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THE TRAINING OF CLERICAL AND SECRETARIAL STAFF IN AFRICA
(prepared by the International Labour Office, Geneva)

THE TRAINING OF CLERICAL AND SECRETARIAL STAFF IN AFRICA

Current situation

In most developing countries the re-organization or establishment of an efficient public administration is hampered by the lack of qualified staff to carry out executive duties.

Harmonious improvement of the economy is impeded by this same obstacle to which, furthermore, is added that constituted by the application of modern techniques to the organization of office work.

In general, apart from some commercial schools offering courses of long duration clerical and secretarial staff is trained "on the job", and office organization is equally empirical.

Such a situation cannot but lead to qualitatively and quantitatively inadequate output, to a swelling of the number of employees and to a deterioration of the profession.

Steps to take

Reform of the training of clerical and secretarial staff has become essential. Some countries have understood this and have appealed to ILO for technical assistance in solving this problem by establishing facilities for the training of staff to be recruited, and the further training of those already employed, both by government departments and private firms.

Before these training facilities are established, and in order that they be developed in the best interests of the beneficiary countries, the labour market for clerical and secretarial workers should be carefully studied.

This can be done only with the complete collaboration of the public administration (Ministries of Labour and of Public Administration), chambers of commerce, employers' organizations and workers' unions.

Account must also be taken, to the extent that precise assessment is possible, of the mobility of clerical and secretarial staff between the public and private sectors. The greatest attention must also be paid to

the situation of the private sector, even if in some countries the first objective of a training project is to meet administrative needs.

Another point, i.e. examination of training facilities already existing in the country under consideration, must not be overlooked. The various programmes must be co-ordinated and harmonized with respect to both standard and content. New facilities can be developed only as a function of what exists. Here, therefore, it is in agreement with the authorities responsible for long duration instruction (Ministry of National Education) that one must build.

The choice of systems within a country's vocational training policy must be determined by the manner in which office work is organized, or has to be re-organized, and by the competence of the students or office staff to be trained.

Cultural and social aspects of the question

In addition to the objectives and results directly related to the manpower policy, the technical assistance facilities for the rapid training of clerical and secretarial staff make their special contribution to the cultural and social enhancement of the human resources of developing countries. By means of special educational and training programmes adapted to the scholastic standards of the candidates, these facilities make it possible to reclaim young and adult members of the national population who have not -- or have only barely -- progressed beyond the level of primary schooling. Without the contribution of additional general knowledge and of vocational training so designed as to enhance and make the best possible use of earlier scholastic attainments, the technical and cultural potentials of these persons would be lost both to themselves and to their country.

Categories of employees to be trained

Up to the present, and generally speaking, the following categories of office staff are in demand: clerks, typists, assistant-accountants, accountants, shorthand typists and secretaries.

The word "clerks" must be taken to mean subordinate employees performing everyday executive duties calling for neither personal initiative nor any specialized knowledge. This category of employee must be given a modest basis of knowledge necessary for their work, such as better understanding of the working language and of arithmetic, with some rudiments of work organization (filing, collating, telephone, for example).

For typists (copy typists), the emphasis will be on lay-out technique, speed of typing and improvement of the working language. Assistant-accountants and accountants will concentrate, apart from courses peculiar to the techniques of the profession, on arithmetic, while in the case of shorthand typists and secretaries special attention will be devoted to the working language, besides subjects peculiar to the profession.

ILO forms of assistance

Hitherto, ILO's assistance in training clerical and secretarial staff has generally taken the following forms, determined by the needs peculiar to the countries under consideration:

(a) Establishment of centres to train young persons for office work

The purpose of these centres is to supply young persons (boys and girls) who have completed their general school education up to a certain minimum level (if possible two or three years of secondary education) with the means of preparing for the usual categories of skilled office work, in particular those of shorthand typists, secretaries, book-keepers and assistant-accountants. The centres provide basic training in the form of full-time courses (continuous or sandwich) with programmes normally extending over two or three years. In the first stages of the project, the courses may be joint or divided into two sections (secretarial - accountancy) and they generally aim at a single, not too ambitious (subordinate employees), level of qualification determined in accordance with the candidates' original standard of general education. Subsequently, the centres may develop their activity to meet wider and more advanced needs.

