1. CONSTRAINTS ON PRESENTING ACTION-ORIENTED INFORMATION

- Minding the future; a thought-experiment on presenting new information
- Principles of the conscientized international expert
- Mobilization of public opinion; yesterday's answer to today's problems
- A new global organizational order
- Displacement of the wood by the trees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minding the future; a thought-experiment on presenting new information</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles of the conscientized international expert</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization of public opinion; yesterday's answer to today's problems</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new global organizational order</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacement of the wood by the trees</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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MINDING THE FUTURE

- a thought experiment on presenting new information (*)

Introduction
Much may be learnt about the status of communication susceptible to provoke personal and social change by considering any of the variants of the following thought experiment. This involves the despatch and reception of a « perfect message », carefully reflecting on possible attitudes to it, and the action to be taken. Much may also be learnt by attempting to develop or redesign the experiment itself, possibly by adding other features to it.

Despatch problem
Consider any of the following variants:

A. Bangladeshi girl (1)
In Bangladesh a girl was born. Because of a low-probability genetic accident she has all the attributes of a supergenius. She is now 19 years old (in 1983). She is totally impoverished and bound to a dominating husband, but has had access, since an early age, in a little rundown school, to a very extensive library funded by the legacy of an eccentric. She is especially talented in the psycho-social sciences and has made (as history acknowledged 50 years later) a number of interrelated breakthroughs of fundamental significance to world society, faced with the crises she has so deeply studied. What should she send, in what form, to whom, and how should she ensure that its complex significance is understood or influences change appropriately?

B. Future Development Council (2)
In the year 2500 A.D. a form of time travel has been developed. The Planetary Development Council has the ability to transmit artefacts and individuals in order to communicate with the past. It also has long experience with an interconnected series of approaches which ensure the dynamism and harmony of a society free from injustice of any kind. There is great concern with the situation of the planet in the watershed period of the early 1980’s. What should the Council send, in what form, to whom, and how should it ensure that its complex significance is understood or influences change appropriately?

C. Ancient Council of Sages (3)
In the year 1500 B.C. in China a strange historical coincidence brought together a group of 12 extremely wise men and women. They were remarkable for their insight into human nature and society and for the manner in which they could evolve in relation to one another. They could clearly foresee long-term patterns and were particularly concerned at the crisis period which was likely to emerge under the conditions of the early 1980’s. What should the sages do or leave for that future period, in what form could they leave it, to whom should it appeal, and how should they ensure that the complex significance of their insights is understood or influences change appropriately?

D. Network of the Wise (4)
During the 1960’s a number of exceptionally gifted wise men and women formed a network which by the end of the 1970’s had developed a deep insight into the human condition. It was on the basis of their breakthroughs that society later achieved the much desired harmony and justice for all. They had the special advantage in the 1980’s of having unlimited resources at their disposal. What should the network send, in what form, to whom, and how should it ensure that its complex significance is understood or influences change appropriately?

E. United Planets Development Programme (5)
A galaxy-wide organization of sentient species has existed for millions of years. The many variant solutions to the problems of social harmony and individual development have been tested on millions of worlds. Several million years ago a United Planets Organization was brought into existence within this solar system. It duly created a U.P. Development Programme (UPDP) of which one of the principal LDP sections is the Third World (Earth) Division. In the face of the critical situation of the 1980’s, the Division has decided to change its long-standing « indirect » policy (despite the extremely low level of education on the planet, especially where communication-related matters are concerned). What should the division send, to whom, and how should it ensure that its complex significance is understood or influences change appropriately?

(*) Presented at a meeting on Forms of Presentation (Geneva, 1983) of the Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development project of the United Nations University.

(1) This case is suggested by that of the Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887-1920), famous for his work on number theory.
(2) This case has been explored as a theme in science fiction.
(3) This case is suggested by the Greek and Florentine academies.
(4) This case is suggested by the Club of Rome and Aspen networks.
(5) This case is suggested by the Doris Lessing novel - "Shikasta" (1980) and by Isaac Asimov’s - "Foundation" trilogy.
Reception problem
In each of the following variants, how can those concerned arrange their communication structure so that they receive insightful new information? How can they develop appropriate filters to select the vehicles of such information prior to having comprehended the nature of the insights?
A. U.N. Secretary General
B. U.N. University Rector
C. Government Prime Minister
D. Secret Service Director
E. University Rector
F. Individual (meaning you or me)
G. Corporation President
H. Newspaper Editor
I. Nongovernmental organization (NGO)
J. Foundation
K. Charismatic religious leader
L. "Eminence grise"

Action problem
Once the "package" containing the information has been received, the possibilities for subsequent action include:
A. Open and digest
B. Destroy
C. File ("pigeon-hole")
D. Send on to... ("buck passing")
E. Insert in "time capsule"
F. Open and misrepresent
G. Exploit to advance existing interests
H. Discuss and research it in such a way as to destroy its potential for change (coopt as an element of an existing debate)

Problem of reflecting on possible action
The following are some of the factors for the above receivers, which determine what is done with the "package":
A. What is it?
B. Nature of source ("from whom")?
C. Why was it sent?
D. How was it sent?
E. Who arranged for it to be sent?
F. When does it come from?
(out of date?)
G. Does it conform to my/our accepted style (jargon)?
H. Is it in accordance with my/our current policies?
I. Will it affect my/our status/motivation (job security/advancement/skills)?
J. Will it demand anything of me/us (a switch of allegiance, change of lifestyle)?
K. Will it render my/our activity obsolete?
L. Is it relevant to any of my/our current programmes?
M. How can I prepare myself/ourselves for its possible impact (avoiding premature judgement)?

Questions
A. Would you open the "package"? Are you sure? Think a bit more.
B. Would you expect anyone else to open it? And then?
C. How would you go about opening it to your understanding?
D. How different (change provoking) would it have to be before you could not afford to open it?
E. Would you send such a message if you had the means? Do you have them?
F. Could you send such a message if you knew what to put in it? Do you know what to put in it?
G. Do you believe that one or more such messages have been sent? If so, what have you done about it?
H. If the basic concept of a "sent message" is an "imperfection" what other form of action can the originators take?

