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DELEGATE OF THE NETHERLANDS

12 May 1966

With pleasure I have accepted the invitation of the Director of the International Trade Centre to speak for you about the training in the Netherlands of officials from developing countries in export promotion and trade information. In my opinion it was a very good idea of Mr. Jacobson to discuss in a meeting the training problems, as the training forms an important part of the task of the International Trade Centre. We - that is to say: the countries, which already run training courses - know almost nothing about each other's ideas, the systems followed, the experiences and so on and therefore it seems very useful for the future development of this part of the task of the International Trade Centre that we have come together now to exchange our views on this matter.

The Economic Information Service of the Ministry of Economic Affairs - Netherlands liaison agency for the International Trade Centre - has not hesitated to offer fellowships in export promotion and trade information within the framework of its participation in the work of the International Trade Centre, convinced as it was of the great importance of training in those fields. For, the role of the "human factor" in the economic progress of the developing countries is at least as important as each of the factors labour and capital. "For developing countries it is more important to have at their disposal trained and qualified people than to get financial aid", thus the report "Assistance from the United Kingdom for Overseas Development 1960".

We did not hesitate to offer fellowships, indeed, but we had no experience at all with training in this field. We had also no experience with the selection of the candidates. We published an announcement of our offer of the fellowships in "International Trade Forum Volume I, No. 2 of March 1965, no more and no less but only stipulating that the candidates had to be government officials, that their previous education should be - as a rule - at university or corresponding level and that they were required to have a good knowledge of the English language. We assumed simply, that they were already active in the field of export promotion and trade information.
We received many applications. These applications were - generally speaking - very brief, in our opinion: too brief. Some candidates gave no particulars about their education and their present activities. Rather it was put, that the candidates were recommended or met the requirements. We are of opinion now, that more details are required to get a better impression of the candidates. Thus we shall ask - if we decide to continue the course - plain details about:

1. Education
2. Present activities
3. Expectations of the course
4. Follow-up of the course

We consider in particular the items nos. 3 and 4 to be of great importance, as we had the impression, that not all the candidates were engaged in export promotion and trade information, or had the intention to enter this field or to remain in this field of activity. This would mean, that the knowledge gathered gets lost again or is not put into practice. Of course it is not the intention of our course, that the participants use it as a gain for their general education or only as an asset for a part of their activities. We want this course to yield an efficiency as great as possible; this is in the first place in the interest of the developing country itself. We expect, therefore, that the developing countries will take this aspect into account when designating their candidates. Here lies perhaps a task for our embassies, which occupied themselves so far only with an examination of the knowledge of the English language of the candidates. In every case: this "screening" has to be done before the candidate arrives in Europe. We consider, that our responsibility for a good result of the training makes such a screening a necessity.

From the announcements of fellowships in "International Trade Forum" we get the impression, that other providers of courses also ask - and therefore get - only brief information about the candidates. In fact only the Irish announcement (see "Forum" Volume I, No. 3) mentions persons, active in the field of export promotion. Would it be advisable, that the course givers pull together and draft a questionnaire for the four points I just mentioned? I shall be glad to learn your opinion about it. The Netherlands Economic Information Service emphasizes, that it is definitely not discontented with its choice of trainees, but the problem mentioned is in our opinion of great and general interest and deserves therefore attention, for a well aimed training is the object strived after. This aim implies, that it seems advisable to ask the accepted candidates before they leave their country in what aspects of export promotion and trade information they are specially interested. Their wishes could be very helpful in setting up the course. I would like to hear your opinion about this suggestion too.
Now some information about the Netherlands course itself, which lasts for about four months. We felt that it had to be adapted to the needs of the respective countries. The degree of development of the developing countries differs considerably and this means in our opinion that it is difficult - if not impossible - to create a course, which is equally useful for candidates from all those countries. In this respect too we advocate an aimed course, which involves as least ballast as possible, convinced as we are that the Plimsoll mark of the trainees still once and again disappears under water by pumping in too much knowledge, knowledge which is yet of little or no use in view of the present degree of development of the countries concerned and their exports.

The danger is, that the knowledge offered is tuned in to the situation in the developed countries and therefore falls through, as it is not opportune and does not link up with the reality in the developing countries.

We have thought it fit to keep the trainees in our service for about seven weeks. To keep the efficiency of this period as high as possible we felt it useful that our officials, which had to do with the trainees, should get a good insight into the situation in and the economic needs of the countries of origin of the trainees. They had to put themselves in the place of the trainees, as one can only understand in this way what is of interest to them. This is a fundamental starting point which we have kept up during the whole course, in so far as it was practicable. Therefore we have had drawn up special surveys for the officials mentioned, which served as background information when transferring knowledge. This system has worked well and I should like to hear from other delegates what they are doing in this respect.

You have been able to see from the documentation put at your disposal that the trainees have passed through several departments of our service, amongst them the departments of Policy Making, Economic Research, Government Measures, Library and Documentation, Development Projects, Publicity Abroad, Trade Fairs and Public Relations. It speaks for itself, that we have tried to fit this visiting scheme to the pre-supposed graduation of the interest of the trainees. In this connexion we have had them produced some pieces of work, on the basis of which could be noticed, if the subjects dealt with were understood and digested. Thus the Indonesian trainee produced a report with relation to the possibilities of exports of canned fruits to the Philippines, which possibilities at the moment are being just realized in his country. Generally speaking we can say, that this practical side of the course makes it more attractive - the trainees feel themselves part of a machinery - and when the occasion arises we shall certainly extend this part of the training.
It has turned out, that the trainees were most interested in the departments of Government Measures, Publicity Abroad and Trade Fairs, which is not surprising. Government measures regulate, if a product can be imported or not and under which conditions a possible import can be effectuated. Propaganda and advertising in developed countries is - as a matter of fact - very important for developing countries. It is our intention to enable the trainees to pay a short second visit to those departments towards the end of their course. The library and documentation department, very large, modern and progressive, did not mean much to them; apparently it goes beyond the needs, now and in the near future.

