



# What Is Technical Assistance?

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**T**ECHNICAL Assistance is not a new concept; it is one of the oldest things in the world. Probably the first time it occurred was when Eve, with her superior sense of dress, helped Adam fix his fig leaf. "Technical assistance," in the sense in which the words are used in the phrase, "An expanded program of technical assistance to underdeveloped countries," is merely one application of a primordial human activity, but an application which is not as well understood as it should be, even in the underdeveloped countries to which this new prospect of help in solving their problems is held out.

Just as there is nothing new in the concept of technical assistance, so also there is nothing new in the concept of technical assistance to underdeveloped countries. Most countries in the world have received technical assistance from other countries at some period in the course of their history; and for centuries now individuals or corporations from the more advanced countries have deliberately gone to less advanced countries to help them in their development.

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Indeed for a good many years the governments of the more advanced countries, as well as the citizens, have taken a hand in the process. But until recently it never occurred to any government that its obligation to give technical assistance extended beyond dependent territories for which, in the modern phrase, it had international responsibility. What is new in the expanded program launched under President Truman's inspiration is that, for the first time in history, most nations in the world have publicly accepted a financial obligation to take part in a co-operative program of technical assistance to the underdeveloped countries and bound themselves to do all that they can to make it a success.

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FAO's early years were another age in global politics and social attitudes; it was primarily through technical assistance to "underdeveloped" countries that FAO wove knowledge into development. Today's approaches place more emphasis on technical cooperation and networking.

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*The opening up of vast tropical forests needs specialized experience*





*Bullock-drawn high-wheeled carts are still used to haul sal (*Shorea robusta*) logs in remote areas in India, where better roads and modern equipment could step up production. Travel is so slow that fodder must be carried for the bullocks en route.*

The course of events since President Truman included Point Four in his famous inaugural address is too well known to need description, but particular attention should be given to the statement of principles annexed to the Economic and Social Council's resolution of August 1949, which has since been approved by the Assembly of the United Nations and the Technical Assistance Conference at Lake Success as governing the implementation of the program.

It would take more space than is available here to discuss these principles at length; the purpose of this article is merely to discuss their application within the field of forestry; but one preliminary observation is important. "Technical assistance" has limits which are clearly defined, and it is not worth giving it unless it is known in advance that certain conditions exist which will make it useful. To take a simple analogy, if a man's automobile has broken down and he asks for help to get it going again, technical assistance, in the form approved by the ECOSOC principles, would extend to looking at the automobile and telling the owner what had gone wrong and how it could be put right; it would not, however, extend to doing the repair job for him, or giving him the spare part necessary to put it right. That he must do for himself at his own expense, that is with his own money or a loan, if anyone will give him one. So it is no use giving a man technical assistance in such a case if he is obviously as broke as his automobile, and it is known that no one will lend him the money to mend it. Technical assistance, in short, is a procedure for helping underdeveloped countries to help themselves; it is not a procedure for giving or lending them money to be spent on actual development.

An underdeveloped country either has forests or it has none. If it has forests, they are either left to themselves or they are exploited, more or less. If they are exploited, they are exploited either scientifically and properly, or unscientifically and harmfully. If a country has no forests, either the soil and physical conditions are suitable for forest cultivation or they are not. The only country which has no use for technical assistance in the field of forestry is the country which has no forests and knows that there is no

prospect of establishing them. Every other kind of country may need technical assistance; even the country at the extreme opposite end of the scale which has forests properly and scientifically exploited may need technical assistance in the form of facilities for its forest officers to visit other countries and study their methods.

#### *Forms of Technical Assistance*

The form of technical assistance which the individual country will require depends of course on its actual circumstances, but, broadly speaking, it will fall within one of the following groups:

(1) If a country has no forests, but thinks that they could be established and would be economically valuable, it requires the services of an expert silviculturist to examine the land and advise whether it is suitable for forest development. It is not, of course, realistic to suggest that this would be an isolated mission. There would be no sense in having an area examined simply from one point of view. What would be required would be a land survey conducted by a small team of agricultural, forestry, and animal breeding experts to look at the area in all its aspects and advise on the best use to be made of it.

(2) If the conclusion is that forest cultivation is probably the most economic method of developing the area, the next step would be a pilot project, that is the experimental establishment of a small forest to determine whether this judgment is correct. This would require the services of several experts over a period of some years to conduct the experiment.

(3) If the experiment is successful, the next stage would be to build up the forests and a forest service, side by side, and the forms of technical assistance required would be much the same as those which would be required by a country which has unexploited forests.

(4) If a country has forests which are unexploited, it requires first the services of a small team composed of, say, a silviculturist, a soil scientist and an expert in forest management to advise whether the forest can safely be exploited. This may not always be the case. If the soil is very poor, it may not be possible to re-establish cultivation of it if the forest cover is removed, and the only result of exploitation would be a galloping attack of soil erosion. If, however, the verdict was favorable, the mission would provide a plan of rational exploitation.

(5) Such a plan would not be one for immediate execution. The essential first step would be to build up a staff of forest technicians and forest guards to supervise the work of exploitation. The time is long past when it would be regarded as sensible to give a concession to some private profit-making organization to exploit the forest without proper supervision. Forestry is such a long-term project that it is not reasonable to expect that an enterprise whose main purpose is the making of immediate profits would, without outside stimulus, devote part of those profits to reinvestment in trees which will not in any event be ready for felling for decades and may not be really ready for hundreds of years. Moreover, even if, in principle, the forest is exploitable, it may be essential to leave parts of it untouched in such areas as the headwaters of rivers and streams, if the general agricultural economy of the country is not to suffer injury.

The first need in such a case, therefore, would be for a certain number of foreign experts, serving on medium- or long-term contracts, to start the forest service and train local personnel for it. Simultaneously, facilities would be required for sending local personnel with an adequate educational background to be trained for future work in the forest service in training establishments abroad. The size of the cadres required would depend not only on the size of the forests but also on the country's decision whether to entrust the exploitation of the forests to private enterprise or to carry out the work as a government undertaking. In the first event all that would be required would be a limited number of scientifically trained supervisors and an appropriate number of forest guards. In the latter event a whole range of silviculturists, experts in forest management and timber exploitation and conversion, and skilled forest workers would be required, and the task of recruiting and training them would be proportionately the greater.

(6) If a country has forests which are already being exploited, the extent to which it will require help and the kind of help which it will require will depend on the extent to which the exploitation is already being controlled. If it already has a fully developed forest service, it will probably require no more than facilities to send members of that service to study methods of forest management and exploitation in other countries, facilities to send recruits for

the service to training establishments abroad, and facilities for its representatives to study how the timber exported from the country is marketed and to find out whether an alteration in the extraction and conversion methods would make it possible to increase the foreign revenue. On the other hand, if the exploitation of the forests is imperfectly controlled or not controlled at all, the country will require the same kind of help as a country where the forests are not at present being exploited at all.

This is not, of course, a complete and exhaustive treatise on the application of technical assistance to forestry in all its aspects, nor is it written by a technical expert in forestry matters. It is merely a broad picture of the subject designed to help those responsible for the government, the general administration or the forestry departments of underdeveloped countries to consider what technical assistance they should request from the Food and Agriculture Organization.

One final word of warning. Forestry experts are rare animals, and most of them are fully occupied with responsible work in their own countries. It must not be assumed that they can be obtained in large numbers just for the asking.