Nasty thought
In the Despatch Problem listed above, consider the possibility that in each case the intention was "malevolent" rather than "benevolent", as has been assumed. Then consider the remaining points again in this new light. How could you distinguish between "perfect" messages of the two types? Is your difficulty part of the fundamental problem?

Afterthoughts
- If you do not know how you are part of the problem, you cannot understand the nature of the solution required.
- If you do not know how you are part of the solution, you cannot understand the nature of the problem faced.
Project participants

1. Participant representativity:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which the distribution of participants (a) by age, (b) by creed, (c) by race, (d) by ideology and (e) by nationality, reflects, in each case (within say 15%) that for the world population, or at least for that sub-set with which the project is concerned.

Any imbalance toward a predominance of one age-group, creed, race, ideology, or nationality, or any coalition thereof, runs a considerable risk of restricting the validity of any conclusions (to the degree of that imbalance) for a society in which the interests of each are improperly guaranteed and protected by the others.

2. Sexism:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which the difference in the numbers of males or females is not greater than (say) 15%.

Any imbalance runs a considerable risk of restricting the validity of any conclusions (to the degree of that imbalance) for a society composed of approximately equal numbers of each sex. The dominance of one perspective is not tolerable.

3. Discipline representation:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which the disciplines represented reflect the complete spectrum of those which consider that the topic under discussion is related to their concerns and current activities.

In a society bedevilled by complex problems it cannot be expected that any international issue can be appropriately and responsibly discussed in the absence of the insight of disciplines which may provide clues to useful action. It is intolerable that discussion should be dominated by views emerging from one discipline or group of disciplines. It has been remarked that few of the 1800 disciplines would acknowledge that their expertise is not relevant to any complex problem.

4. Qualifications:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which special care is taken to ensure that those participating are appropriately qualified to guarantee that the discussion and conclusions are of quality commensurate with the best available in institutions around the world and are not influenced by superficial considerations.

The participation of people who have devoted insufficient attention to the topic under discussion, as recognized by their peers, is irresponsible. If the project is to be of any significance, every effort must be made to protect the project from inappropriate inputs and inadequate insight.

5. Community representation:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which the representatives of the community to be affected participate on an equal footing with outside experts.

It is intolerable, in the light of past experiences of the misuse of expertise, that experts should make plans for a community without involving those to be affected right from the start. In doing so, care should be taken to ensure that all factions and minority groups are appropriately and genuinely represented at that level.

6. Economic and social equality:
I will not participate in meetings or projects in which participants are supposed to participate as equals but in which their annual salaries (including financial privileges) differ by a significant amount (e.g. 15%).

It is unreasonable to engage in projects to reduce economic and social inequalities when the participants in such projects constitute a living and unsympathetic demonstration of such inequalities.

7. Family participation:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which arrangements are made to facilitate the presence and participation of family members including children.

It is unrealistic to expect that a balanced discussion concerning the problems and future of any community can be achieved when persons representing important dimensions of that community are excluded or allocated a purely decorative role. This procedure further reinforces adult arrogance (usually male) and does much to perpetuate the unenlightened sterility of such proceedings. It constitutes a demonstration of the insidious dynamics whose prevalence in society is of so much concern. And, in so far as it is towards improving the world in which children will have to live, it is only natural that such meetings should be more responsive to children's views of the future - rather than designing their world with eyes blinkered by the views and methods of the preceding generation.

Project facilities

8. Location:
I will not participate in meetings or projects based in cities to which a disproportionate percentage of resources is already allocated at the expense of other locations whose underprivileged condition is consequently aggravated.

It is intolerable that projects to reduce the unequal allocation of resources should constitute a basic demonstration of the mentality which reinforces the continuation of such practices.

9. Transportation:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which do not require use of vehicles constructed by aerospace and automotive enterprises intimately associated with the manufacture of arms and military equipment.

Such enterprises are at the heart of the military-industrial complex and contribute directly to the arms race, to misallocation of resources, and the aggravation of world problems. Each time such vehicles are used to transport participants the position of such enterprises within the international system is reinforced.
10. Handicapped:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which make provision for the participation on an equal footing of those who may be physically handicapped, whether confined to wheel chairs, blind, deaf or with a speech impediment.

A physical handicap should not constitute an excuse for disqualifying a participant, particularly when this is reinforced by the design of the conference building, furniture, toilet and audio-visual facilities, and the arrangements made for transport and accommodation. This is especially the case when the project in concerned with problems which may give rise to the handicap by which the person is afflicted and to which that person is uniquely qualified to bear witness.

11. Equipment:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which do not use technical equipment (e.g. typewriters, computers, telephones, desk calculators, interpretation equipment, etc.) manufactured or maintained by multinational enterprises. Aside from making use of scarce resources, and displacing individuals from jobs, such products are often partly manufactured in developing countries under exploitative labour arrangements and are then sold under monopolistic conditions.

12. Ergonomic factors:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which involve the use of furniture and time schedules which respect the physiological and psychological needs of participants (as determined by such disciplines as ergonomics).

It is unreasonable to expect a group to generate useful results for a wider society when its members do violence to their posture, health and general well-being by the manner in which they are obliged to work. Furthermore, solutions to this difficulty should reflect the needs of individuals from cultures where both the actual furniture and the organization and pace of interpersonal interaction may be very different.

Working arrangements
13. Holidays:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which respect the national holidays (independence days, etc.) of the countries of the world and the weekly and other holy days of the religions of the world.

It is insulting to a people or a creed to arrange international meeting or project schedules in terms of the practices in one nation or culture whilst ignoring the practice in another which may be less favourably represented. This can only aggravate international misunderstanding and also reinforce the insensitivity of those from dominant nations and cultures.

Forms of address:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which take account of the appropriate forms of greeting and address to which people from different cultures are accustomed.

It is insensitive and possibly insulting, for example, to use the first (or given) name of a person who does not wish to be automatically coopted into the western fraternity which favours this practice.

15. Group size:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which call for interaction in groups in numbers not significantly greater than the "critical group size", namely 7-12 participants.

