COLONIAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE SCHEMES

REPORT FOR 1956-57

THE schemes made under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts in the period April 1, 1956-March 31, 1957, which are detailed in the latest return*, bring the total commitments for development and welfare under those Acts to £170,452,589, and for research schemes to £16,874,215, of which £23,755,193 and £2,202,880, respectively, are for the year in question. Of this last, £943,301 is for agriculture, £529,979 for medicine, £199,683 for tsetse and trypanosomiasis, £171,128 for insecticides, £103,085 for fisheries, £87,796 for products research, £14,982 for social science, £59,350 for locust control and £10,550 for economics research.

Of the actual research schemes, £166,744 is for the East African Veterinary Research Organization, £229,600 for the East African Agriculture and Forestry Research Organization, £147,229 for the West African Council for Medical Research, £65,169 for the East African Medical Survey and Research Institute, £96,300 for the East African Virus Research Institute, £36,346 for the East African Marine Fisheries Research Organization, £36,711 for the East African Inland Fisheries Research Organization and £28,775 for the East African Institute of Malaria and Vector-Borne Diseases, all for the period 1956-60. The West African Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research received a supplementary £119,050, the Organization for Agricultural Research and Land Use Planning, Tanganyika, £99,616, the East African Trypanosomiasis Research Organization £68,174, the Colonial Pesticides Research Unit, East Africa, £97,150, the Colonial Microbiological Research Institute, Trinidad, £50,104, research into natural products of medical interest at the University College of the West Indies, £33,700, the establishment of a Soils Laboratory, Sarawak, £21,000, physiological and biochemical research in East Africa, £26,478, and research on cotton pests in Nyasaland, £14,487. Agricultural research services in Northern Rhodesia received £52,400 for 1956-58, £41,823 was provided for maintenance of the Colonial Section, Building Research Station (Department of Scientific and Industrial Research), and £15,308 for fundamental insecticides research at the Silwood Park Field Station of the Imperial College of Science and Technology. For the period 1956-60, £18,914 was provided to augment the staff at the Long Ashton Research Station; £79,473 for the Agricultural Research and Experimental Station, Lilongwe, Nyasaland; £60,000 to maintain the Medical Research Council's Field Station, Fajara, Gambia; £40,815 for the agricultural research section of the Abyan Development Programme, Aden; £50,500 for maintenance of the Experimental Rice Station, Federation of Malaya; and £30,550 for maintenance of the Livestock Experimental Station, Ebini, British Guiana.

The development and welfare schemes include a number of large schemes for the development of roads; for example, £1,800,000 for trunk roads in Nigeria, and £3,450,000 for the development of class B

trunk roads in the Northern Region there, £486,080 for road construction and improvements in North Borneo, and £297,750 for road construction in Fiji; and also for the development of water supplies, such as £1,300,000 for rural water supplies in Northern Nigeria and £100,000 for minor water supplies in rural areas in Jamaica. Major schemes of particular scientific interest include besides a further £555,000 for the central organization for the Colonial Geodetic and Topographical Survey, and £101,500 for the Central Directorate, Colonial Geological Surveys, £108,840 for the geological survey in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, £359,385 for expansion of the geological survey, British Guiana, and £115,180 for the geological survey, Jamaica, £294,750 for cacao expansion, Jamaica, £1,200,000 for African agricultural development in Kenya, £56,550 for leprosy control in Eastern Nigeria, and £120,000 for agricultural research and land use planning, Tanganyika. Among many schemes for educational development may be mentioned the £190,000 for a new hall of residence, £125,850 for senior staff housing, and £111,800 for extensions to the medical school, all at the University College of East Africa; £100,000 for the men's hall of residence and subordinate staff quarters, Royal Technical College, Nairobi; a further £168,000 for permanent buildings and equipment for the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland; a supplementary £516,000 for permanent buildings for the University of Malaya; and, to the University College of the West Indies and the associated teaching hospital, £205,255 for a fourth hall of residence, £137,500 for extension of science schools, and £100,000 for staff houses.

BRITISH NATIONAL FOOD SURVEY

THE preface of the sixth annual report of the National Food Survey Committee, which has recently been published*, states that the series "was introduced in 1950 with the object of providing continuous information on the trends of domestic food consumption, expenditure and nutrition in Great Britain". A few minor modifications in technique have been made in the course of the six years but, broadly, the recording and the analysis follow the same pattern and involve visits to about twenty thousand homes (20,400 in 1954; 18,580 in 1955) and the analysis of more than ten thousand completed records. The cost of the survey in both time and money must be very considerable and it seems pertinent to ask if the results are commensurate in value with the outlay.

Any government interested in maintaining the health of the people at a high level must seek to prevent the occurrence of malnutrition even in the mildest degree, and to do this requires to know the composition of the diet currently consumed. The Survey reports are not published until some eighteen months after the end of the year in which the data are collected, but it may be that the results are available to the Ministry itself in time for action to be taken if any marked fall in nutritive value of the diets

* Colonial Development and Welfare Acts. Return of Schemes made under the Colonial Development Acts by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, with the concurrence of the Treasury, in the period from 1st April, 1956, to 31st March, 1957. Pp. 40. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1957.) 2s. 3d. net.

* Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Domestic Food Consumption and Expenditure 1955: Annual Report of the National Food Survey Committee. Pp. iv+148. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1957.) 6s. 6d. net.

should become apparent. If this is not so, the most valuable aspect of the survey—that of giving warning of ‘incipient malnutrition’—is being entirely lost. If the survey is being used for this purpose, the next important question is how much reliance can be placed upon the evidence so provided.

The report states that “in 1955 no sub-group fell below 95 per cent (of the estimated requirements) in energy value, but percentages less than 95 were recorded in certain sub-groups for protein, calcium, iron and riboflavin”. As the figures represent averages for groups of families, it must be supposed that some families within the groups had intakes considerably below the average 95 per cent. Did such families show any evidence of a deficiency of these particular nutrients? This is apparently not known. For young childless couples in the highest income group the energy value of the recorded diet was 143 per cent and the protein content 150 per cent of the recommended allowances; fat intakes were of the order of 150 grams per head per day. Are these people suffering from their over-indulgence, or should these levels be taken as evidence of incipient malnutrition? At the moment, no one seems to know. For the whole ten thousand families, the caloric value of the diet averaged 105 per cent of the estimated requirement. If food intakes are regularly greater than requirements, body-weights in Great Britain should be steadily increasing. If they are not doing so, then either the estimate of requirements is too low or the assessment of the diet is inaccurate.

It is sometimes forgotten that these records deal only with the quantities of food bought for domestic consumption in the course of the survey week; they do not set out to measure the actual quantity of food eaten by the families concerned. In attempting to assess the adequacy of the diets, arbitrary allowances are made for preparation waste, and a round ten per cent deduction is made for edible material discarded or given to pet animals; meals out are given a ‘points’ value of breakfast 4, dinner 5, tea 3, and supper 2. It is unlikely that these ‘corrections’ are equally suitable for all families, all seasons, and all geographical areas. No attempt is made to allow for sweets, alcoholic or soft drinks, ice-creams, etc., nor are changes in larder stocks recorded—as they were when the survey first began. The arbitrary allowances made for cooking losses of thiamine and ascorbic acid, and the low vitamin A value assigned to carotene-rich foods are ‘corrections’ of questionable value. In all, there is room for a quite considerable degree of error when the analysis is confined to small sub-groups, though the broad general picture obtained may be true enough.

The yardstick against which the recorded diets are measured for adequacy is the set of allowances recommended by a Committee of the British Medical Association in 1950¹; but in making these recommendations the Committee continually reiterated the ‘urgent need’ for further extensive study of human nutritional requirements. The failure to parallel the Food Survey with a clinical survey to assess the nutritional state of the consumers of diets of different level means that a most valuable opportunity to forward our knowledge of dietary needs is being entirely missed. As it stands, the Survey provides a mass of interesting detail on price trends, dietary patterns, seasonal, occupational and geographical influences, the effect of family size within different

income groups, etc.; but it fails to make any contribution to the knowledge most urgently needed, which relates to what type of diet is best and to what the range of nutrient intake is within which good health can be maintained.

At any time, a food consumption study is of little practical value unless it is made in conjunction with a study of the resultant health of the consumers; at the present time, when such fundamental changes are being introduced into the methods of producing and processing our everyday foods, this second study is of paramount importance and it is to be hoped that future reports will include a section on the nutritional state of the families eating the diets described in so much detail.

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¹ Report of the Committee on Nutrition. British Medical Association (1950).

RESEARCH ON ROADS IN BRITAIN

THE annual reports of the Road Research Board of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and the Director of Road Research for the year 1956 have now appeared*.

The report of the Road Research Board directs attention to the growing road traffic problem and states that a method of evaluating road projects in relation to their economic advantages is to be tried. The importance of training road engineers in traffic engineering and the value of ‘before and after’ studies with the current road-building programme are emphasized. It is believed that the economic advantages of building new roads have been grossly under-estimated hitherto.

It is suggested that improvement of the facilities for studying the causes and means of reducing accidents is urgent. Closer attention should be paid to the contribution of high speed to the increase in road casualties, because “it may well be that neither the skill of the average driver nor the care normally bestowed on the maintenance of cars is commensurate with their high performance”.

The report of the Director of Road Research summarizes the activities of the Road Research Laboratory during 1956; these come mainly under three headings: safety, traffic and materials and methods of construction.

Work on road safety has included tests and recommendations on protective helmets for motor-cyclists. Accident studies have been made with the object of designing safety devices for vehicles, such as interior padding and safety belts. The contribution of the nature of road surfaces to skidding accidents has been investigated; it is estimated that the reduction of accidents due to treating road surfaces at dangerous sites represents a saving of ten times the cost of maintaining the surface with a high resistance to skidding. Statistics of accidents due to various causes have been compiled and are summarized in the report. Vehicle- and road-lighting studies have been made with the object of finding economical methods of reducing accidents due to conditions of night driving.

Traffic statistics are being compiled annually, and detailed surveys of traffic in selected areas are made.

* Road Research 1956: The Report of the Road Research Board with the Report of the Director of Road Research. Pp. iv+88+8 plates. (H.M. Stationery Office, London, 1957.) 5s. 6d. net.