The main tasks of the experts responsible for implementing such a project consist—besides choosing methods, establishing programmes, setting up the centre and starting instruction—in assisting in organizing (generally at the centre itself) the training of local instructors and other teachers for the centre and for the other centres eventually to be established in the country.

The assistance provided within the framework of these projects includes not only the recruitment (for three to five years and sometimes more) of a sufficient number of international experts and instructors but also, very often, the supply of technical equipment for the centre (typewriters, calculating machines, duplicators, etc.). In addition, in order to intensify and consolidate the centre's work, ILO may, when appropriate, grant fellowships for advanced training abroad to the local director of the centre and to local monitors and instructors selected from among those who have been trained under the project.

(b) Establishment of centres for the accelerated vocational training of office staff

The purpose of these centres is to meet the urgent need for qualified office staff by providing young persons (boys and girls) and unemployed (or under-employed) adults with rapid training in some skilled or semi-skilled office work such as typewriting, shorthand or book-keeping. The choice of specializations depends on the nature of short-term needs, and the centre's programme must be as flexible as possible so that it can be adapted to the development of these needs. These centres provide essentially practical training by special accelerated training methods. The courses may be full-time or part-time and be spread over periods ranging from a few months to approximately one year.

As with category (a) projects, the emphasis is on the choice of adequate methods, the establishment of suitable programmes and the training of local instructors to apply these methods and programmes; the assistance may, besides the despatch of international experts and instructors (generally in

teams consisting of one expert and one or two international instructors, working for approximately three years), consist of the supply of the equipment necessary for the centre and the granting of fellowships for advanced training abroad to certain members of the local staff attached to the centre.

(c) Establishment of advanced training systems for office employees

Advanced training for various categories of qualified staff (particularly shorthand-typists, typists, secretaries, filing clerks, book-keepers and assistant-accountants) may be organized either in the form of part-time (day or night) courses or intensive training sessions in centres or schools, or as in-service training. The systems consisting of courses in centres are generally applied to (a) or (b) type projects while the various in-service training systems are generally arranged as part of autonomous projects, sometimes to supplement a productivity project. Organization of an in-service training course generally necessitates the assistance of an expert and, later on, the grant of fellowships for advanced training abroad to local cadres responsible for vocational training.

Special problems

(a) Level of recruitment

The present state of schooling in main developing countries makes it difficult to recruit candidates of the level of the first period of secondary education (3 years after primary school), which it would be desirable to be able to do if future office employees are to be trained. Generally, either the pupils stop attending school before completing the first period of secondary education, or they continue until the end of the second period (6 years after primary school), or they even branch off into teacher training before completing the second period of secondary education. The standard of the vast majority of pupils who sit the entrance examination to a training centre for office employees is that of the end of primary studies or between the end of primary studies and the end of the first period of secondary education. In these conditions it is almost impossible,

for want of candidates and as experience has proved on several occasions, to require a higher standard. It is possible that his state of affairs will change in a few years, but at present we must bear this situation in mind and act accordingly, i.e. institute preparatory courses and considerably intensify the teaching of general subjects alongside the teaching of technical subjects.

(b) Recruitment of students

Because of lack of accommodation and adequate means of subsistence, recruitment is generally confined to candidates living in the town in which the centre is established, i.e. in most cases the capital of the country.

If suitable candidates living in the interior of the country are to be given their chance, consideration should be given to the question of building a boarding school or granting scholarships. This would be a means of mobilizing in the service of the country concerned the candidates most likely to be able to supply the needs for qualified staff.

(c) General knowledge and knowledge of the working language

The most striking of the problems encountered in implementing technical assistance projects on the training of office workers is the low standard of the students in general knowledge and knowledge of the language used for work.

If these two obstacles spring from a common cause, i.e. school attendance rarely exceeding primary level, they may to a certain extent be removed by the organization of preparatory and intensive courses alongside the teaching of technical subjects peculiar to the training of office staff.

In the case of the working language, however, it appears that even intensive courses do not yield completely satisfactory results because outside the courses the pupils speak to each other in their mother tongue. The same is true, and to an even greater extent, as soon as they return home. To obviate this difficulty, the effort to assimilate the working language should concentrate on the three following main points.

The first is the acquisition of a vocabulary, which, although sufficiently wide does not exceed the current needs of everyday life, supplemented by a certain number of terms proper to the chosen occupation.