Groups of larger size inhibit the freedom of expression of the less articulate and less aggressive participants whose views may well be both specially relevant and less distorted by needs for personal aggrandisement. Larger groups are generally less effective in this mode of operation and therefore absorb considerable person-hours when those involved could better employ their attention on other activities.

16. Participant expression:
I will not participate in meetings or projects in which the speaking is done mainly by a small clique (representing less than 30% of the participants) whilst the remainder, for whatever reason, seldom speak, if at all.

This is an extremely inefficient use of human resources in which many travel long distances without having the opportunity to express their views and priorities. The more aggressive individuals or those speaking the congress "jargon" fluently, dominate such events which thus stand as models of the oppressive communication practices in the wider society.

Project environment and resource use
17. Resource conservation:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which make deliberate efforts to counter the wastage of natural resources normally associated with such activities.

It is only appropriate that an international project should make use of recycled paper and reusable envelopes, for example.

18. Meeting budget:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which the total budget for the preparatory meetings (including travel, accommodation, and cost of work lost) does not exceed a reasonable percentage (say 33%) of the total annual operational budget (i.e. excluding administrative overheads) of the project.

It is counter-productive to assemble people to engage in projects whose operational budgets are of the same order of magnitude as the cost of their preparatory meetings, and to waste time discussing the details and viability of such budgets.

19. Smoking:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which smoking in any form is not tolerated.

Smoking fouls the air. It is inconsiderate of non-smoking participants, is bad for the health of smokers and non-smokers, and reinforces the attitudes which ensure continued environmental pollution. It is especially inappropriate in meetings about environmental questions.

20. Alcohol consumption:
I will only participate in meetings or projects enlivened by receptions, banquets or entertainment in which alcoholic beverages are not tolerated.

Alcohol dulls the mental faculties, diminishing the value of participant contributions and thus of the exercise. In addition, it is against the principles of some major cultures and therefore offensive to them. It constitutes a significant waste of scarce resources at a time when budgetary restrictions are increasing and many viable projects go unfunded. Furthermore, it is unseemly that participants should engage in such activity, which often amounts to conspicuous overconsumption, at a time when two-thirds of the world's population is short of food or starving.

21. Meat consumption:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which the meals provided, available or recommended, do not involve consumption of animal flesh.

Such consumption is offensive to the principles of some cultures and as such is not appropriate to an international project. Delegation of the (often painful) slaughter of such animals, by people who find it distasteful and yet hope to benefit thereby, reinforces the split-minded attitude whereby the slaughter of human beings is tolerated by those who would supposedly prefer not to engage in it themselves. Further, it is
wasteful of agricultural land which could be more efficiently used to produce food for the undernourished two-thirds of the world. The conspicuous waste associated with such consumption (during intergovernmental meetings, for example) is often insulting to those whom the project is supposed to benefit.

22. Energy use:
I will not participate in meetings or projects in which the use of energy (for air-conditioning, central heating, lighting, etc.) is inconsistent with the internationally recognized need to conserve energy resources.

It is intolerable to be associated with projects which are concerned in some way with energy-related issues and yet fail to take account of international recommendations on these matters in connection with their own practices.

Project communications
23. Languages:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which arrangements are made for interpretation of discussions into and from the working home languages of all the participants, and in which equivalent arrangements are made for the working documents.

It is intolerable that participants from countries which are already underprivileged in many respects should be obliged to interact using the languages of those countries which have contributed most to maintaining their current state.

24. Practical action:
I will only participate in meetings or projects which do not confine their activity to verbal exchanges of ideas but ensure a significant convergence on practical action or real-world problems.

Debate is all too easily a substitute for action. The needed thinking has largely been done, but seldom has any impact on the problems and that is the problem. New angels continue to be discovered on the pinhead of scholastic discourse.

25. Observer detachment:
I will only participate in meetings or projects in which it is not expected that I should take up an attitude as a detached observer, unaffected and uninvolved in the societies and issues on which I am supposed to advise.

Such detachment suggests a degree of objectivity which does not correspond to the reality of the situation. At the same time, it establishes an artificial distance from the issues which protects me from any consequences of my actions as well as reducing the credibility of my advice in the eyes of those who should supposedly act upon it.

26. Community dialogue:
I will only participate in projects requiring dialogue with those to be affected by the project if the period of dialogue is extended to a point at which the community in question no longer views those coming from outside as a source of interference in their internal affairs.

It is intolerable that experts should undertake hit-and-run investigations of communities. It is well-known that it takes much time for true dialogue to emerge in such situations. It is characteristic of such communities that people who have lived with them for several decades are considered as foreigners and not to be wholly trusted. To be worthwhile, as much time as is necessary must be spent with the community in question.

27. Participant interaction:
I will not participate in meetings or projects in which the messages between participants must necessarily pass via some central group which, armed with such excuses as "time", "relevance", "mailing costs", etc., regulates or inhibits such communication.

Such communication patterns do violence to the interests which participant factions share, and impede the articulation of those interests, to the advantage of the controlling group. Again it is precisely such practices which reinforce inequalities to which the group should be sensitive and as such erodes its credibility as an instigator of meaningful change.

In view of the interaction between the constraints noted above, it is clearly improbable that any meeting or project will come up to these standards and must therefore necessarily aggravate existing problems in attempting so inappropriately to alleviate them.

I am therefore, through no fault of my own, unable to act meaningfully in terms of the values of the international community which are my own.

I will therefore refrain from action until events evolve to permit me to act in a manner consistent with these principles. By that time, however, as a continually developing being, I hope that my principles and standards would have been even further refined (*).

