

Medical Equipment Maintenance and Repair Project

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The shortage of personnel provided to the Engineering Office of the Ministry of Health has become a critical problem. The Ministry shows little interest in supporting the project, but continues to demand a full range of services, technical and administrative, from the Engineering Office.

1. Personnel

The Central Workshop staff was further reduced this quarter when one trained technician (on contract) quit the MOH, and another was re-transferred to the Technical Health Institute. One technician (ex-AID participant trainee) was finally released from military service and has returned to work, although at military pay.

The Ministry administration consistently appears to be placing obstacles in the way of hiring new technicians, with the result that the workshop staff has dropped from six at the start of this project to three now. No new trainees have been hired or transferred to the central workshop in two years. When one technician was recently brought from Hama Hospital for a six-week training period, the Ministry failed to co-operate in finding him accommodations at a local hospital as is customary in such cases.

Neither have any administrative personnel or additional drivers been provided, so the technical staff continues to spend a large proportion of its time dealing with routine administrative matters and problems of vehicle maintenance and fuel allotments.

A recent notice from the Planning Ministry advised that the Ministry of Health will be receiving two new engineering graduates to work in the Damascus area, and one for Idlib. This affords only marginal relief, since one engineer from Damascus Hospital recently transferred to another ministry.

2. Training

Technical training continues as before, necessarily limited to practical shop work and field trips, due to inadequate facilities

and insufficient personnel to justify any formal training courses.

A technician from Aleppo Hospital was sent to a three-month WHO course in Budapest in medical electronics. Our English-trainee engineer Mr. Na'meh has apparently elected not to take any training opportunities, so I have dropped my inquiries into appropriate stateside courses since there are no other eligible candidates.

3. Management System

The repair manual file is in good order and is being expanded with some regularity as manuals are ordered or found. Equipment Inventory and Maintenance Report cards are being used regularly for equipment coming into the central workshop, as well as in a few hospitals and the THI where personnel have been trained in their use. Additional property control systems are also being used.

An equipment inventory is nearly complete in the southern region. However, if one looks back to the main purpose of having this inventory, i.e., to be able to rationalize the stocking of spare parts, one realizes that unless the MOH changes its policies and procedures concerning ordering spare parts from foreign sources the equipment inventory will have been a meaningless exercise. There seems to be an unwritten policy not to purchase any spare parts, but to rather rely on local manufacturer's agents to stock them. Not only is this approach doomed to failure for a number of reasons, but it is counter to the aim of the project, to increase self-sufficiency in repair and maintenance.

Furthermore, those parts which have already been delivered with new equipment and are very much needed cannot be unpacked for lack of a suitable temporary storeroom and an administrative clerk to provide storekeeping services. Numerous requests have been made for these to be provided.

4. USAID Commodities

All of the tools and parts ordered by PIO/Cs 80088 and 80075 have arrived but have not been unpacked yet due to lack of space. (They were ordered with the new facilities in mind.) The portable generator arrived in good shape but may not be used in the mobile workshop due to its weight.

The mobile workshop van is nearly completely outfitted, but the vehicle spare parts for it do not seem to have ever been ordered. A shakedown trip to Dera'a was useful in pinpointing certain technical problems.

I have prepared a final list of additional equipment and materials to be ordered under PIO/C for the new workshop and mobile van. This should use up most of the balance of the commodity funds in the project agreement. I cannot judge if this expenditure is justified on the basis of co-operation from the MOH and likelihood of continued operation of the Engineering Office. Perhaps some additional commitment should be obtained from the Ministry of Health as to their intentions.

5. Prefabricated Workshop Building

The steel building and interior components were shipped Dec. 12, 1979 from Baltimore in 2 40-foot containers. One of the SARG construction companies has agreed to grade and pour the foundation, and possibly to provide the erection labor. It is to be hoped that the foundation work will be completed at roughly the time the supervising engineer arrives and the building is delivered. Nonetheless it is questionable that the new workshop and stores will be ready for use before the end of this contract, taking a realistic view of the way things work.

By virtue of hindsight it seems that a serious error was committed by USAID project planners in acquiescing so readily to the MOH's withdrawal of the originally agreed workshop space at the Technical Health Institute and the substitution of a prefabricated building. The THI basement space is not in fact being used for any useful purpose and would have made an ideal workshop. Had this space been used as originally planned the new workshop could have been in operation by last fall.

S. Fabricant