USE OF COMPUTERS BY NGOs

Routine Problems of NGOs

Every NGO has to face the following routine administrative problems on a regular basis:

- addressing letters, envelopes, mailings, etc.
  - magazine subscribers
  - publicity mailings
  - appeal mailings
  - questionnaire mailings
  - membership fee reminders
  - convocations, etc.

- maintaining membership lists

- congress organization (due payments, invoicing, maintaining list of participants)

- production of labels for packages ordered

- invoices for publications ordered
  - different discounts, currencies, number of copies, tax, layout, etc.
  - receipts
  - payment reminders.

- monthly and annual accounts

- membership statistics, etc.

For an international NGO this problem is made more difficult because of the need to work in several languages.

What Methods are possible for Routine Operations?

- manual system of addressing and preparing invoices
- manual system of addressograph plates and manual preparation of invoices
- electrical system of addressograph plates and accounting machines
- punched card system for addressing and invoicing (mechanografie classique)
- punched card input to tape/disk computers for invoicing and addressing

In each case, it is important to determine to what extent the equipment should be owned, hired or used via a service bureau.

Reasons for Considering New Methods

- most NGOs are concerned with spending the funds they have at their disposal as effectively as possible. It is regrettably necessary to devote a certain portion of these funds to general expenses required to maintain the organization in working order. If it is possible to reduce the funds expended in this way or alternatively make it possible for personnel to spend less time on the routine operations and more on developing the activities of the organization, then the organizational effectiveness can be increased.
it is important to consider new methods to discover whether existing
routine activities can be done more efficiently and whether funds,
personnel and equipment can be reallocated in a manner which will in-
crease the amount of 'real' activity thus avoiding what might be termed
hidden waste.

it is most important to get away from the practice in some organi-
zations where the Secretary-General himself has to check over the rou-
tine operations. He must be freed to advance the work of the organi-
zation in general.

Main Problems of NGOs with respect to Computers
- lack of knowledge as to how to go about determining whether their
  operations lend themselves to an economic computer solution.
- anxiety and doubt about the costs of computer processing
- confidence in and satisfaction with classical semi-manual methods
- sensitivity on the question of dealing with routine problems in a
  manner which smacks of commercial and profit-making attitudes, per-
haps leading to a loss of the special NGO quality
- concern that control or understanding of the organization will pass
  into the hands of 'experts' who have not got the aims of the organi-
zation at heart
- concern that specialized and expensive staff will be necessary within
  the organization
- confusion caused by the peculiar jargon favoured by computer experts
- ignorance of the fact that initial consultation with computer experts
  is a free service.

Why have Computer Companies and Commercial Service Bureaux not attempted
to contact NGOs?
Many of the above problems also exist within commercial organizations and
have been successfully dealt with by computer companies. The reason that
NGOs have not been approached are:
- the lack of awareness of the existence of international organizations
- the general impression, shared by business and government, that non-
  profit organizations are not efficiency orientated and therefore not
  interested in techniques of increasing their efficiency and effect-
  iveness
- the general impression that non-profit organizations are not suffici-
   ently highly organized to have a data processing problem
- the fear that the low budgets of NGOs imply that they cannot allocate
  extensive funds to the solution of their problems
- the low volume of 'semi-commercial' or routine information handled
- lack of approaches by NGOs which would make computer companies aware
  of the NGO market (in addition NGOs are perhaps not sufficiently
clearly defined as a class or organizations)
- computer companies, but not service bureaux, are usually more inter-
  ested in hiring a whole machine rather than partial use of a machâne.