(*) I can be contacted by carrier pigeon, provided that someone with similar values is sent on foot to fetch the pigeon.
Mobilization of public opinion

Introduction

Development Forum (published by the UN Centre for Economic and Social Information/OPI) in its latest issue (November-December 1978) reproduces a text by Jean Ripert, Under-Secretary-General in charge of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs. The editors introduce the text (reproduced in this issue on pages 123-456) with the paragraph:

"The drive toward world development and a better economic order has made little headway in the present decade. The mobilization of public opinion as an essential element in the effort has not been very successful either. Nevertheless, the approach was right, says UN Under-Secretary-General Jean Ripert, and a more massive mobilization is indispensable. But was the approach right? How is it possible to be so sure? The current policy has been in force since the beginning of the First Development Decade and the world situation has deteriorated significantly since that time with many warnings of much worse to come in the very near future. And in that same issue of Development Forum, there are a few small symptoms of the inconsistencies underlying Jean Ripert's text. The editors have titled it "Rally public opinion" in English whilst "Mobiliser l'opinion" in French. Is "mobilization" now inappropriate to an English-speaking audience and, if so, why? The emphasis is on the media with a single passing reference to "nongovernmental organizations which relay new ideas to the public should also contribute". For a body which is usually meticulous about translation, this phrase appears in French, without mentioning nongovernmental organizations (a UN term), as "doivent également contribuer conjointement... les groupes qui servent de relais pour la diffusion d'idées nouvelles dans l'opinion publique (partis politiques, Eglises, associations laïques d'entraide et d'animation, universités et institutions de recherche, etc.)".

Clearly international NGOs play no part in this scheme, and the national ones are seen as passive relays for the "new ideas" generated by the United Nations. (Why should the UN play on the ambiguities of terms which it itself has created?) And yet in the same issue in the NGO Forum section (which is omitted from the French version) appears a text which stresses the importance of the nongovernmental organizations. It is reproduced as an insert on this page. And finally there appears a note (also absent from the much shorter French version) to the effect that "Development Forum regrets that due to financial difficulties the previously announced 11 editions of this year have been reduced to 10". Those responsible within the UN system for "mobilizing public opinion" have for too many years conveyed the impression that their approach was the correct one and completely justified the resources which have been channelled into their activities. And yet their results fail completely to match their rhetoric. Perhaps their financial difficulties will encourage a healthy re-examination of their whole philosophy. As it is one is forced into a sense of déjà vu. Some five years ago, this same sense of "déjà vu" was provoked by the UN Secretary General's own review and appraisal of the "Dissemination of information and mobilization of public opinion relative to problems of development". It seems therefore appropriate, much as it is to be regretted, that our text analyzing that report and its implications (3) appears in Jean Ripert's article on the matter. At that time the article below appeared under the heading "Mobilization for alienation versus Catalysis for participation; the critical choice for the United Nations system".

The Problem

The United Nations often appears to be rapidly destroying itself (1). Disillusionment concerning the capacity of international organization to solve world problems is now widespread. This is particularly true of the United Nations system of organizations (and extends corrosively to staff members of each secretariat).

"The image" of the system has, rightly or wrongly, vastly changed and hopes have been disappointed, and a feeling of uncertainty and doubt has emerged even among the staunchest defenders of its ideals (2).

This disillusionment, and the realization that we may have to live with the problems and adapt to them, has led to severe cuts in United Nations and Agency programme budgets now viewed as increasingly symbolic in value. The U.N. has even had difficulties in meeting its payroll and other day-to-day obligations. The situation has been considerably aggravated by the recent dollar devaluations (3). All available facts and figures indicate that a major crisis cannot be much longer postponed says one UN General Assembly document. Clearly, if a full, final and viable settlement of the Organization's urgent financial difficulties is to stand any chance of success, substantial voluntary contributions (or their equivalent) additional to those already paid or pledged must be assured. Whether they will be forthcoming in sufficient amount will be very much dependent on the response made, in the first instance, by the major powers of the United Nations. They have not been forthcoming. Politically the major powers no longer have any great need for the United Nations (4).

Provocos?

It has increasingly been recognized by the United Nations that voluntary organizations can contribute valuable resources and expertise to many UN programmes. The number of international voluntary agencies co-operation with UN specialized agencies confirms this. But in the past, it has often been a one-way process where NGOs participated in UN projects and were utilized for information and fund raising purposes, but were rarely involved in joint planning efforts. Dwain Epps of the World Council of Churches' Commission on International Affairs described this situation in 1976: "The UN is very interested in being serviced on its terms, but is hesitant to serve, to facilitate NGO contributions, or to permit effective NGO co-operation at policy-formulation levels".

Bradford Morse, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) supports expanding the co-operation of this agency with NGOs, or, as he has termed them, "professional, voluntary and citizens' organizations" (PROVOCOS), thus emphasizing what they are, rather than what they are not.

Development Forum - Nov.-Dec. 1978
With the exception of some specialized technical agencies, it has become an arena in which developing countries are placated and contained by encouraging them to spend endless hours in formulating toothless resolutions with little hope of implementation (6).

The UN Response

Faced with this situation the United Nations has only two responses, one internal, the other external. The internal response is to devote « an entirely disproportionate part of the energy of delegates and secretariats » to the matter of « coordination » — « a large scale escape » into these issues has been used by great powers to curtail the organizations’ effectiveness, according to Gunnar Myrdal (7). (This matter will be considered in a later issue). The external response is to considerably accelerate the persuasion of public opinion and the creation of « political will ». This was stressed by the Secretary General of UNCTAD as being of the highest priority in order to avoid a second Development Decade of even deeper frustration than the first one (TD/98).

To meet this challenge ECOSOC’s Centre for Economic and Social Information (now incorporated into the Office of Public Information) prepared a report (A/AC. 141/L.71) which was submitted to the fourth session (meeting from 29 September 1969) of the Preparatory Committee for the Second United Nations Development Decade. The report concerned mobilization of public opinion for the Decade. Extracts were published in International Associations (1970, No. 3, p. 154-156) and a critique appeared in the following issue (1970, No. 4, p. 221-224). The report was used as a guideline in terms of which CESI and, to some extent, OPI have been functioning since 1970.

The UN Secretary General has just produced a Review and Appraisal of the « Dissemination of Information and Mobilization of Public Opinion Relative to Problems of Development » (E/5358, 21 May 1973). This is the follow-up to the CESI report of 1969 and records progress made on the mobilization front. The information for the Secretary General’s review « is drawn from replies submitted by member States ... But in view of the limited number of replies received to the three questions raised about public attitudes, it was necessary to draw on other sources of information as well. Of the 12 replies received, 10 were from industrial countries... » (paras 3-4). This is indicative of member States’ interest in the matter. However, « While some of the submissions discussed the impact of such activities on the public mind, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, in spite of governmental efforts and similar programmes by nongovernmental organizations (8), the state of public opinion on matters of development, particularly in the industrialized countries, is generally less favourable today than it has been in the past. This tends to be borne out by empiric observation » (paras 5-6). The review notes that « It would probably be unfair to conclude that a sudden callousness had overcome public opinion in the developed countries. It is more like a closing of the gates to a pattern of generalizations perceived as outworn by over-use » (para. 20).

