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TRANSFER OF KNOW-HOW THROUGH EXPATRIATE NATIONALS

Summary and Conclusions
of an International Seminar,
sponsored by UNIDO-UNDP and
the Scientific and Technical Research
Council of Turkey

Istanbul, 1 - 6 June 1978

id. 78-5037

INTRODUCTION

1. The "braindrain" has adversely affected the economic development of many developing countries, particularly the gradually widening gap between the demand for, and the supply of, skills. The countries involved must each tackle this problem on a national level and among themselves through technical and economic co-operation on the formulation of policies.
2. The Seminar on the Transfer of Know-how by Expatriate Nationals (Istanbul, 1-6 June 1978) was organized by UNIDO in collaboration with the Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Council and the UNDP, in order to strengthen such co-operation. Participants from 20 different countries reviewed a pilot scheme for technical assistance through emigrant nationals which started in Turkey in late 1976, and they discussed various other schemes for utilizing the skills of expatriates. The Government of Turkey, in collaboration with the United Nations, established a project, "Re-Transfer of Technology to Turkey" (RTTT), to offer short-term technical assignments, in those sectors given priority in the National Development Plan, to specialists of Turkish origin, now residing abroad.
3. There are several approaches to the problem of the braindrain. Some developing countries have initiated programmes to use the technical capabilities of their expatriate professionals while others are attempting to reduce the out-flow and to secure the return of their non-resident talent. As opposed to the conventional approach of attempting to prevent the braindrain, the Turkish project, and similar projects elsewhere, provides a new approach by emphasizing the utilization of expatriate nationals.
4. The consultant is paid his travel costs and living expenses (an average of \$US 2,200 per month), with no regular United Nations fees involved. The benefits derived are far-reaching: apart from effecting direct savings in investment costs on a number of projects for which such consultancy is obtained, know-how is transferred on a continuing basis. Also, the scheme provides opportunities for the establishment of linkages, on a more permanent basis, between the institution of the expert and the host institution.
5. Thus, accepting the fact that many, and often the best, professionals from developing countries train abroad and remain there, the scheme provides an opportunity to draw upon their knowledge, at a relatively low cost, to tackle specific technological problems that arise in the socio-economic development of the country. The scheme thereby helps, in a modest way, to reverse the brain-drain.

6. The Turkish experiment has several innovative features that are key elements to its success. First, while experts from the industrialized countries often find it difficult to relate their specialized skills, designed for one culture, to the entirely different problems of another culture, the RPTT scheme uses the most favourable channel by transmitting know-how through an expatriate who, having succeeded abroad, is likely to be respected by colleagues in his homeland.

7. Second, there is a supply, rather than the usual demand, orientation. Traditional technical assistance establishes the needs of agencies, institutions and enterprises for technical advice and provides an individual with that expertise. The RPTT scheme starts with highly motivated, highly skilled individuals wishing to serve their homeland, then the administrative mechanism in the United Nations Field Office relates that supply to demand.

8. Third, the RPTT scheme expects highly skilled consultants to work for short periods without normal financial remuneration. By contrast, the multilateral and bilateral systems for technical assistance operate on the principle that remuneration should be higher, rather than lower, than normal. The satisfaction derived by the expatriate consultant in assisting his homeland and the welcome he receives on his arrival, prove to be sufficient remuneration and are a powerful motivating force.

9. Fourth, those concerned with technology policy now recognize that merely to transfer technology as is may not be in the interest of the receiving country, yet the technical assistance expert often takes pride in transmitting the technology he knows, irrespective of its appropriateness to the receiving culture. However, the expatriate consultant adapts the technology he has acquired abroad to the familiar conditions of his country of origin.

10. Fifth, through the operation of the scheme an ad hoc but most effective administrative system has been worked out that reduces the average time for providing a consultant from well over a year, with traditional technical assistance, to a few months. In no other way than through Field Office administration could 28 high-level consultants have come to Turkey within so short a period as 12 months.

11. Lastly, in securing candidates, United Nations sponsorship offers the advantage of a ready volunteering of services. There is no element either of Government coercion or of commitment of permanent return.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

12. The Seminar discussed with great interest a scheme, in operation in Turkey since late 1976, for the utilization of expatriate professionals through short-term assignments related to the development of the country. This scheme offers valuable experience and could be adapted to situations in other countries with similar problems.

13. The scheme consists primarily of a new device for the transfer of know-how by the mobilization of the skills of expatriate nationals, not only through brief assignments, but also through a continuous flow of know-how as a follow-up to the visits. It is, in effect, an added dimension of technical co-operation as well as a modest contribution to reducing the adverse effects of the brain-drain on the economies of the developing countries.

