rubber research and poultry. Equipment was provided in support of tea and rubber research, and a poultry unit, threshers, and hatching eggs have also been contributed.

The assistance described above has been given under the Technical Co-operation Scheme. In addition a very substantial amount of capital aid has been contributed by Ceylon's Colombo Plan partners. At an early stage there was agreement that support of food production was probably the most useful form which this outside aid might take.

The United States has very recently entered into agreements to contribute to agricultural extension, research and education. This will include advisers on methods and techniques for extension work, advisers on training curricula for extension workers and research to back-stop extension. A second major project is irrigation and land development in the Dry Zone. The U. S. is to furnish earth-moving equipment and maintenance and operation specialists for this equipment. It will also provide equipment for a maintenance shop.

In the Dry Zone, control of malaria has greatly increased Ceylon's potential food supply. Cultivation was made possible in ancient times by an elaborate system of tanks which provided a perennial supply of water. Australia has been associated with the scheme to restore three tanks at Padawiya, Pavatukulam and Vavunikulam which will open up a total of 24,500 acres for rice cultivation. Australia contributed 200 tractors to help in the mechanization of agriculture and so increase food production.

Apart from developing land by major and minor irrigation projects, Ceylon has introduced four schemes to assess the possibilities of dry farming on unirrigable land in the Dry Zone.

New Zealand made a grant for buildings and equipment towards the dry farming research station at Maha Illupalama. Nearly all the equipment has arrived on the site and construction is well advanced. The United Kingdom is training one of the engineers engaged on the design and development of animal-drawn implements for highland cultivation.

Canada has made a gift of flour whose sale has generated counterpart funds for local construction costs of rural roads and of a building for the Faculty of Agriculture. She has presented a refrigeration and by-products plant at Mutwal, a trawler, and a fisheries harbour, as well as pest control and sprinkler and lift irrigation units, and veterinary vans.