

THE PROBLEMS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ARRANGEMENTS**DR. SIMEON O. IHEMADU****DIRECTOR****REGIONAL CENTRE FOR TRAINING IN AERIAL SURVEYS****NIGERIA.****COMMISSION VI****ABSTRACT**

Most developing countries depend to a large extent on technical assistance for their national development. However, the failure rate of Technical Assistance Arrangements has become increasingly, indeed alarmingly, high. On the basis of the analysis of various Technical Assistance Projects offered by BELGIUM, FR GERMANY, IDRC, INDIA, NETHERLANDS, SIDA, SWITZERLAND, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNRPTA, UNTFAD and USAID and involving both bilateral and multilateral arrangements, the paper attempts to recommend measures aimed at drastically reducing the highlighted failure rate.

INTRODUCTION

With the inestimable, but everincreasing, scientific and Technological progress, the gap between the industrialised and developing countries continues to widen. Already, technical assistance has become so vital for developing countries that some of them largely depend on it for their national development.

On the one hand, no country has more human, financial and material resources than it needs. Consequently, judicious use of these resources is highly advisable at all times. An assurance, if possible, that Technical Assistance Projects would be useful and successfull would understandably encourage Funding Agencies and Donor Organisations.

On the other hand, the failure rate of Technical Assistance Arrangements has become increasingly, indeed alarmingly, high. This motivated a study of various Bilateral Technical Assistance Projects being implemented under the supervision of the United Nations Ecpnomc Commission for Africa, together with Technical Assistance Arrangements involving some Educational Institutions.

This paper presents the major findings from these studies and the subsequent recommendations aimed at increasing effectiveness while drastically reducing failure rate of Technical Assistance Arrangements.

2.

DEFINITIONS

For avoidance of doubts, the underlisted expressions shall have the meanings hereunder assigned to them.

- (a) "Donor Organisation" shall mean any Government Establishment, Organisation or Institution, which donates any item (s) of equipment to Recipient Organisation (s).
- (b) "Executing Agency" shall mean a Body charged with the responsibility for executing any project under any Technical Assistance Arrangement (TAA).
- (c) "Funding Agency" shall mean any Government Establishment, Organisation or Institution, which acts as a Benefactor in any TAA.
- (d) "Recipient Organisation" shall mean any Government Establishment, Organisation or Institution, which is a Beneficiary of a TAA.

3.

ANALYSIS OF BILATERAL PROJECTS

3.1 Sectors Covered

A total of 155 projects implemented under bilateral assistance arrangements were studied by the author during the period 1982-1983. Ninety-three percent of these projects were under the agency of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The projects covered fifteen sectors, including Agriculture, Communications, Documentation and Information, Environmental hazards, Industry, Management, Manpower Development and Training, Natural Resources, Planning, Population Studies, Public Administration, Skill Research, Statistics, Trade and Transport. In addition, some of the projects concerned Consultancy, Social Development and Staff Secondment.

3.2 Funding Agencies and Donor Organisations

The major Funding Agencies and Donor Organisations for the projects studied include: Belgium, Canada, Commonwealth Fund, Federal Republic of Germany, IDRC, India, Royal Netherlands, Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Swiss Direction for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Food Programme for Africa (UNFPA), United Kingdom Directorate of Overseas Surveys, UNRPTA, United Nations Trust Fund for Africa Development (UNTFAD) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

3.3 Failure Rate

Based on the investigations carried out, the failure rate for Bilateral Projects as at the end of 1983 stood at 60%. This is, indeed, alarmingly high.

3.4 Factors Affecting Failure Rate

From a detailed analysis of the data available, the following factors have been identified as affecting the failure rate.

3.4.1 Supply of Experts

Most Funding Agencies insist on supplying the needed Experts. Where they fail, they agree to have local Experts. This causes considerable delay in project implementation, forcing the recruitment phase to lag behind schedule.

3.4.2 Progress Report

For several Funding Agencies, release of funds depends upon receipt of satisfactory progress reports on project implementation. Delay in release of funds tantamounts to temporary withdrawal and causes costing to be outdated generally increasing failure rate.

3.4.3 Formulation of Project Documents

The formulation of project documents is often found to be too study oriented, and less investment-oriented. As studies generally take a lot of time, project implementation is often so delayed as to warrant budget revision, thereby reducing chance of success.