The second point, closely related to the first, is the choice of simple reading matter, appropriate to the above-defined vocabulary, and supervised daily by explanation of the texts read.

Finally, the third point - conversation, which is also closely related to the other two, from which it derives. Although it is practically impossible to compel the students to speak a language other than their own at home, it is necessary to impose the exclusive use of the working language during school hours and to provide elocution courses, using tape recorders to correct faulty pronunciation or sentence construction.

(d) Placing of students

The question of the placing of students upon completion of courses also poses a particularly important problem. In principle, it must be solved by the labour department of the beneficiary country, which must be in a position to follow employment supply and demand, attend to the up-grading of qualified employees and see that the conventions established in this connexion are respected.

(e) Statute of the training Centre, the counterpart and local instructors

The choice of the counterpart to replace the expert is of capital importance. This choice and the eventual training efforts it implies are frequently hampered by administrative difficulties such as the lack of effective collaboration between various responsible authorities (National Education and Labour, for example) and the absence of a statute ultimately guaranteeing the counterpart a stable and well paid position.

It is not rare to have to wait a long time before being supplied with the necessary instructors and, because the responsible authorities have not nominated him, before being able to start training a counterpart. It

happens just as frequently that the barely trained counterpart disappears for pecuniary reasons.

This situation, which is prejudicial to all parties concerned, could easily be avoided by the establishment of an official statute (in the form of an order, for example) governing the operation of the training centre, the value of its diplomas and the method of their award, the obligations imposed on the counterpart and instructors and their entitlement to a salary commensurate with services rendered.

It is desirable that the statute of the training centre should be established at the start of each technical assistance project to which ILO lends the assistance of its experts. This method of procedure would permit removal of most of the administrative obstacles which too often impede regular progress of the project.

Examples of technical assistance projects

Some examples of technical assistance projects for the training of office staff carried out in Africa under the auspices of ILO may be quoted.

In the Congo (Léopoldville) and within the framework of ONUC technical assistance, the ILO has since 1962 established two centres for the accelerated vocational training and advanced training of office staff, one at Léopoldville and the other at Stanleyville. The courses given at these centres aim at training office staff (clerks) and office staff qualified in secretarial work and accountancy. The instruction is based on the in-service training principle and consists of advanced vocational training courses intended for staff in government service and in private firms. A Chief of Mission and three experts are taking part in the conduct of this project which may be further developed by the establishment of new training centres.

In Kenya, and within the framework of a project for the development of office staff training, the ILO, in March 1963, started, with the assistance of an expert, courses for the vocational training and advanced training of secretaries and typists. At present these courses are given at Nairobi in

a training centre, the "Secretarial Training Institute", and the expert has managed to obtain facilities for the accommodation of some of the female students. At the present time, preparations are being made for the installation of these facilities, the establishment of a centre for the training of teachers of secretarial subjects, and for the establishment of a similar centre at Mombassa. This extension of the project, which implies the acquisition and equipment of buildings, will be possible thanks to the financial assistance afforded by the Government of Sweden under its programme for the advancement of women in Africa. In-service training for office staff for government service is also being studied as part of the ILO project.

In Morocco, and within the framework of international technical assistance and with the collaboration of an expert and two instructor experts, ILO was able to open a centre for the accelerated vocational training of typists, shorthand-typists, and assistant-accountants at Rabat in October 1962. Parallel with this, training is provided for instructors. The possibility of establishing similar centres in other towns is contemplated.

Other projects, such as those in Ethiopia, Gabon, Sudan and Upper Volta, are being implemented. Finally, projects for Afghanistan, Algeria, Cameroun, Central Africa, Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Somalia are being studied or prepared. In nearly all cases they are a combination of types (b) and (c). Most of them consist of the establishment of accelerated training centres capable of providing elementary and advanced training courses for both the future office workers so urgently needed and for workers already in employment. In some of these projects priority has been given to the training of secretarial staff (particularly for typing, shorthand-typing, correspondence and filing), while in others preparation for employment as book-keepers and assistant-accountants is organized simultaneously. In most cases, the training is designed in such a way as to prepare the beneficiaries to fill posts in government departments or in private firms.

In conclusion, attention must be drawn to the collaboration existing between the ILO and the United Nations Public Administration Institutes in countries where this type of institution exists, particularly in Ethiopia and Sudan and, possibly, later on in Somalia.
