

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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E. DISCUSSION

a) Implications for the future of nongovernmental organization.

International nongovernmental organizations are mentioned in none of the reports considered, with the exception of the SATCOM Report — a non-UN national body. Nongovernmental organizations are mentioned in passing in the Capacity Study but the references are so vague that it is not clear what sort of NGOs are meant or whether they are international or national. The Pearson Report only mentions nonprofit bodies, again without specifying whether they are national or international. In the case of international NGOs this is somewhat strange. Individual Agencies have made a point, in the past, of calling on these bodies in resolutions and recommendations to collaborate on specific programmes, including that of the Second Development Decade. Is this to be construed as merely a public relations effort, or a ritual inclusion of the phrase « and international nongovernmental organizations », as one NGO observer remarked ? For from the UN reports it seems quite clear that they serve no function in the Second Development Decade. And yet how is this to be related to this address of the UN Secretary General to a Conference of NGOs in May 1969 :

«...let me express . my very sincere thanks to all of you, not only for your magnificent work for the United Nations and the peoples of the United Nations, but also for your consistent understanding, cooperation and support, and your very sincere spirit of dedication and devotion to the principles of the Charter...the United Nations owes all of you a deep debt of gratitude. » (quoted in Campbell, Persia. United Nations report; do NGOs have a role ? International Development (Society for International Development), vol. II, September 1969, p. 34)

(*) Extracts from : JUDGE, A.J.N. International organizations and the generation of the will to change — the information systems required. Brussels, UAI, 1970, 89 pages (UAI Study Papers INF / 5)
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National NGOs do not fair much better. The academic NGOs are given some recognition in the Capacity Study as sources of scientific and technological reports and the voluntary organizations, as a source of manpower for UNDP projects — but no others. The Report on the Mobilization of Public Opinion considers them as secondary to the individuals momentarily holding office in the organization. Yet despite this attitude, the number and variety of such bodies and of their meetings, whether national or international, continues to increase ? This is the phenomenon referred to disparagingly as « proliferation ». Why is there this growth in the number of these bodies and why does the range of their activities continue to increase ? They must perform some function in society, by definition, in sociological terms. The individuals and organizations which are members of such groups must derive some benefit from membership. Furthermore, this benefit must take the form of something which is not provided by governmental or intergovernmental structures and their activities.

Yet from the above reports it is clear that these nongovernmental structures may be considered insignificant according to the perspectives and disciplines used by the teams engaged in the UN studies. From this one may conclude either *firstly* that in fact the nongovernmental structures are of no importance in terms of the objectives of the UN for the Second - Development Decade. But in which case what is the meaning of the statement in the Capacity Study that : «...methods of implementation should be more flexible and, while maximum use should be made of the special properties possessed by the Specialized Agencies, the programme should avail itself, in agreement with governments, of all sources of knowledge or expertise that can provide an effective speedy response to the requirements of developing countries, subject only to adequate safeguards to preserve the international character of the operation. » (II, p.149)
« More frequent contracting of projects outside the system would ease the burden of direct recruitment

and also provide cooperati... to the developing countries more rapidly... » (I, p. 42)

Nongovernmental bodies do represent such sources (see SATCOM Report) and do undertake UN projects under contract. But consider this point :

« A more general criticism was the failure to consider all the various inputs at the disposal of the UN system in a comprehensive manner when a project is formulated... An extension of this problem is the inadequate participation — or, more often, the total lack of participation — at this vital stage, of all potential inputs within the system or outside it, including capital. » (II, p. 78)

Nongovernmental body information constitutes an input at the time of development project formulation. To the extent that the Capacity Study was one form of project, then one would expect that information concerning such bodies would be sought as « potential inputs » to round out understanding of the UN environment. The « total lack of participation » of international NGOs certainly proved to be the case. Nongovernmental bodies can also be considered as an important part of the social structure particularly as they blend into informal groups and movements. The Study makes the point :

« The social dimension of development, for example, is generally treated separately from the technical or economic aspects, a dichotomy which results in rhetorical « social » projects with no bearing on realities, and in shortsighted technical projects with no grasp of the human factor. If, as may happen, the UN system is too often simply trying to transplant ideas from the developed world into societies that are intrinsically different, there is a clear cut need for seeing projects in the round and ensuring that adequate measures are taken to explore, and take into account, the sociocultural circumstances within which the transfer of technical know-how and skills has to take place. »