3.4.4 Inputs from Recipient Organisations

In several cases, envisaged inputs from Recipient Organisations are not made in time. In some extreme cases, Recipient Organisations prove incapable of providing their quota of inputs, usually owing to dearth of required manpower. This is often misinterpreted as a tendency to avoid responsibilities. The resultant delay does not help the projects.

3.4.5 Payment of Handling Charges

It has become an accepted practice that 13% of project sum is paid to the Supervisory Agency as handling charges. However, where the Funding Agency directly recruits the Experts, there is generally an objection to this payment from the said Agency. A deadlock often arises in such cases.

3.4.6 Variation of Project Sum

In the process of implementation of some projects, some Funding Agencies may release less funds than earlier envisaged and agreed to. Having earlier formulated the project with higher funding in view, its implementation runs into serious financial difficulties as a result of reduced funding.

3.4.7 Annual Retirement of Funds

Some Funding Agencies call for retirements of unused funds at the end of each year. While awaiting the approval of new allocation of funds during the subsequent year, activities become paralysed.

3.4.8 Engagement of Multiple Executing Agencies

Occasionally, several Executing Agencies are engaged on a single project. These Agencies normally have different, at times conflicting, policies, which complicate, and often render impossible, the project implementation processes. For instance, where the Agency responsible for staff recruitment differs from the Agency supplying equipment, the wrong person for a given equipment may be recruited; or there may be lack of synchronisation in times of recruitment and acquisition of equipment.

3.5 The Training Sector

In view of its extreme importance in manpower development leading to an enhancement of executive capacity, the training sector deserves, and was given, special consideration

Considered under the headings: Secondment of Staff, grant of equipment and fellowships, the major factors affecting failure rates of Technical Assistance Arrangements involving training projects are as follows:

3.5.1 Secondment of Staff

- (i) Difficulties are generally experienced by seconded staff associated with inadequate knowledge of the local environment, particularly hampering ability to use local objects and phenomena for illustrations and demonstrations.
- (ii) Problems of understanding may be experienced by students arising from limited knowledge by seconded staff of language of instruction at the Institution.
- (iii) General lack of adequate briefing on the background of the students prevents effective interaction.
- (iv) Climatic and environmental hazards affect the health and, consequently, effectiveness and efficiency of the seconded staff.
- (v) The seconded staff may exhibit split loyalty in attitude towards the Regulations of the Funding Agency and Recipient Organisations.

- (vi) Destabilisation of the service structure, particularly with regards to differentials in salary levels of normally recruited and seconded staff, may occur, causing dissatisfaction and unrest within the given Educational Institution.

3.5.2 Grant of Equipment

- (i) The capital-intensive nature of the grant usually limits the number and levels of sophistication of donated equipment.
- (ii) Unwieldy process of granting exemption from customs duties often constitutes a discouraging factor on the part of Donor Organisations.
- (iii) Where the equipment donated are not the newest brands, they may hardly serve for illustrating the latest technology in the given discipline.
- (iv) Donated equipment are not always accompanied with Operational Manuals and Structural Diagrams. Occasionally, such Manuals, where they exist, may be in unfamiliar languages.
- (v) Unfavourable climatic conditions often adversely affect the efficiency and duration of useful lives of donated equipment.

3.5.3 Fellowships

- (i) Bureaucratic processing of awards generally leads to undesirable delays in the administration of fellowships.
- (ii) The administration of several fellowships suffers from lack of precise guidelines.
- (iii) The requirement for Recipient Organisation to provide passage often frustrates awards.
- (iv) The engagement of Intermediate Agencies in the execution of awards often leads to administrative bottlenecks.
- (v) Wrong selection of award recipients generally increases examination failure rate.
- (vi) Inadequate organisation of the awards often frustrates achievement of the set objectives. For instance, recipients of staff training awards, on completion of their courses, may fail to take up teaching appointments.

3.6 Capital Investments on Bilateral Projects

Capital investments on Bilateral Projects are generally considerable. During the first half of 1983 the investments by Funding Agencies in 111 Bilateral Projects amounted to US \$ 23 million.

4. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON MULTINATIONAL PROJECTS

- 1) The projects are normally of high magnitude, reflecting the needs of several countries.
- 2) In view of the magnitude of the projects, they are invariably ambitious in cost.
- 3) The zeal from component countries to second local staff to common projects is usually below expectation.
- 4) Often, countries draw up national programmes alongside the multinational programmes.
- 5) Multinational programmes at times suffer from poor definition of priorities, often resulting from disagreements by recipient countries on order of priority.
- 6) Project submission is occasionally unsatisfactory, particularly in view of the usual requirement for multinational projects to be submitted on priority by at least two countries.
- 7) National Projects tend to attract more attention and financing than subregional and regional projects.
- 8) Individual recipient Governments often do not live up to their expressed commitments towards ensuring success of regional or subregional projects, particularly while still promoting their parallel national projects.
- 9) Difficulties of information gathering from the various countries of the region or subregion adversely affect and project study and success rate.

Illustrating with the experience so far on the implementation of the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa (*) currently under study by the author, the 45% of the target of the first phase executed during the first half of the Decade claimed US. \$ 9 billion.

NOTE:

* UN General Assembly Resolution 32/160 adopted at 32nd session.

Out of this, the cost of 17 transport projects alone amounted to U.S. \$ 3.2 billion. The second phase of the Decade (1984-88) envisaged 969 transport and communications projects at an estimated cost of U.S. \$ 24 billion. Thus, the programme of the Decade envisages an expenditure of U.S. \$ 33 billion. Assuming that the level of technical assistance for the first half of the Decade would be maintained, the total anticipated contribution from technical assistance would amount to about U.S. \$ 9 billion. Consequently, for the considered Decade multinational projects in the transport and communications sectors alone are both voluminous and costly.

5.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With a view to increasing effectiveness of Technical Assistance Projects and reducing their failures rate the following measures are recommended for consideration by the Parties involved.

5.1

Funding Agencies

Funding Agencies should:

- (a) be more willing to engage local Experts, merely insisting on satisfactory evidence of their ability to perform the required tasks;
- (b) consider a more liberal attitude towards release of funds, while indicating acceptable format for progress reports;
- (c) ensure that project formulation is made less study-oriented, and more investment-oriented;
- (d) always be faithful to the terms of project agreements, thereby guaranteeing the release of envisaged funds for full project implementation;
- (e) discontinue the practice of retiring unused sums budgeted for each year at the end of the said year, so as to avoid paralysing the implementation of project;
- (f) avoid engaging multiple Executing Agencies to ensure smooth implementations of projects;
- (g) ensure that seconded staff acquaint themselves with the cultural and educational systems in the country of duty-station, as well as relevant requirements (such as admission requirements of Educational Institutions to which they may be seconded).
- (h) ensure that only staff known to be proficient in the language (s) in use in a given place or Institution, may be seconded to such place/Institution;

- (i) realise the need to consider ability to withstand the prevailing climatic and environmental conditions of the geographical region concerned in selecting staff to be seconded to projects;
- (j) ensure that terms of staff secondment are made abundantly clear and are initially discussed and accepted by the Recipient Organisations so as to avoid issuing conflicting instructions to seconded staff;
- (k) effect, where applicable, remuneration of seconded staff confidentially, in order to avoid dissatisfaction and unrest within the Recipient Organisations;
- (l) in case of fellowship awards, process same a year in advance of time of study so as to avoid disappointments stemming from insufficiency of time; when possible, involve Educational Institutions with selection of candidates for fellowship awards, allow these Institutions to play the role of Intermediate Agency in order to shorten the administrative loop and maintain regular communication with them so as to be aware of changes in fees for, and durations of, available courses.

5.2 Donor Organisations

Donor Organisations should:

- (a) grant short-term maintenance service courses to some staff members of Recipient Organisations to ensure satisfactory maintenance of donated equipment;
- (b) endeavour to donate new items of equipments, thus enabling Recipient Organisations to apply latest technological progress while dispelling the widely-held view of tendency to use Recipient Organisations as dumping grounds for out-dated equipment;
- (c) ensure that donated equipment are accompanied with Operational and Schematic Manuals written in, at least, one of the most popular languages (English, French, German or Russian);

- (d) make Instrument manufacturers realise that equipment donation to Educational Institutions is an investment as the Students would normally later recommend their purchase after training.

5.3 Recipient Organisations

Recipient Organisations should:

- (a) always be ready to provide the necessary collateral inputs, such as passage for award recipients and staff attachment to projects so as to demonstrate commitment and ensure increased involvement;
- (b) follow appropriate guidelines issued by Funding Agencies;
- (c) render satisfactory accounts as and when necessary;
- (d) endeavour to store and exploit donated equipment under conducive atmospheric conditions;
- (e) strive to render satisfactory progress reports;
- (f) endeavour to create harmonious atmosphere for seconded staff.