

*A review of some of the implications of three reports on the United Nations System in terms of the total network of organizations making up the world system and the complex network of interacting problem areas.*

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## C. Report of the United Nations Centre for Economic and Social Information (CESI)

The UN Preparatory Committee for the Second United Nations Development Decade entrusted to CESI, which is associated with the Office of Public Information, the preparation of a report on the measures undertaken and envisaged « with a view to mobilizing public opinion in regard to the objectives of the Second Development Decade ». The Report is also to be considered a response to similar requests « formulated by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the UNCTAD Trade and Development Board, and other United Nations bodies. » (P. 2)

In view of the criticisms made of the Capacity Study and the Pearson Report on the question of public information, this Report clearly represents a « missing link ». It is through the measures reviewed in this Report that the « will » to act to support development is to be created.

The second section of the Report consists of an analysis of the « complexity and urgency of the problem ». This concludes that : the task of explaining the necessity of promoting economic and social development is « one of the most difficult that Governments and intergovernmental bodies face today »; « development itself is not a simple idea »; « aid is only one factor among the numerous elements required to generate development »; « it would be pointless to continue appealing to individuals charitable feelings or humanitarian sentiment alone »; « a sense of lasting participation can only result from the prior understanding of the fundamentals of a given situation and the true nature of a problem »; « it is unfortunate that the impression has often been given that formulae could be devised which would bring a rapid solution to one of the most complex and intricate problems of our age. This...is one of the consequences of information programmes which tend to over-emphasize the part played by the United Nations system in the field of development rather than showing the total nature of the problem »; « the consciousness has to be conveyed that unless a global, coordinated and all-out effort is urgently made, our world will continue to drift towards irremediable disequilibrium »; « the thinking which produced the existing information concepts and methods, is no longer relevant or adequate to the present task »; « public opinion, in almost all cases, is national opinion ».

From which it follows that : « the task of reaching the largest possible number of specific groups within the national framework must be the responsibility mainly of national authorities rather than the information services of an international organization such as the United Nations... the task of persuasion must belong to Governments. However, these Governments respond to major national segments of the population — i.e. business, workers, farmers, teachers, religious leaders and youth. Consequently, these groups have a major role to play. There is thus a two-way flow. »

### a) Mobilization of will

Mobilizing public opinion, creating a sense of lasting participation, generating the wholehearted support of the general public, and creating will or political will, appear to be treated almost synonymously as the objective to be accomplished by the UN public information effort.

Whilst the desirability of a common will can be clearly seen, are will and public opinion synonymous except in a very superficial sense — perhaps sufficient for voting purposes ? But even if they are not synonymous, does the mobilization of public opinion result in the mobilization of will ? These are rather abstruse questions, but the possibility of inferring that will can be mobilized is very clear (\*). In a sense, this provides an operational definition of will. The word « mobilization » has special associations and was clearly chosen for that reason. Just as in the past, people have been mobilized for war, the UN is now proposing to take the lead in mobilizing people for the war on want. From a governmental point of view, there is perhaps little difference. It is (as one dictionary puts it) a case of making the people mobile and readily available, and calling into active service in readiness for a course of action decided by government.

(\*) As for instance in : Young, Whitney. Suggestions for mobilizing public will to appropriate political action. *Eikistics*; vol. 28, October 1969, p. 264-5.

The question could however be raised as to whether there were not some attitudes deriving from war psychology which are not directly associated with the mobilization of the public — such as artificially generating a crisis mentality. Given that it is in the process of mobilization that the people's freedom of action is bent to that of its leaders associated with the government apparatus, once the process of mobilization is completed, a war machine is in being and individual will can no longer be taken into account. It is the psychology of the various stages in this process which form one topic of peace research.

*The question raised here is therefore whether in a free society, and under what conditions, public will can or should be mobilized by government. In addition there is the implied definition of man and human nature, and the rights of man, in the supposition that his will can be bent to suit the government strategy, however benign its intentions. Is the will which can*

be so induced or manipulated to be considered no different in quality, desirability and durability from self-generated will? These are old questions.