The stay at our service was followed by a visit to the Foreign Agricultural Service of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, lasting one week. During this week the trainees noted the tackling of the typical problems connected with the export of agricultural products. Attention was also paid to the collective promotion of the interests of all involved in cultivation, breeding, exporting agricultural produce etc. Of course quality control was not forgotten.

During the following ten days the trainees ran a short course at the Netherlands Council for Trade Promotion. Here they got an insight into the efforts of commerce and industry themselves in the field of export promotion and into the concrete commercial rendering of services to exporters. Moreover they noted several interesting aspects of the Council's activities such as trade mediation, commercial participation in trade fairs, organization of trade missions, and so on. Besides they visited the Africa Institute and the Indonesia desk of the Council.

The programme then reported a week's visit to the Netherlands Wholesale Federation. This was an important link in the course-chain too. During their stay at this federation - which includes amongst others more than a hundred importers' associations - they got a good notion of the many problems which face the import trade, such as: quality of tropical products, packing, continuity, and so on, together with the criticisms and wishes of the importers in this field and marketing problems. The knowledge thus acquired can benefit directly the export trade of the developing countries concerned. In this respect I may inform you that the Netherlands Wholesale Federation has at its disposal experts, which could hold short courses in developing countries overseas, during which these problems could be dealt with.

The week after their stay at the federation mentioned was reserved for the Netherlands Credit Insurance Company and one of the largest Dutch banks. The competition in granting credit terms, the influence of export credit costs on export prices and the activities of the economic department of the company were some of the aspects of the export credit insurance business, which had the trainees' great interest. The visit to the bank enabled them to hear something about export financing and the many services the banks can render to their exporting clients. This week, which is just behind them seemed to be far more interesting and fruitful than expected.
This week the trainees are the guests of our famous Royal Tropical Institute. We have included this institute in our training programme, as the bulk of the exports of the countries concerned consists of agricultural products and as the Royal Tropical Institute is highly specialized in all matters concerning those products, including exports and thus it cannot surprise, that governments of - and exporters in developing countries, importers in developed countries and buyers in developed countries are among their clients.

The last weeks of the course will be passed at the Institute of Social Studies. Here the trainees will attend some lectures about international economic relations, technical co-operation, economic aspects of planning and social consequences of industrialization. Those lectures require a highly developed and a very rich soil and we wonder if our trainees will be able to cope with or to benefit from these high-level lectures.

During the whole course we have organized many visits to industries, specialized institutions and so on. It does not surprise that the aspects of industrialization interests the trainees a great deal and they themselves have suggested several visits to specified industries. Moreover they have made some trips, which are more or less a "must" in the field of mixing business with pleasure, for instance a visit to the docks of the world's largest port: Rotterdam and a visit to the Delta works. Visits to the Utrecht Trade Fair and the ROKA International Food Fair were also included in the programme. The trainees appreciate the course very much, but they think the training period is too short and ought to be about six months.

So far the programme of our course. As it is still running and as we have not yet had a meeting of all concerned to review the course and to make recommendations about it, we cannot produce a definite opinion. Therefore I want to make only some provisional remarks - without commitment - on the basis of the experience gained so far - including some remarks made before.

1. It is important to have at one's disposal detailed information about the present and the future field of activities the trainee is and will be engaged in.

2. The course must be fitted to the developing country concerned, that is to say: to its economic and administrative infrastructure, to its exports, and so on.

3. It seems not advisable to have trainees from countries, which differ greatly with respect to their degree of development, at the same time.

4. The course must not be burdened with knowledge, which is in the present circumstances or in the years to come of little or no use for the trainees.
5. It may be advisable to invite the accepted candidate to submit special wishes about the purpose of the course.

6. It may be recommended to include as much self activity in the course as possible.

7. The course must include practical contacts with trade, commerce and industry.

8. It seems advisable not to include in the course knowledge, which is in the first place the "working material" of such experts as forwarding agents, bankers, juridical advisers, arbitrators, insurers and so on.

9. It is useful to put at the trainee's disposal a few books dealing with export business, export promotion, etc.

10. A standard course seems difficult to realize, because of the difference in the education of the trainees and in the needs and the structure of their countries.

11. The course often takes the form of an apprenticeship like our course. It seems not practical to try to bring unification in this respect; it is the result that counts.

12. The duration of the course is necessarily affected by many factors. Generally speaking it seems advisable to make the training period not too short; the field of export promotion and trade information is very extensive and the trainee must have time to digest the knowledge pumped in and have a fair chance to survive the course.

13. If the trainee's country plans to set up an export promotion service, the follow up of the training would be secured best by having the trainee accompanied by a field adviser of the developed country concerned, who can render valuable assistance in establishing the proposed service. It would be better yet, if the field adviser could visit the developing country also before the trainee leaves that country.

14. Would it be advisable to let the course start or end with a short stay at the International Trade Centre, as soon as this is practicable?

15. The practical side of the course must have - generally speaking - preference over the theoretical part.

16. It may be recommended to include in the course visits to small-scale industries, which can be for a developing country in its present stage of development more interesting than Western-scale industries.

I have told you something about our course and our relevant ideas. My statement intends not to be more than a superficial interim report and I shall be glad if it can contribute in view of this a little to the discussions. I thank you for your attention.