Unfortunately the words used here could mean many things. Are the references to « social » concerned solely with the individual and the « culture » in which he moves ? In which case the problem cannot conveniently be subjected to any form of systematic analysis, since this view approximates closely to the subjective. Or is the vagueness deliberate ? But all three UN reports expressed awareness of the importance of volunteers — the individual, or social unit, bereft of his organizational setting. Each recognized the need to influence such individuals to associate themselves with development programmes. In the case of the CESI Report, the intention was even to get them to vote, or influence voters, in a particular way — to obtain more aid funds. But focussing on the individual indicates no awareness of his social environment as Bertram M. Gross,

UN Consultant, indicates in the following :

« In discussing the population structure...we divided human beings into various categories. These categories are *less* significant, however, than those which describe the way people act together in subsystems or smaller groups of various types. It is the intricate network of these subsystems that, more than anything else, establishes the framework of social structure. We must, therefore, be prepared to identify the various kinds of social groupings : families, communities, employment organizations, associations, and political parties... . . . Another important structural aspect is provided by the *continuum* from government organizations at one extreme to nongovernment organizations at the other... . . . An important factor in subsystem integration is the linkage provided by multiple membership... . . . Still greater integration is provided by *organizational links*. » (p. 194-9)

but, he continues (p. 269-70)

« The United Nations and its various specialized agencies have developed a growing series of increasingly sophisticated factual surveys of economic conditions around the world. To these have been added a number of noneconomic matters. One of the most important of these is the *Report on the World Social Situation*... now to be issued biennially... . Unfortunately, this report (1963) is unduly confined to the standard-of-living concepts developed a decade earlier. Thus, neither art nor recreation...neither political nor business institutions are included as part of the « social situation » in any country in the entire world. « Social » is used to refer to certain minimum welfare concepts...rather than to major aspects of society. Accordingly, the United Nations should be expected to broaden the kinds of information to be covered as part of the « world social situation ». »

(Gross, B.M. The State of the Nation : Social Systems Accounting. In : Bauer, R.A. (Ed.) Social Indications, Cambridge, M.I.T. 1966).

Details are available on the number of cinemas, newspapers, radios, libraries, etc, per capita in each country. *No details are available on the number of local, regional or national groups in different areas even in the developed countries.* The first set of information corresponds to methods of *informing, instructing or influencing* individuals, namely the *downward* flow of information direct from points of power — the controlling stabilizing process. The second, and missing, set corresponds to methods by which individuals and their minority groups can *express, protect and further* their particular interests. This is the corresponding *upward* flow of information, filtered and coloured by all the elements of the social structure. These are the methods by which individuals *participate* in society.

As Bertram Gross implies, « social » within the UN system appears to have come to mean physical well-being and the acquisition of the necessary physical

and mental skills to contribute as an economic unit to national economic growth — « economic and social development ». The notion of « quality of life » is missing. Yet it is precisely the quality of life which is becoming the criterion by which development is judged. A recent Fortune editorial, for example, is entitled « Reconciling progress with the quality of life » (February 1970). The values required to define the desired quality of life are formulated, refined and concretized within the network of nongovernmental bodies — interacting with the governmental network. These social structures — the organizational networks from the grass roots to the international level — are important according to this argument. The lack of attention paid to these social structures diminishes the value of the UN reports.

A *second* possibility exists however, namely that the role of the NGOs was recognized, but that political factors precluded them from being considered as partners to the UN in assisting developing countries. This would follow quite logically from the attitudes evident during the recent two year review by ECOSOC's NGO Committee of the NGO consultative relationship, « during which some delegations had made highly acrimonious attacks against certain NGOs and new restrictive regulations had been established governing NGO consultative arrangements. » (Campbell, Persia. United Nations report; do NGOs have a role ? International Development (Society for International Development), vol. II, Septembre 1969, p. 35; see also International Associations, vol. 20, January and September 1968, vol. 21, October 1969).

The move by various UN bodies, reflected in the recommendations of the three UN reports, to make direct use of volunteers may then be construed as the *first of a series of direct and deliberate attempts to bypass all nongovernmental bodies*. This has many implications for such bodies, if this proves to be the case. It will split NGOs into two camps : those anxious to maintain the consultative relationship at all costs (« There is a widespread sentiment among NGOs active in protecting human rights that NGOs will henceforth feel inhibited and restrained in criticizing governments for departing from principles of « natural justice » lest they be embroiled in proceedings to deprive them of consultative status », International Associations, vol. 21, p. 472); and those which will henceforth concentrate on their own programmes with a minimum of contact with the UN system. A more serious consequence will be the further decay in the feedback mechanism which

NGOs constitute for the UN system. This is now fairly well advanced.