The space devoted to these issues in the Report does not correspond to the number of problems raised by some of their implications. There is a radical difference, as is intended, between informing those members of the public who desire information, and scientifically designing a campaign to influence individuals via the leaders whom they respect. This is very similar to the problem posed by corporations trading in their own shares to control artificially their value in the market. How democratic is the selection of the cause for which people should be mobilized? There is a total lack of awareness that will should be formed by mature reflection on the part of the individual and not by artificially manipulating his environment. In a democratic society each organized group has the right to attempt to influence the individual. It is from his interaction with these groups — his *total* social environment — his own experiences, that his freely chosen course of action — his will — germinates. The UN, according to the Report, should intervene in these processes without, as might be considered its responsibility, revealing any understanding of the complexity of the processes involved.

#### **b) Stages in the progressive definition of « want »**

At any one point in time, the UN public information programme will have a particular conception of the ends to which public opinion is to be mobilized — the current definition of « want ». Now this definition derives from political processes during which « want »

is defined by government positions on programme issues. One may assume a lag of one year between programme formulation and impact of the information programme on the public. But the government positions are formed as a result of political processes at the national level. One may assume a lag of two years between public sensitivity to a problem and formulation of a government programme on that particular aspect of « want ».

On this basis, and it would appear to be a case of underestimating rather than overestimating, the current topics which are stressed in the UN public information programme are those which individuals and groups in a significant number of countries were sensitive to three or more years ago. The countries in which this is the case will be precisely those developed countries from which it is desired that more aid should be obtained. But, according to this argument, the individuals and groups and particularly the elite, will now be aware of aspects of « want » three years in advance of those to which the UN system is permitted to be sensitive in providing « global directions ».

There is no question but that the UN system will help to reinforce government positions on issues of « want », but will its programmes be as forward looking as the views of the elite it is trying to influence? And if not, will this not give rise to the frustration which jeopardizes the image of the UN at the national level as a growth point for change? The Report suggests that in future the information programme should not over-emphasize the part played by the UN system in the field of development but should show the « total nature of the problem », « the fundamentals of the situation and the true nature of a problem » and the need for a « global, coordinated and all-out effort » (p. 5). The Capacity Study however indicated that no one in the UN system had a clear view of the totality of UN operations. How then is the public information programme to acquire information on the totality of UN and non-UN operations to show the total nature of the problem? Furthermore, given that the definition of the problem and what is « true » takes place at the national level and in non-political bodies, how is the UN to acquire the complete picture, given that it is only sensitive to an earlier definition of the true ramifications of the problem? The assumption made by the Report is that the UN knows what the critical problems are and is in a position to define them for the public and to lead the

way. This may be true in the case of the developing countries, but takes no account of the intellectual expertise in the developed countries which are not drawn into the UN orbit — the Capacity Study noted this problem with respect to management expertise. Who determines what the total nature of the problem is, how is this shown, and what is the function of a group which considers that there is an extra element to be added to, presumably the UN's, finally agreed version of what the total nature of the problem is ? The Report notes three flows of information : UN to Government; Government to group; and group to Government. Under « group » is meant the elite leaders of the groups. This would appear to be a highly simplified analysis of the processes involved. It would appear to ignore : other intergovernmental bodies (some with important development concerns) ; once again the international nongovernmental bodies which are extremely interested in influencing their national member groups; and the complexity of inter-organization structure at the national level which does not only give rise to groups of people, but groups which group groups and so on. Each extra level may either be an opportunity or an information filter.

### c) Meaning of « groups »

The use of the word « groups » has been very subtly phrased. Clearly it may imply either an organized or an unorganized group depending on to whom the information programme is being justified. Consider : « Governments respond to major national segments of the population — i.e. business, workers, farmers, teachers, religious leaders and youth. Consequently these groups have a major role to play. » (p. 7) This in no way implies the involvement of national and local *organizations* in the information programme. The object of the programme is to influence the leadership, « public opinion responds to leadership ». Note it is not the members of a nongovernmental body which respond to leadership, just the *public en masse*. But consider the following comment concerning :

« ...the whole concept of concentrating one's efforts in moulding public opinion by trying to influence an « elite », who are then expected to provide the leadership in mobilizing public opinion...I would point out that even the most influential individuals need institutional machinery to carry their influence to others (and incidentally to reinforce their own convictions).... NGOs are groups of like-minded people who have come together because of the need to establish institutional associations for pragmatic reasons, social pressure, or idealism....