14. The Seminar provided an opportunity for a discussion of the problem of the braindrain and of various methods used or planned to combat this problem. It heard from participants of their experiences in the matter and agreed on the need for a variety of related approaches. These would aim not only at encouraging the return of non-resident skills, but also at creating conditions that would discourage the braindrain. A more rapid pace of development would best serve to create such conditions. Assistance provided through professional expatriates brought back on short- or long-term assignments, will accelerate the pace of development.

15. The participants of the Seminar considered that action was needed at many levels: by the developing countries individually and in co-operation with each other, by countries that benefitted from the migration of professionals (primarily developed countries but also some richer developing countries that were short of manpower), and by the United Nations. A plan of action, given below, was suggested.

Developing countries

16. Selected countries should take immediate steps to utilize the know-how of their professional expatriates for short technical assistance assignments through projects inspired, if appropriate, by the Turkish project. Such schemes should take into account the special conditions and requirements of each country.

17. Countries should also formulate programmes to bring back those abroad based on incentives and other measures such as those being successfully carried out in Brazil, India, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea. No plans were envisaged to stop the international movement of top scientists, doctors and others.

18. Measures should be taken to establish registers of professionals resident abroad. This would be a continuous activity carried out in co-operation with the country's representatives in the developed countries, professional associations, universities and other sources. Such registers were considered a desirable prerequisite for programmes to utilize the skills of expatriate nationals in the short-term and to induce their permanent return as required.

19. Meetings on the braindrain problem should be arranged in selected countries to include a variety of participants, such as representatives of countries benefitting most from the professional migrants, and regional and international organizations. The objectives would be to consider this mutual problem, to co-operate in formulating policies, and to attract international finance to help tackle the problem.

20. The developing countries themselves have to take steps to improve the conditions of work and the material and non-material rewards for their professionals, and to give them a proper environment to carry on responsible work.

21. While projects are being implemented for the short-term or long-term return of expatriate professionals, developing countries should examine a series of longer-term programmes designed to reduce the adverse effects of the brain-drain. These programmes include:

(a) Measures to make national educational and training systems more relevant to basic needs strategy, to the appropriate technology and to rural development;

(b) The relating of foreign education and training to clearly defined internal requirements;

(c) The comprehensive planning of manpower;

(d) The setting up of new universities and research and development institutes to attract experienced personnel.

22. A problem similar to the braindrain is the migration of talent within a developing country from backward regions to urban areas. Schemes of the RITT type may help to attract talented persons from industrialized cities to rural areas.

23. The Seminar took note of the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey's proposal to set up at Istanbul an international centre for advanced studies where outstanding research workers from the developing and developed countries could study problems of global concern in a multi-disciplinary setting.

24. Distinguished professionals from abroad could be invited to a conference in the home country, as is being done in Egypt, to advise on problems and study development within the country.

Developed, and those developing, countries hosting professionals from developing countries

25. Developed countries should recognize the tremendous gains to their economies owing to the contributions of professionals from the developing countries and they should co-operate with the developing countries in the attempt to reduce the braindrain.

26. Furthermore, the countries hosting expatriates are called upon to make financial commitments, when requested to do so, in support of national and regional programmes to minimize the adverse effects of the braindrain.

27. Developed countries should be urged to facilitate the release of expatriates for service in their country of origin.

Co-operation among developing countries

28. Regional workshops should be organized to share knowledge, gained through the operation of programmes such as the RTTT, and other practical measures to tackle the braindrain.

29. Consideration should be given to have migrant professionals from regional and subregional groupings of countries with similar conditions advise on technical problems in each other's countries, along the lines of the Turkish project. Subregional cultural links can be effectively taken advantage of in this way.

30. The achievement of Brazil in reducing and reversing the flow of its professionals is of particular interest, and could provide a useful example to other countries.

31. Also, the methods used in such countries as India and Peru to invite entrepreneurial talent plus capital for the country's development could be studied and applied.

32. New forms of regional institutions are required for development studies and training in order to develop requisite manpower for specific country requirements.

33. A major conference of interested countries should be called in 1981 or 1982 to consider in more depth operational experiences gained in tackling the problems of the international movement of talent.

United Nations

34. Further studies on this problem should be undertaken in order to compile information on costs-benefits to the developing and developed countries and to develop alternative strategies leading to recommendations.

35. UNIDO has a major role in such work as, in most countries, engineers and technologists constitute the bulk of these migrations thus retarding the process of industrialization. UNITAR, UNESCO, the ILO and others are engaged in major activities in their respective spheres of competence. UNCTAD is undertaking comprehensive schemes for promoting an exchange of skills among developing countries.

36. United Nations bodies are urged to make available appropriate funding and assistance, at Government request, for programmes to minimize the adverse effects of the braindrain. It is essential that the operations of such schemes should be decentralized and administrative responsibilities be given at the country level. United Nations status for returning professionals in schemes such as HPTT was considered important. Once such schemes have been established with United Nations assistance, they should continue to be implemented by national institutions.