These trends are of course completely against those toward greater participation in governmental decision-making processes. The UN system appears to be compensating for this by directly involving individuals ('youth') in programmes and secretariat activities. Whether this ploy proves to be satisfactory or sufficient remains to be seen.

The *third* and final possibility is that the three UN reports reflect neither analytical deficiencies, nor deliberate « anti-nongovernmental » policy but simply lack of awareness of the number and variety of bodies operating within the UN system's environment. It could be argued that the three teams came across no evidence during the course of their enquiries which indicated that nongovernmental systems had any function relevant to the teams' interests. This might follow from the point the Capacity Study noted, namely that few UN officials were aware of the importance of public information to UN programmes.

The Study did apparently make special efforts to obtain as many views as possible :

« In its efforts to look toward the end of this century, the Study asked everyone, both inside and outside the system, to advance unorthodox and heretical proposals for new action. The response was disappointing. This is hard to understand... It is difficult to escape the conclusion that those who command this kind of knowledge are unaware of the need, while those who stand in need have no access to the knowledge » (I, p. 16).

Nothing in the context qualifies the coverage of « everyone ». The Study team must therefore be fairly confident that *all* relevant contacts were made. However, the only identified international NGOs that were contacted were the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (financed by UNESCO) and the International Voluntary Service (founder member of the former). These can hardly be considered as representative of some 2,500 international NGOs in every field of human activity. In the section of the second volume which details the points made in the first, we find the equivalent to the above quote :

« The Capacity Study has consulted a very wide range of authorities : the governments of developed and developing countries; UNDP and the Executing Agencies; Resident Representatives; regional organizations inside and outside the system; and official and non-official institutions and individuals. The following observations... reflect the views that were most frequently echoed — that is to say, a general, if not in every case a total, consensus. » (11, p. 63)

This gives greater precision to the meaning of « everyone ». It is not surprising that the official bodies named in the Study, together with unidentified non-official bodies constituting together the totality of bodies considered relevant to UN development operations, proved to be in agreement.

It would be interesting to know whether any of the teams' requests for possible contacts passed through the ECOSOC and Agency divisions concerned with liaison with international NGOs. The Study's complaint concerning the lack of originality and poor response may be entirely due to the procedure of consulting people and organizations who, as the Study conclusions show, would be aware that their own activities and future status were threatened.

Similarly, it would also be interesting to know the criteria by which the persons receiving the 6000 copies of the Capacity Study — « out of print » within a month of publication — were selected. Press copies aside, this would indicate « everyone » considered to be affected by the Study's conclusions, or from whom comments were desired.

The lack of attention paid to NGOs may, however, be merely a symptom of a much more serious cause for concern. Any team faced with the problem of studying a particularly complex system like the UN has, even in its own eyes (and almost by definition), little ability, inclination or justification to explore outside its own perceived system boundaries or use disciplines other than those it possesses.

« Suppose that an organizational problem is completely solvable by one of the disciplines...How is the manager who controls the system to know which one ? Or, for that matter, how is a practitioner of any one discipline to know in a particular case if another discipline is better equipped to handle the problem than is his ? It would be rare indeed if a representative of any one of these disciplines did not feel that his approach to a particular organizational problem would be very fruitful, if not the most fruitful... » (Ackoff, R.L. Systems, organizations, and interdisciplinary research. General Systems Yearbook, vol. 5 (1960), Society for General Systems Research, p. 1-8)

This is also considered in the following as a problem of facilitating working relationships between bodies with specialized interests :

« A question that is often encountered in connection with systems work is whether a certain problem would best be handled by the specialists in its field or by people who are not very familiar with that field but do instead know the total system — or even, on a still more general level, do not either know that system but are expert in basic system design methods. The answer should be fairly obvious — but is yet often missed — a balanced cooperation between different groups is what gives the best promise of success... A basic problem of

systems theory should actually be to find out the best way of subdividing the work between different groups of specialists. Experience appears to indicate that most of the groups involved tend to neglect the importance or the difficulty of the other peoples' field... » (Langefors, Börje Theoretical analysis of information systems. Lund, Studentlitteratur, 1966, p. 35-6)