In order to execute these programmes these groups have institutional machinery to communicate with their members and to secure their support or acquiescence for the organization's programme and/or platform. It would be the hope of any strategy to use the organizational machinery, although taking advantage of this machinery is not easy, for these organizations are set up for their own purpose, and not for other organizations' purposes. (This is where the United Nations' attitude is so often frustrating to NGOs). » (Roosevelt, Curtis. The politics of development : a role for interest and pressure groups. Paper presented to an SID Conference, New Delhi, 1969).

It would appear that the Report is only interested in the UN, Government, leaders and the public. Once again there is a total lack of interest in the social structure. And yet the Report can state : « the social component is in fact the one of ultimate importance ». The definition of « social » however is tied very closely to that of social welfare, very close to the economists recognition of this term as important to the working environment : « the social component is concerned with the objectives of health, education and those things which in the end affect the spirit of man as well as with problems such as the population explosion, the basic reasons for starvation and malnutrition. » (p. 4).

### d) Consequences of development

It is quite clear that the proposed public information programme is to be geared entirely to development. It will be organized solely for that purpose. The debate at the national level is however turning strongly in the developed countries to problems of *pollution* and the *environment*. Given the earlier argument that there is a time lag before UN programmes incorporate the latest national thinking, it would appear that either the philosophy of the Report will have to be modified within one or two years, or else it will be argued that development programmes include environmental programmes anyway, or finally a separate environmental public information programme may be set up to contact the same « groups » at the national level. The essence of the information problem, namely that it is not only the development problem in itself which is complex, but that there is a control problem of balancing between maximum development and minimum pollution, which could be beneficially based on an integrated information programme, is not recognized.

### e) Target audience data bank service

The Report mentions as possible activities what seem to be fairly standard public information procedures :

leaderships symposia, briefing papers, field trips, field involvement of youth (student speakers), films. It does not mention the most significant activity of CESI which is described in a later report entitled « The Target Audience Data Bank Service » (CESI / PC.69-13)

In this document it is stated that CESI has as one of its basic objectives « the channelling of selected information on social and economic activities to distinct categories of opinion-making and decision-making elites in each country. » The Service « is designed as an inter-Agency cooperative undertaking for the sharing, compilation and maintenance of individual, organizational and statistical data on all such audiences... »

It has been found that there exists in the UN system « a huge fund of audience data, amounting to well over *one million names and addresses* » which it would be possible to put on computer for use by the UN Agencies.

According to the document « CESI's own original idea of the Service as a single, centralized, computer

facility quickly gave way (after visits to many Agencies) to the concept for a central factory for audience data feeding computer-usable material...to the various computer installations within the UN system. » It would seem that individual Agencies did not wish to lose control over their own confidential lists.

« To possess information is to possess power, A monopoly of information can give a form of security. There are, in all organizations at all levels, a selective withholding and extending of information. Sole possession of information can make others dependent on oneself. Withholding of information can limit the scope and power of others' actions and reduce the threat to oneself. Control of information channels can isolate certain persons from the remainder of the organization and keep them within one's own sphere of influence. » (Forrester, J.W. A new corporate design. In : Jantsch, Erich Perspectives on Planning, Paris, OECD, 1969, p. 435).

The organization of the data nevertheless highlights the individual, the leader. The organization with which he is concerned, if any, seems to be a secondary feature. The system is now being implemented.

## D. Report of the Committee on Scientific and Technical Communication (Satcom Report)

The Committee on Scientific and Technical Communication (SATCOM) was established in February 1966 by the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering to investigate the present status and future requirements of the scientific and engineering communication with respect to the flow and transfer of information, principally in the U.S.A. The work of the Committee is closely related to that of the Joint UNESCO-ICSU Committee for a Worldwide Science Information Service. This Report is important because of the manner in which its basic principles contrast with those of the UN Reports. The SATCOM Report is permeated by an awareness of the *interdependence* and *variety* of different types of *autonomous* organizations with *their own interests* and different but *related* needs and the importance of *shared* responsibility.