37. The UNDP should serve as a focal point for mobilizing funds from various sources, bilateral or multilateral, and an appropriate share of funds from TCDC activities could be allotted to tackling the braindrain problem.

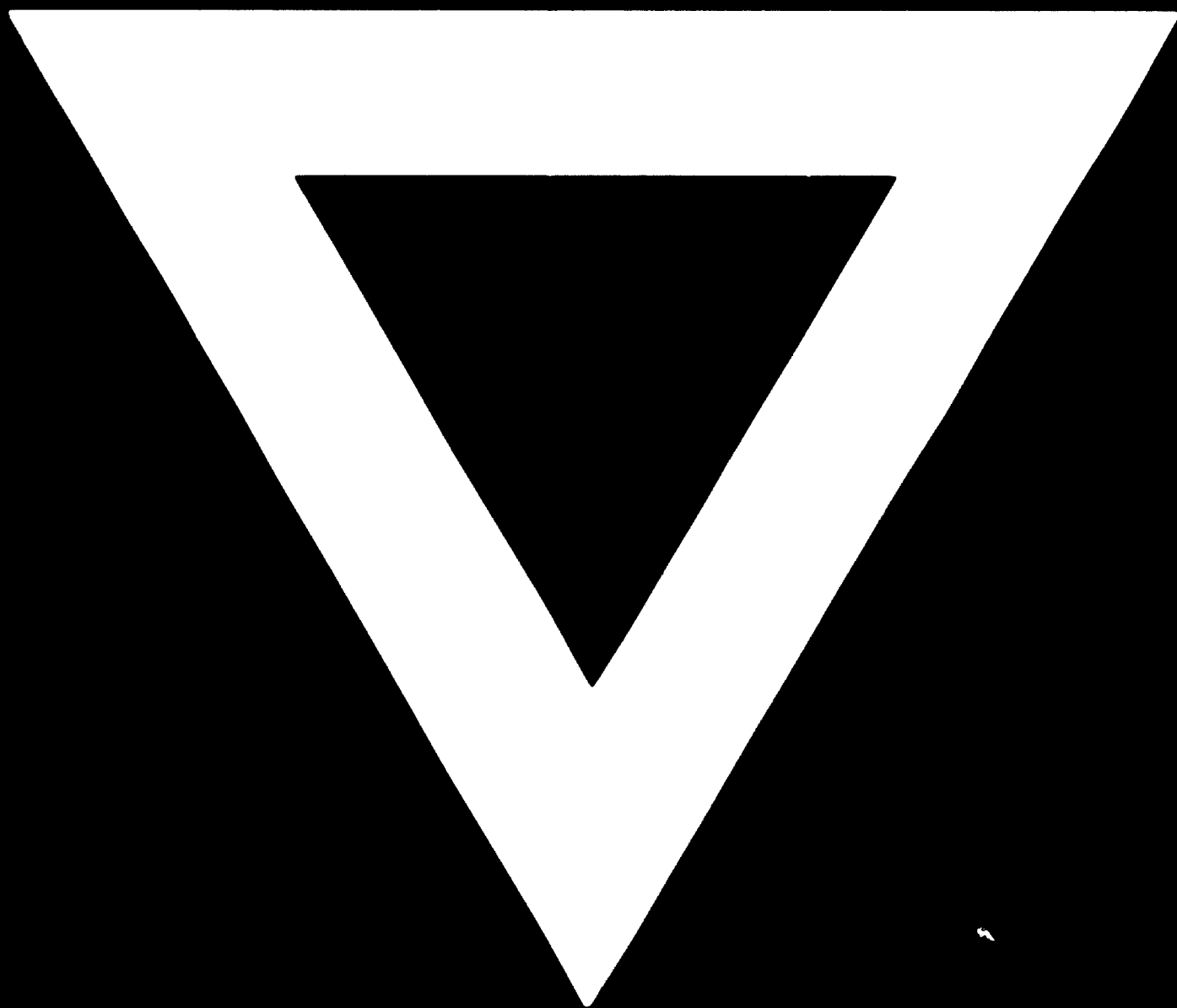
38. Although recognizing that the UNDP rules prohibit the recruitment of experts of the nationality of the country to which they are assigned, it was considered desirable that due weight be given to the considerable advantage of having experts with the cultural and language links that a successful expatriate has.

39. An inter-agency task force should be set up by the UNDP on the follow-up measures needed to tackle the braindrain problem. This task force, including UNIDO, UNCTAD, the ILO and other United Nations bodies, would be expected to propose co-ordinated action by the United Nations.

40. The Seminar proposed that the findings and suggestions summarized above be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Technical Co-operation Among Developing Countries, Argentina. It urged that a plan be adopted to help mitigate the adverse consequences of the migration of professionals from developing countries.



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