An Analysis

Now the question is who within the UN system is responsible for the over-use of this pattern of generalizations? How predictable was the « closing of the gates? » Why has the « political will » been further eroded ? (9). In our 1970 critique of the CESI approach we attempted to draw attention to its defects (see extract in insert). The out-of-date mentality which characterizes U.N. thinking on these matters can be illustrated by a modified version of the classic World War I « mobilization » poster (p. 410). It can be useful, if ironically and regretfully, contrasted with the current U.S. Army conscription poster whose new mentality theme and style we illustrate on page 411 (10). Analysis and evidence is of course available in support of the need for this changed approach, and what else would convince U.S. Army generals to change their traditional « tough » stance to such an extent. And yet no equivalent analysis penetrates through to the UN Public Information sections. The most succinct version of an analysis that we have encountered may be given in diagrammatic form in Fig. 1 (11).

Approach 1

Under the heading « Avoiding disillusionment », the author notes that « Approach 1 », which is the standard UN/OPI approach, may lead to a favourable reaction by the « target » body (e.g. man-in-the-street, NGO, or a national government agency) receiving the « message », but often this reaction is incorrect due to the tendency, admitted by many producing the messages, to over-sell their product (in this case the UN development programme) to give the impression that it will solve every problem about which the target body is concerned. This approach often leads to disillusionment when recommendations become realities, and the target body realizes that the UN programmes do not cure problems but may even bring additional problems in their wake. This discovery tends to lead to conflict and alienation from the UN pro-
grammes and, by association, from the programme objectives.

Approach 2
A second option often taken when the previous approach does not work, may be described as the "command" approach. This involves arranging for a directive from a body (possibly a United Nations Association or a UNESCO National Commission) on which the target body is dependent or which he or it respects, announcing that a positive response is required to the message (e.g. the UN programme). If the body has little independence then, as shown in Approach 2 (left-hand side), resentment of the approach will result in action but with alienation of those involved and a hostile attitude towards future messages. If the body is more powerful, it may be able to implement it in a counter-productive manner or ensure that it is ignored (Approach 2, right-hand side). Approach 2 probably occurs in all national government bureaucracies which have to respond to the frequent and seemingly frenetic calls for UN Days, Years, and other symbolic programmes and questionnaires.

Approach 3
The United Nations has still to learn how to implement "Approach 3", which is a minimum response to its resource problem and the achievement of its objectives. Approach 3 is much less authoritarian. The responsible body (in this case the appropriate unit of the U.N. system) approaches the external contact (the "target body" in OPI/CESI parlance) with an offer of help, pointing out what might be achieved by the external contact's information programme in a collaborative and participative enterprise and asking for ideas and assistance from that body. This approach helps the external contact (e.g. an NGO or a national government agency) to gain a correct impression of the proposed programme and to participate in its elaboration (see feedback loop). The programme finally implemented has much greater chance of motivating the external contact and of ensuring its involvement and cooperation.

Of course UN officials regularly ask for "assistance and ideas" in such arenas as NGO briefing sessions. On closer inspection however, this is either a completely ritual gesture, or is interpreted to mean publicizing the UN programme to a wider audience. No participation or feedback is involved. Nor could it be "received" by the secretariat in many cases - there is no procedural provision for such feedback messages. Whilst Approach 3 would represent a major step forward if meaningfully implemented, it is nevertheless excessively directive (12), if maximum support is to be obtained for "programmes on world problems". The wording is deliberate here. The UN seeks maximum support for action in terms of "UN programme objectives". These programme objectives however presumably represent the desires of "we the peoples...". They do not belong in some mysterious, exclusive and copyrighted manner to the United Nations system as a set of institutions, as the wording would seem to imply. The UN system therefore loses nothing, and gains much, by encouraging and facilitating external bodies in the pursuit of their own programme objectives. It is really a question of whether the UN system is interested solely in its own programmes as symbols of departmental and institutional glory, or rather in the accomplishment of its objectives, by whatever channels are available. Unfortunately it usually seems to be the former, even when (as is often the case) the programme has only sufficient resources for one staff member plus shared secretary.

Approach 4
An "Approach 4" could therefore be conceived which goes beyond marketing, even of the subtler "stimulus-response" type as ably analyzed above by Rigby. In Approach 4 the "stimulus" would not come from only one group of bodies, namely the UN Agencies, implying that only they have seen "the truth". And the stimulus would not only be received by external bodies, implying that they are all and always "retarded" in their thinking, compared to that of the U.N. system. In Approach 4 the "stimulus" would come from any active and concerned body and the "responses" would come from as many bodies as perceived the stimuli to be valid options for their own programmes. This network-oriented approach is the basis for a synergistic multiplication of resources directed toward world problems. The challenge to the U.N. system is to help give operational reality to such an approach 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.

(Extract from a review of UN "mobilization" in International Associations, 1970, no. 4)
The NGO Role

Let us see how the U.N. is meeting this challenge and moving toward a more up-to-date approach to mobilizing public opinion by involving NGO's. In December 1972 in Geneva, ECOSOC convened a "Meeting of experts on the particular role of the nongovernmental organizations on the mobilizing of public opinion and political will". Some versions of the title add "in support of the International Development Strategy". The experts were mainly from key NGO's with some participants from key national development information programmes. The meeting was chaired by Mrs Helvi Sipila, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Social and Humanitarian Matters, in the presence of Curtis Roosevelt, Chief of the ECOSOC NGO Section and W. Gibson Parker, Director of CESI/UN.

The experts came forth with exciting references to a "new style of relationship", for which a Canadian example was given, in which a much less directive approach was used. This involved going beyond existing NGO's, shifting emphasis to the participation of people and communities rather than building up membership of particular organizational empires. "Mobilization" was even condemned in favour of involving people where they can participate and where they can learn in "learning centres" - a "people approach" rather than an "institutional approach".