This argument could also be applied to groups of specialists working through organizations at different points on the governmental — nongovernmental, profit — nonprofit, etc. dimensions. No procedure appears to exist to guarantee that all relevant subsystems are taken into consideration or that those not taken into consideration can be listed with equal confidence. Until such a procedure is developed such studies can only be considered partial, inadequate and unlikely to excite general enthusiasm, participation or the necessary political will required for change.

b) Participation, legitimacy and will

The reports and the previous section show that the channels for participation by organized minority groups in UN activities are being eliminated or ignored, with the compensation that the members of such groups, as individuals, may become involved at an operational level in the field. This move is against the trend to greater participation in decision making « ...the next decade is likely to see continued crises of legitimacy of all our overloaded and surprised administrations... In spite of the violence of some of these confrontations, this may seem like a trivial problem compared to war or famine — until we realize the dangerous effects of these instabilities on the stability of the whole system. A high-information society now insists on being consulted and not commanded. This is reasonable enough, but it puts a further burden on administrations already faced with mounting responsibilities and new puzzles that no one yet knows how to handle. Traditional methods of election and management do not give them the speed, capacity and knowledge needed for these new problems. Too often they become swollen, incompetent, unresponsive — and vulnerable. » (Platt, John R. What we must do; a mobilization of scientists as in wartime may be the only way to solve our crisis problems.

Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, Science, 28 Novembre 1969, p. 1115-1121)

Given that « Some of the young people coming out of Universities these days have better motivation and dedication than we have had, probably since the thirties. » (II, p. 80), the acknowledged inertia and sectoral thinking in the Agencies, and the ineffectiveness and sub-optimization resulting from programme decisions based on political and nationalistic decision-making, it is questionable whether such young people would welcome either having their own will's mobi-

lized or the propriety of such a system mobilizing the will of the public. It is possible that they may seek to make greater use of new types of nongovernmental structure with greater flexibility and impact. The reports should have facilitated the involvement of such people at a decision-making level and interaction between governmental and nongovernmental structures.

C) Complexity

All the reports noted the complexity of both the problems with which the world is now faced, and the administrative, organizational and information processing systems now in existence to deal with them. This complexity is not only structural but also dynamic. Problem crises may be complex in themselves but also become particularly acute over the same period of time.

« What finally makes all of our crises still more dangerous is that they are now coming on top of each other. Most administrations... are not prepared to deal with...multiple crises, a crisis of crises all at one time... Every problem may escalate because those involved no longer have time to think straight. » (Platt, John R. op. cit.)

Nor is the degree of complexity constant, it is increasing, such that the rapidity of change is a problem in itself. The need for a *clear, comprehensive, communicable overview* becomes crucial. The changes proposed do not appear however to offer a significant means to master this complexity. There is considerable evidence that the UN reports were unaware of the actual degree of complexity since they were able to confine their attention to fragments of the overall problem.

d) Comprehensibility

At the same time as complexity increases, ability to comprehend or render comprehensible significant aspects of the situation decreases. New ways must be found to convey information on multi-country, multi-disciplinary, multi-jurisdiction problems and the organizations handling them.

This is important to :

- researchers, to understand the total problem
- planners, to formulate adequate strategies to resolve the problem
- delegates and representatives, to make informed decisions and formulate policies
- the informed public, to assess the merit of the actions taken, to reinforce the position of delegates and to detect unconsidered problems.

The four-fold problem of Comprehensibility is not considered by the Study.

e) Conservation of resources

Increased coordination and effectiveness of the activities of organizations unconnected with the UN system is a guarantee that the problems with which these bodies choose to concern themselves independently will be dealt with effectively and not become critical problems which the UN is forced to handle with its own limited funds and resources. The solution to UN internal administrative problems is therefore closely linked to non-UN organization effectiveness and UN external programme objectives.

A UN-focussed approach runs the risk of recommending organizational structures, programmes and information networks which will duplicate one another as well as more efficient and better funded structures outside the UN system. Alternatively, both the UN and non-UN solutions, in competing for resources, may be ineffective. There is much to be said for evaluating and reinforcing existing bodies within the total network rather than creating new ones. Some governmental circles may however consider that, by definition, a governmental body's operations could not duplicate that of a non governmental body. This is a confusion of means and ends and can only lead to waste of resources.

A Fortune editorial makes the point that « We have no idea how large a proportion of our present production serves only to compensate for the disutilities and diseconomies created by other parts of our production » (February 1970). This remark could be equally well applied to non-industrial and particularly administrative activities in considering the use of resources by the total network of bodies making up the world system.

f) Urgency

None of the reports conveys a sense of urgency or any concern that the world system may be sliding into an unstable state or out of control over the period of the Second Development Decade.

