

EDITORIAL

Technical Assistance in Agriculture

THE YEARS since the last World War have seen a remarkable development in the field of technical assistance to under-developed countries of the world. This was due to a realization by international groups working for the amelioration of economic conditions that the great disparity of levels of economic development existing between different parts of the world necessitated the provision of such assistance, if the standard of living in these under-developed countries was to be raised even to the minimum which modern social concepts demand.

Accordingly, the United Nations through its Economic and Social Council and the specialized agencies working along with it, resolved in 1949 to provide this necessary assistance in various ways such as by arranging for teams of international experts to visit under-developed countries whose governments requested advice on economic development, awarding fellowships for training experts of such countries abroad, assisting governments to obtain technical personnel, equipment and supplies, etc. In order to make these objectives possible, funds were made available both by the United Nations and the specialized agencies and a programme of expanded technical assistance was started which enabled any under-developed country, at its own request, to obtain assistance within the scope of its provisions. The governments of the latter countries had, on their part, certain obligations to fulfil, but these were only such as would permit of the fullest use being made of the assistance provided. Among the specialized agencies which have contributed their share of technical assistance to these under-developed countries are the Food and Agricultural Organization (F. A. O.), the World Health Organization (W. H. O.), and the International Labour Organization (I. L. O.).

Since 1950 Ceylon has had the benefit of the services of a number of experts from F. A. O. They have been concerned with various aspects of food production, agricultural extension and animal husbandry. Up to date we have had 32 specialists comprising agronomists for dry farming and sugarcane, agricultural engineers, a statistician, agricultural extension experts, plant pathologists, food and rice-processing experts, plant and equipment specialists, forestry advisers, animal husbandry and poultry experts, veterinarians, etc. These experts have been of different nationalities and have remained in the country from six months to two years generally, but in a few exceptional cases their services have been retained for over five years in view of the valuable work they have been rendering during their assignments. Ceylon has also benefited by fellowships which have been awarded by this agency to officers especially selected for the training required.

F. A. O. has also, in accordance with its declared policy, held a number of seminars and training centres in various parts of South-East Asia on subjects of importance to the region, e.g., paddy breeding, soil fertility with special reference to paddy soils, and representatives from Ceylon have attended these. The agency also acts as a clearing-house of technical information on matters connected with food and agriculture.

It is interesting to indicate here that over 5,000 experts have been provided by U. N. O. and the specialized agencies since the programme of technical assistance was started in 1950, and over 8,000 fellowships have been awarded during the period. Though Ceylon has been, for the greater part, a beneficiary under this scheme it has also in a small way contributed its share towards supplying specialists in certain fields of activity. A few of our doctors have gone out to make their contribution in less-developed parts of the world, particularly in preventive medicine, and in agriculture, it is gratifying to note that apart from assistance rendered at various seminars and training centres by two of our specialists, Ceylon has supplied a veterinarian and a leader of an agricultural mission to more under-developed countries. So much for technical assistance under F. A. O. and its related agencies.

To turn now to another organization which has as one of its main objectives the provision of technical aid in various forms to countries in South and South-East Asia for the promotion of their economic development. This organization, initiated in 1950, is known as the Colombo Plan for the Co-operative Economic Development of South and South-East Asia. The object of the Colombo Plan is to supply this technical aid to these countries where 'living standards are distressingly low and poverty, disease and ignorance constitute a challenge to human conscience, let alone world peace and economic progress'. For the purpose of achieving its objectives the Colombo Plan countries have set up a Council for Technical Co-operation with its headquarters in Colombo. As in the case of the United Nations agencies, experts are made available to the countries of the region and technicians trained in countries where such training can best be provided. In addition, aid is provided either in cash or kind for the economic development of the region.

It is interesting to note that during the five years of the existence of the Colombo Plan Technical Co-operation Scheme nearly 1,500 experts have been provided to Asian countries participating in the plan and over 5,000 men and women of the region have been trained in one speciality or another. The major contributory countries are the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America. Recently, Japan has been added to this list. Ceylon has every reason to be thankful to the Colombo Plan Technical Co-operation scheme for the considerable assistance which has been rendered to it by the various participating countries. The article in the current issue of this Journal by Dr. N. Keyfitz, Director of the Colombo Plan Bureau for Technical Co-operation, admirably

outlines the scope and operation of the scheme in respect of technical aid to Ceylon. Australia has recently capped its numerous benefactions under the Colombo Plan by the grant of a sum of £150,000 towards the establishment of a Research Institute for the promotion of agricultural research in the Island, with particular reference to paddy research. This is in keeping with the generous donation of £500,000 by the New Zealand Government towards the establishment of a Dry Zone Research Station at Maha Illupalam. Canada has also added to its numerous contributions under the Plan by providing for the construction and equipping of up-to-date laboratories for the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Ceylon.

The last and the most recent of the major technical aid agencies which are collaborating in the economic development of the Island is the International Co-operation Administration of the U. S. A. (I. C. A.). By an agreement entered into with the Ceylon Government, this country agreed to provide aid in various fields of economic development to the sum of five million dollars for the 1956 fiscal year. The provision for land development amounted to over a third of this appropriation, but agricultural extension, research and education also received a share commensurate with their needs. The aid under this programme will be utilized in three ways, namely, for the supply of technical personnel in specialized fields of work, the training of local technicians, and the supply of stores and equipment essential for defined objectives. Part of the provision under foreign training and observation will be utilized for sending a high-level team of Ceylonese agricultural and educational officers to the U. S. A. and other countries to study the integrated facilities of agricultural extension, research and education available there. It is anticipated that aid under the I. C. A. scheme will be given in fuller measure in succeeding years.

Before concluding this survey of technical aid to Ceylon under the various agencies, reference may be made to the Rockefeller Foundation which, for several years, has assisted not only under-developed countries but also advanced countries in training personnel in specialities for which there are no facilities locally and in other ways. Recently Ceylon has benefited by a donation of essential physico-chemical equipment from this source.

It will be observed from the foregoing paragraphs that countries like Ceylon are indeed fortunate in that, through the agency of these technical aid schemes for economic development, they can promote within their boundaries fields of activity which hitherto have remained potentially unproductive. But it is incumbent on the recipient countries to take full advantage of the facilities offered under these schemes by the provision of understudies to the foreign experts assigned to a country, by giving full and prompt consideration to the technical advice they receive, by undertaking the sustained effort required for economic development, and by providing the necessary financial support to the projects initiated at their request.

Ceylon has indeed much reason to be grateful to these technical agencies and participating countries for the generous contributions made by them to "ensure the attainment of a higher level of economic and social welfare for its population". And as this Department has received a fair share of the benefits conferred by them, it is only fitting that the *Tropical Agriculturist*, its official journal, should express its warm appreciation of the practical co-operation which they have extended in such large measure to the solution of the agricultural problems of the Island.