The counter-current however was to stress the letter by letter interpretation of the UN's International Development Strategy and only to examine NGO's possible relevance to it. Opinions were
divided in a somewhat similar manner over whether a NGO should only mean the select few which have passed all their political examinations by one means or another and achieved consultative status, or whether it should also mean non-recognized or non-international bodies. It really is quite extraordinary that in this time of increasing social crisis there should still be this U.N. impulse to say: "that body is not good enough to help"). Some experts stressed the consequent increasing isolation of the U.N. and its seeming irrelevance to international conditions and the issue. The Chairman agreed that the U.N. had lost contact with the people to whom (not with whom?) it should be talking. There were frequent references to the impression that NGO's were "used" by the U.N. rather than being in partnership with it. After an exciting start the meeting decayed considerably. A quite incredible procedure of asking paragraphs to hastily note down on scraps of paper their recommendations which were then typed up in a report examined word by word in plenary. No working documents were prepared beforehand to improve the quality of the final result. The report resulting from this lengthy process was fortunately not circulated; instead, a completely different version was later produced (as an internal document only). This is excellent in may ways. It seems to have been based on an inspired interpretation of the sense of the meeting rather than on the abortive procedure mentioned. The introduction is reproduced here (on page 413). Now the report itself contains some very exciting paragraphs. A rough analysis groups them, according to the "approaches" above, as follows: Approach 1, no paragraphs; Approach 2, 5 paragraphs; Approach 3, 8 paragraphs; Approach 4, 6 paragraphs; unclassified, 5 paragraphs.

The Current Reality

The above report was produced on 24 January 1973. The Secretary-General's Review (cited above) appeared on 21 May 1973. It does not mention the meeting or the report. Its recommendations (none of which suggest any new departures at this critical time) contain only one reference to NGO's: "It would undoubtedly be helpful to the nongovernmental organizations in enlisting public support for United Nations development objectives" (para. 26). In practice this sort of statement works out to Approach 1 again. It would seem that the meeting was one more ritualistic session to contain criticism.

To be meaningful and credible, "partnership" talk on the part of the U.N. system should extend visibly into the documents of CESI and the Office of Public Information. In the vast mountain of U.N. system reports, documents and brochures, why has only ILO produced a brochure on the NGO role? Why are there no imaginative reports and suggestions? Why has it never been more dynamic and exciting? Why have we always been "allergy" to NGO action? Why is no mention made of NGO's in the basic literature on the U.N. system which is available to the thousands of visitors to secretariat buildings, information centres and regional offices, and which is the basic ammunition of the national and local United Nations Associations? Why is the "partnership role" not stressed in the standard secretariat guided-tour speech? Why not tell the people of the channels via which they can work in partnership with the U.N. system?

By stressing the "mighty institutional image, people have no means of responding to the U.N. other than by purchasing pretty postcards and stamps, or selling the U.N. line in their home community. The latter is the traditional Approach 1 which has led to the alienation which is now all too evident, often because of the stultifying effect of the local U.N.A.'s UN-centred programmes (Approach 2).

The Critical Choice

The public information material of the U.N. must show how nongovernmental action (14) action, voluntary action, people's movements, etc., are related to, facilitated and reinforced by, U.N. action. It must show how both contribute in partnership to common objectives; objectives which are those of "We the peoples..." and not of an anxious system of institutions trying to monopolize every iota of credit in order to justify its own existence. This is not to say that the United Nations should stress the importance of the existing NGO's, which in quite a number of cases may be as institutionally distant from the people as is the United Nations (partly for similar reasons and partly in imitation of sterile, status-boosting U.N. procedures). Rather the stress should be placed on the ability of (and need for) people to act in the light of their own understanding through their own styles of organization, whether they exist as traditional NGO's or need to be created using new formulae in their own communities. It is the importance of this complementary creative mode of action which should be stressed, for at the moment NGO's constitute the underdeveloped "third world" of the organizational system (15).

It is only by achieving this form of self-mobilization, catalyzed (not organized) in part by United Nations efforts, that the progressive alienation of people from all forms of organized action can be retarded. The United Nations must trust that a massive growth in this "people action" would result in a very worthwhile percentage of it being directly of value to the specific U.N. concerns (although even the remainder constitutes a valuable, but unrecognized, component of social development). That this is likely to be the case is fairly evident from the amount of independent grass-roots concern with peace, environment, racial discrimination and other such issues. "Catalysis is the key to the needed United Nations public information effort, not "mobilization". Catalysis leads to participation, mobilization leads to alienation.

A.J.

FOOTNOTES


(3) The pensions of retired United Nations civil servants have been effectively reduced by 30-40% with no possibility of compensation under present circumstances.

(4) For example; the European Security Conference, 1965-70.


(6) Chudwick Alger. International Associations, 1972, p. 461-464. "The analysis has shown that only 53 of some 2000 less than 3%) decisions in the assemblies and executive bodies of the UN. ILO and WHO created new activities in the years 1955, 1960 and 1965."


(8) It is rather ironic to note that NGO's are mentioned here for the first time (they were not mentioned in the 1969 report) in a manner which clearly spreads the blame for the inadequacies of the CESI/ODI approach which has not attempted to involve NGO's in its approach but to "brief" them on its own approach.

(9) W. Gibson Parker, Director, CES/UN at expert meeting on Mobilization of Public Opinion. (Geneva, December 1972).

(10) The first represents "Approach 1" and the second, "Approach 3" as follows:

(11) Reproduced from an article on marketing in the computer business by H. Malcolm Rigby. TEM Review (cited above) appeared on 24 January 1973. The Secretary-General's Review (cited above) appeared on 21 May 1973. It does not mention the meeting or the report. Its recommendations (none of which suggest any new departures at this critical time) contain only one reference to NGO's: "It would undoubtedly be helpful to the nongovernmental organizations in enlisting public support for United Nations development objectives" (para. 26). In practice this sort of statement works out to Approach 1 again. It would seem that the meeting was one more ritualistic session to contain criticism.