« As a prime objective, we urge that the initiative of individuals, institutions, and organizations continue to be accorded substantial scope in the development and operation of those scientific-and-technical-communication services that they consider to be in their best interest. *Such information activities should be designed and operated as individual and somewhat independent parts of a comprehensive network*, and, as a matter of policy or principle, no attempt should be made to centralize them either physically or managerially. » (SATCOM Report p. 20-1)

Problems of inter-organization relationships exist :  
« SATCOM was strongly impressed by the evidence that currently existing mechanisms have not been sufficient to elicit the required degree of cooperation among private not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. Nor have the private organizations as a whole been able to work closely enough, and to their mutual benefit, with federal information services and systems. *There is need for a body through which private organizations can coordinate their interests and cooperate with a similarly representative government group* in formulating, and fostering acceptance of, necessary new or modified national policy. » (SATCOM Report, p. 22)  
« *It is vital that the role of the government and private organizations be mutually reinforcing.* Therefore, it is important that, as a basic philosophy of management of this country's information programs, the *involvement of private organizations be encouraged by the government to the maximum extent possible...* there are certain situations in which we feel that the not-for-profit organizations should be the preferred instruments for fulfilling a particular objective. In other instances, the for-profit organizations should be preferred.... »

The Report also shows awareness of the need to look at the *whole process* of information transfer.

« Most present information systems, particularly libraries, suffer from inadequate feedback mechanisms.... Each formal link in the information-transfer process must function effectively and convey information to the next link to assure efficient communication.... No

matter how good information is, the advantages of having created it are lost or greatly reduced unless this marketing function receives sufficient attention... . The general belief is that, if the information is valuable, the people for whom it is intended will find it. In fact there is little basis for such a belief (SATCOM Report, p. 51-2)

### The need for greater understanding of the overall network is recognized :

«...appropriate organizations should initiate and carry out comprehensive analyses of and experiments on the functioning of the different parts of the network of scientific and technical communication as well as of the network as a whole... .To be meaningful, these studies will have to deal realistically with many elusive and complicated factors — for example, inertia in behavioral patterns and its effects on the acceptance of new services or the interrelationships of various communications media. » (SATCOM Report, p. 79)

The broad, *inter-organizational network* approach illustrated by these extracts is missing from the UN Reports. Regretably, however, we are again faced with a report which is forced to limit itself in two ways : Firstly to the U.S.A. situation, although it is made quite clear that the U.S.A. network is considered merely as part of the worldwide network; secondly, to scientific and technical communication. The point is not clearly made that other topics should be considered as forming part of the concern of a general communication network. And again, the bodies concerned with such non-scientific/technical topics are given no mention.

*Virtually the entire legal, intellectual, and administrative base of the redevelopment and urban renewal programs throughout the United States is based on the intensive treatment of a fragment of the problem. Any attempt to recast thinking about the program so that it deals with the universe of the problem runs counter to the interests of both the administrative and intellectual adherents of the program and meet massive resistance.* (E.N. Bacon. Urban Process. *Daedalus*, Fall 1968).

### The Report does however make the point that

« With the expansion of the body of recorded information, the likelihood that all the information which could be of use in a given operation will have its origin in the geographic, temporal, or disciplinary neighbourhood of this potential point of application decreases. »

### and suggests that an area

« requiring attention and appropriate action relates to the slowly knitting, massive, mission-oriented programs of recent years which deal with major social concerns, such as natural resources, education, transportation, pollution, and urban problems. The role of science and technology in the resolution of these problems is not yet clear; therefore, the nature and scope of the information programs that they will require only gradually will become apparent. » (SATCOM Report, p. 256-7)

This indicates an interest in the use of science and technology for other domains, but there is no recognition of the importance, in their own right, of these domains for society, or of the interaction between the hard-core science information networks and those of other fields of interest, or of the need within the field of science for *feedback* from such domains to influence research priorities. It is however possible that the requirements of non-scientific users e.g. policymakers may introduce constraints which could, or should, modify the whole concept and philosophy of the future information network. Finally, the Report is not concerned with the sort of information that is required for systems or programme management. The problems at the interface with such a management information network are not discussed.

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