« Several types of crisis may reach explosion-point in the next 10 years : nuclear escalation, famine, participatory crises, race crises, and what have been called the crises of « administrative legitimacy. » (Platt, John R. -op.cit.)

Reflecting on the results of a 1968 symposium of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on long-range forecasting and planning, one participant writes :

« The appearance of today's world is chaotic. A great mass of problems, ranging from urban growth to the world food shortage, from the control of city traffic through national economies to world population, are not being tackled scientifically. Perhaps they are not

being tackled at all. Moreover there are signs of incipient revolution in many parts of society in many countries of the world. However : because one is personally in the middle of the battle, it may all seem worse than it really is. Given a week for thoughtful reflection among like-minded colleagues, it seemed likely that all these matters would fall into a new perspective, passions die down, wise and tranquil judgments prevail. These expectations were not fulfilled. At the end of the week I had come to a precisely contrary view... It is just because one is always in the middle of the battle that one too lightly accepts the chaotic conditions of today's world as normal. Moreover, the problems just mentioned as being in my mind at the start came into focus with a new and startling clarity... Action is more urgent than I had supposed. Action is less likely to be taken than I had hoped. » (Beer, Stafford. In: Jantsch, Erich (Ed.) Perspectives of Planning Paris. OECD, 1969, p. 501). And, finally, it is not only that the situation is out of control, but the attempts to correct the situation also appear to be out of control :

« Evidence is mounting that the environment which managers seek to control — or, at least, to guide or restrain — is increasing in turbulence and complexity at a rate that far exceeds the capacity of management researchers to provide new and improved methodologies to affect management's intentions. Faced with the consequences of force-fed technological change, and the concomitant changes in the social, political, psychological, and theological spheres, there is real danger that the process by which new concepts of management control are invented and developed may itself be out of control relative to the demands that are likely to be imposed upon it. »
(Introduction to a 1968 management conference session of the College of Management Control Systems — Institute of Management Sciences.)

The UN reports convey the impression of an administrative system which has run into an exceptional but otherwise unimportant growth crisis which can be corrected by juggling with the existing organizational building blocks, and the lines of responsibility, control and information flow. No need is expressed for a radically new approach. Agency and departmental « territories » are safeguarded — even the information system is based on traditional concepts of documentation. The desire is to improve the UN system, the assumption being firstly that the restructuring envisaged will be adequate to the administrative crisis, and secondly that this will be adequate to the world system crisis, and thirdly that even if it is not, it is not the responsibility of the UN to reflect on this possibility and suggest new ways of avoiding the crisis (as though there were many more United Nations where the League of Nations came from). Though the changes proposed by the Study, whether valuable or not, may be radical in terms of the vested

interests in traditional UN approaches, they appear to be most modest in terms of the crises the UN will have to face over the next decade and into the coming quarter century period (for which the Study considers its recommendations to be adequate). By tinkering with the UN system at this point in time and structuring it to deal with *one* problem administrative weaknesses are built into the new system and the stage is set for a time when the restructured system must be used (as at present), to meet problems for which it was not designed to cope. This will mean producing a crisis-type solution to deal with the problem crisis — a solution will have to be rushed through, based on the views of those bodies with which the UN system is in contact.

Is it necessary to restructure the system now in ways which can already be seen to be inadequate, when whatever is done, it will be inadequate in new ways which cannot yet be foreseen ? The system has to be capable of dealing with problems of increasing urgency without being « rushed » into a half-baked solution either in terms of « scientific », « health », « human rights », « cultural », « environmental », « developmental », « political », « peace » etc. criteria or implemented by « government », « business », « revolutionary movements », « technocrat groups », « religious groups », « computer experts », etc.

Satisfactory solutions, criteria and identification of progressively more significant and universal values, can only be derived by ensuring the optimum interaction between *all* such perspectives and groups right through to the implementation of solutions. The question of urgency is then how to ensure that balanced decisions are taken in times of world crisis to avoid narrow focus solutions under pressure which will contain the seeds of further crises and for that reason will lead to solutions which will have to be backed by force.

The UN system, on which the world depends, is *not* organized to ensure that all views on a problem and its solution are properly juxtaposed prior to a decision or that all organizational resources are used in implementing the solution.

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