(14) "Nongovernmental" is an extremely unfortunate term of U.N. origin. It is as conducive to negative term of U.N. origin. It is as conducive to positive effective partnership on the part of voluntary organizations in enlisting public support for the United Nations as is the United Nations itself. NGO's are men- tioned here for the first time (they were not mentioned in the 1969 report) in a manner which clearly spreads the blame for the inadequacies of the CESI/ODI approach which has not attempted to involve NGO's in its approach but to "brief" them on its own approach.

(15) This "third world" parallel is very suggestive of the situation in the Third World. "Third World" parallel is very suggestive of the situation in the Third World. But "mobilization" leads to alienation.

(16) This "third world" parallel is very suggestive of the situation in the Third World. But "mobilization" leads to alienation.
"INVISIBLE" REALITIES

Attempt at a "detailed" model of the United Nations concept of the world social system

Unmentionable by the UN

Visible to the UN

United Nations programmes / organizations

UN Regional programmes / organizations

Member State programmes / organizations

UN Field Level programmes / organizations

Masses as made up of socio-economic units

PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUAL
human beings in search of creative fulfillment and meaningful social roles

WHICH OPTION IS MOST LIKELY TO GALVANIZE THE POLITICAL WILL TO CHANGE?
Extract from the report and recommendations of the U.N. experts meeting in Geneva 13-15 December 1972 on the particular role of the NGO's in mobilizing public opinion and political will

A theme that was repeated over and over again throughout this meeting was the need for a new set of relationships between the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the people of the world. The UN's present attitude towards NGOs reflects a situation where not only are people unaware and often uninterested in the work of the United Nations, but also where the United Nations is unaware and apparently uninterested in the views and concerns of people throughout the world. For « we the people » the United Nations is becoming increasingly irrelevant and it is essential that the United Nations generally, and the Economic and Social Council in particular, understand the implications of this situation and respond to it.

In this regard, there was a strong feeling that NGOs will no longer tolerate being used by the United Nations - told what the United Nations wants them to promote without being consulted during the formulation stages of the programme. A change in the present process is imperative if the United Nations is to regain the interest and support of the world population, and engage the constituencies of the NGOs in furthering the work of the United Nations.

This change must lead to a partnership between the United Nations and NGOs from which each can mutually benefit. NGOs with their different constituencies, particularly at the national level, can offer a great variety of resources to the United Nations if the United Nations is willing to listen and be influenced by these resources (constituencies). The United Nations must be willing to involve those NGOs with specific capabilities in programme planning, formulation, and implementation. Other wise, the United Nations cannot expect NGOs to mobilize public opinion for a strategy which they had no hand in drafting. Having described this underlying theme of the meeting, the need for a new relationship, the participants emphasized that this relationship must involve all the bodies and channels of the United Nations system in a co-ordinated manner, international, regional, and national. It must involve a broader range of voluntary agencies than those NGOs presently having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The emphasis is not on numbers but on relevance and the quality of the potential contribution of the NGOs. The development and implementation of such a relationship must be a longterm policy of the United Nations, rather than the present fragmented and occasional approach. It will involve acquainting Member States and United Nations Secretariat members with the considerable contributions which have and can be made by NGOs. Equally, it will involve educating NGOs about the possibilities of working with inter-governmental organizations, and about what can and has been done by Member States and the United Nations, while making each aware of the limitations of the other.

Specifically, there was a strong feeling that the United Nations and governments must recognize that many NGOs are most effective at the national and local level. Technical cooperation and assistance materialize at the field level where political will for the goals of the International Development Strategy must be approached differently in each country.

The relationship between the UN and NGOs must be adjusted to take this into account. As an integral part of this the international NGO headquarters must be helped to facilitate liaison if the NGO contribution at all levels is to be maximized.

Underlying the discussion of the group was an urgency to bridge a gap of ignorance and misunderstanding between the governmental and non-governmental sectors. Implicit here is the idea of engaging NGOs as a means of reaching the peoples of the world in order to involve them in the international community's effort to work, through an International Development Strategy, towards a universal society where social justice, with its political and economic consequences, appears as a realistic possibility. To accomplish this the group felt that the United Nations would have to take the lead in establishing a relationship with NGOs and their constituencies where a style leading to trust and confidence was clearly evident.

1. The United Nations should include the participation of NGOs, selected on the basis of their special expertise, in the planning and drafting of programmes and reports to be submitted to the United Nations governing bodies. This should be done 1) by direct representation of NGOs in preparatory meetings, 2) by use of information collected by NGOs concerning the issue under study. This means involving NGOs in all aspects of policy-making - planning, planning and implementation. It will not only provide the United Nations with a valuable pool of expertise and information, but will also increase its awareness of public opinion.

2. Co-ordination (non-duplication) within the UN system, maximizing on existing experience, programmes and relationships, is essential, as is the need to streamline and co-ordinate channels of communications with NGOs, and to coordinate NGO programmes with those of the total UN family. (Secretariat Note: The Secretary of the Council's Committee on NGOs has reported to the Committee that lack of coordination within the UN system - rivalries and duplication - is the main reason for inhibiting more engagement from NGOs).

5. UN should develop channels for a continuous, genuine UN-NGO dialogue with a cross-section of NGOs to ensure a two-way communication with NGOs. In this regard, provision should be made for the collection of data on action taken by NGOs on issues of development. (Data on their technical assistance efforts as well as their educational, informational and political efforts).

7. Provisions should be made for developing relations with a broader range of organizations than those presently granted consultative status, including national NGOs, academic and research institutions and foundations. A review of policies and procedures for groups obtaining consultative status should be undertaken in consultation with voluntary associations and NGOs. A thorough study and analysis of NGOs and voluntary associations, their interests, activities and resource capabilities should be authorized, taking into account those studies already undertaken or planned.

10. ECOSOC should consider making appropriate arrangements to enable the public to express its view on development issues, such as holding a « public » session, and that more meetings between the ECOSOC NGO Committee and NGOs be held, with summary records. The summary records, or their equivalent, were stressed because of the need to communicate the details of such proceedings to interested parties not able to be present.

11. That CESI be encouraged to develop further, in other countries, the initiative it took in convening the public meetings in Boston and St. Louis.

