

EDITORIAL

Belgian presence in developing countries

The temptation offered to me through this editorial to recall the circumstances in which the promoter of this magazine met with the undersigned is great. I cannot resist.

This meeting took place fifteen years ago during the "Golden Sixties" in the Niger Valley between Timbuctoo and Gao ... A dream.

This temptation is also due to the fact that I am writing these few words just before going on another mission to that region.

The needs of the Third World countries remain enormous. The youths from all these countries are conscious of this, however, everyone claims that it is difficult to find an employer who would allow one to put his dynamism at the disposal of the poorest.

Important potential resources exist in most of these countries and continents which are not always exploited or which are badly exploited. Sometimes unbalanced development occurs but fortunately when faced with its responsibilities human intelligence has always proved capable of overcoming difficulties and adversity. Many individual initiatives have come up but good will alone is not always sufficient. On the other hand, solid common sense and a practical rather than theoretical approach to the many problems often characterize those who succeed and are thus appreciated.

In this last generation the Belgian presence overseas has not developed much, on the contrary it has decreased. But worse, no systematic approach regarding the Belgian presence in the field of rural development in the Third World nor objective analysis have been undertaken except in cases with strictly political objectives.

Despite the absence of any offensive official policy regarding the Belgian presence in the world, and particularly in the developing countries, a few courageous people (among which the creators of Tropicultura) have resolved to publicize the efforts and successes of our universities and the numerous other categories of specialists (technical assistants, volunteers, missionaries as well as personnel for the private sector). Our duty is to help and support them.

Let's hope that Tropicultura acts as a consolidating element to all those scattered around the world. Let's hope that Tropicultura leads towards a more homogenous development approach, which will be followed by a more coherent official Belgian assistance policy towards the developing countries. This latter reflexion results from observations according to which bilateral technical assistance endeavours to concentrate means (research and development) on one main commodity or on one main topic which confers a specific reference or label to the given assistance (maize to US aid, cassava to the Canadians, etc.).

It is up to those who believe in and understand the interest of maintaining a qualified Belgian presence in developing countries to reflect carefully in order to find the right channel to streamline our co-operation and to maintain a good reputation to which, I am convinced, Tropicultura is already contributing highly.

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the International Organizations (Section UFBE)