13. The facilities available to NGOs directly affect their ability to fulfill their communication and other functions. The ECOSOC should look into the facilities available at Headquarters, Geneva, and other UN Offices for the purpose of improving these.
A NEW GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONAL ORDER

Principles essential to widespread response to world crises. Prepared for the planning meeting of the Planetary Initiative for the World We Choose (Stony Point, January 1981)

1. People and groups (small or large) tend to disagree on basic issues when faced with complex problems and opportunities. Such disagreement often takes the form of unrestrained mutual hostility or perceived mutual irrelevance.

2. Preoccupation with achieving or imposing consensus absorbs considerable energy, alienates or represses many willing to contribute to a solution, and necessitates oversimplifications which are ultimately dangerous. Such consensus when achieved is usually of a token nature and can seldom be satisfactorily operationalized.

3. Social development is both the consequence and catalyst of individual human development which, although essentially undefinable, is characterized by increased ability to seek out and respond harmoniously to both diversity and challenging adversity.

4. Complex problems may be understood and approached in different and seemingly contradictory ways—and the variety of such approaches tends to be essential to adequate containment and transmutation of the problem complex.

5. When coalitions can be formed on the basis of some degree of consensus this will and should be done. However, where there is resistance to such coalitions, or considerable resources are wasted on competition between coalitions, a « New Organizational Order » is vital to further success.

6. Conventional organizations, whether hierarchies or networks, achieve limited success by relying on performance at focal centres within domains over which consensus is maintained. The focalizing task at any such centre becomes virtually impossible, however, when the full range of harmonies and dissonances in the real world has to be encompassed. A « virtual centre » is called for.

7. A « New Organizational Order » may be brought into being by recognizing the fundamental distinction between local centres (focalizing local or specialized consensus) and the « unoccupied common centre » whose position is determined by the pattern of all local specialized centres constellated around it. It is the very pattern of harmonies and dissonances between the local centres which can then engender the space of which the unoccupied centre is the focal reference point. This only occurs if the mutual rejection of those most strongly opposed is contained, by allowing them appropriate separation, and is thus itself used to maintain the form of the pattern.

8. The common centre can only exist and « function » by remaining free from the pattern by which it is defined. In a « New Organizational Order » communications cannot pass through such a centre or be mediated by it. They must travel along pathways through the pattern around the circumference (as is true on this planet). This permits many coalitions with profound differences of opinion to exist simultaneously (for example even as to whether it is « day » or « night » on the planet). However, it is their very complementarity within the unbounded overall pattern which maintains the stability of that pattern and contains its dynamism.

9. Such dialectical freedom (the freedom to dialogue) can only be adequate operationally as an organizational response to the present challenges if the dialectical pattern is rendered explicit. The greater the diversity encompassed or tolerated within the pattern, the more explicit the structure of that pattern must necessarily be. Encompassing social reality in this way thus depends upon a higher order of consensus which does not itself depend upon universal consensus of a lower order at the verbal/conceptual level. However the unoccupied central position can necessarily only be defined and understood to a very limited extent from any local centre within the pattern.

10. The « New Organizational Order » can only succeed by being open to the harmonious and conflictual redistribution of information and energy around the pattern as a whole. For the pattern to maintain its coherence and integrity, care must be taken to ensure the emergence of a complement to every portion of the pattern; such counterpatterns counteract and absorb each other's excesses and energize each other's evolution.

11. The « New Organizational Order » cannot ultimately depend upon a single pattern to redistribute energies in response to present circumstances. Different patterns need to emerge according to the diversity to be interrelated and in response to the continuing pressures of human and social development. Familiarity with the range of patterning possibilities, and how their emergence may be facilitated, is an important factor in making this alternative viable.

12. The « New Organizational Order » will prove most significant when the transition between patterns can itself be made in harmony with a pattern of a yet higher order.
DISPLACEMENT OF THE WOOD BY THE TREES

The small black patterns in the design on the opposite page are included to indicate graphically a currently prevalent conceptual trend. The page constitutes a Gestalt puzzle and does have a very clear significance which once seen is obvious. The disordered impression is then permanently lost (see last paragraph for the key). Each black pattern may however be considered as representing the field of interest, concern or activity of some body or group in society. Thus, for example:

— patterns with particular characteristics are the special concern of particular disciplines, other patterns being considered as irrelevant. Each discipline therefore develops its activity in isolation from others — taken to the extreme this may lead to a form of "conceptual apartheid";

— each organization in society — as patterns of activity — whether governmental, nongovernmental, academic or commercial believes that only certain similar or matching patterns are of significance and warrant its attention or recognition. Taken to the extreme this may lead to a form of "organizational apartheid";

— each action or mission-oriented group believes that only certain pre-defined features of its social environment need to be taken into account in the conception and implementation of its programme. This leads to the well-known problems of communication between dynamic groups with different perspectives and value systems;

— each individual, despite the legal concept of equality of human rights, isolates characteristics common to his immediate contacts as being of greater absolute importance than others possessed by other individuals — thus reinforcing the many trends towards discrimination.

Each believes that the hope for a stable, peaceful and fulfilling world society lies in greater emphasis on those particular aspects of society of which he or she happens to be currently aware — just as in examining the black patterns opposite we attempt to fit them together by a detailed scrutiny of their structure. It is in this way that we expect to arrive at a more comprehensive and balanced understanding.

And yet the key to a comprehensive view is not necessarily via the greater elaboration of detail. There are other ways of looking at a maze of isolated patterns which can bring them together into a meaningful whole. The possibility of a "conceptual ecology" and an "organizational ecology" may be important in this respect.

Such a meaningful synthesis is required in many areas, for example: the need for multidisciplinary thinking to guide the long-term development of society, the need for co-ordination between different kinds of organizations concerned with related problems, and perhaps most important, the need for a fulfilling, balanced environment in which human beings can develop towards maturity. The key to the pattern opposite is obtained by looking at the network of white patterns which form letters of the alphabet linking the black patterns into lines of text (seen horizontally) thus creating a meaningful whole. The lack of education in the ability to make this type of conceptual switch of perspective in other contexts severely impedes progress towards wide recognition of world society as a meaningful organic reality. The prime concern of the Union of International Associations is with new methods of facilitating such a switch.