

NOTE ON UNESCO'S PROGRAMMING METHODS AND THE DEFINITION OF ITS OBJECTIVES

1. The progress which UNESCO has made in the past few years in regard to programming has been considerable. Among the agencies of the United Nations family which have embarked on this course, UNESCO undoubtedly occupies a leading position. */ The submission of document 17C/4, modestly entitled "Draft Medium-Term Outline Plan", represents in this respect an extremely important step in the direction of a complete system of "rationalization of choices."

2. Nevertheless, all those who have contributed to the preparation of this plan seem to agree that it represents only a first stage and that much remains to be done in order to come within sight of the final objective, which is to establish a genuine programming system.

3. It is indeed very difficult to say with any great measure of certainty what exactly a "genuine programming system" should be. Though we know fairly well what a national planning system is, programming at the level of international organizations can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Thus, a single definition of the purpose to be achieved would, from the methodological standpoint, represent a considerable step forward by comparison with the existing situation.

4. The main difficulty seems to reside in the question of what is meant by an objective. The meaning of this word is clear in national planning because in most cases it is expressed in concrete terms (schools, factories, dams, kilometres of highway), because the objectives involved are investment objectives and because the means to be used in attaining them are defined by the Government which has obtained approval for them; but the position is different in the case of the objectives of an international organization.

5. The purpose of this note is to offer one opinion - among other possible opinions - concerning the nature of the objectives of an international organization such as UNESCO, and to consider how the nature of the objectives affects the concept of a medium-term plan and the methods and the structure required for preparing the plan and putting it into effect.

I. The concept of the "objective" in international organizations

6. Four basic difficulties appear to be involved in any attempt to define an objective for an international organization.

7. The first difficulty is that the objectives in question are not (save in exceptional cases **/) investment objectives. Pre-investment objectives (research, training, dissemination of ideas or standards, advice, etc.) are infinitely more difficult to identify clearly. In other words, the choice of a specific goal to be attained is essential but it is also difficult.

*/ Which it seems to share with FAO.

**/ Such as certain UNESCO objectives connected with the protection of the cultural heritage.

8. The second difficulty is that, in most sectors of activity where solving problems might constitute the objectives to be achieved, final solutions to the problems to be solved cannot, it seems, be produced rapidly. In the economic and social field, in particular, it seems that a solution to most of the problems is inconceivable for a number of decades to come. The only way of dealing with this difficulty is to introduce the idea of stages. Thus, a medium-term objective could be regarded as a typical stage on the road to the solution of a specific problem. However, the idea of stages is inseparable from the determination, however approximate and imprecise, of the general course which will lead to the solution; in other words, long-term research must produce both long-term working hypotheses and also a method for assessing how much ground is to be covered in the next few stages.

9. The third difficulty arises from the variety of the fields of activity of international organizations. Whereas national planning is designed mainly to promote the development of a country, international programming has to embrace at least two categories of problems, namely:

- development problems, mainly involving pre-investment activities in countries whose levels and types of development vary considerably, and
- problems of international co-operation, for which there is no comparable model at the national level.

In defining objectives for each of these two types of problems, different considerations are involved and different methods must be used.

10. Lastly, the fourth and perhaps the most serious difficulty arises from the fact that an international organization must bear in mind the objectives of each of its member States (and try to help them in defining their objectives), and it must at the same time identify its own objectives. The objectives of the international organization itself, conditioned as they are by the objectives of each of its member States, must not be confused with those of the international community which the organization is called upon to assist. For example, in the campaign for full school enrolment, each member State gets its own objectives, and the achievement of results in this field is the responsibility of each Government. UNESCO also has decided upon certain important action to be taken in this sector, but the definition of its own objectives must not -- as the result of an inadmissible transposition of responsibilities -- be confused with the definition of the objectives of its member States.

11. The solution of these difficulties would solve the problem of the "genuine system of international programming". I am convinced that the solution can be produced only by a collective effort, and in gradual stages. The views expressed in this note should be considered as a contribution to this collective effort.

II. Objectives and problems

12. Clearly, definition of the problem must precede the definition of objectives. Accordingly, it seems that special attention should be paid to the method whereby problems are identified, gradually defined and considered, since it is at this stage that co-operation between the Secretariat of an international organization and its member States can help to show which aspects of the subject under consideration are the responsibility of States and which are the responsibility of the organization.

13. In this connexion, UNESCO has indeed had in operation for many years a procedure for prior consultation with member States. The principle underlying this consultation is of fundamental value. Nevertheless, I believe that this procedure should be improved, since it offers a solution to the main difficulties encountered in the definition of objectives.

14. Instead of a general and open consultation on future policy guidelines, there should, I feel, be a problem-by-problem consultation. I believe that, for each of the various UNESCO sectors, a consolidated and succinct document should be prepared containing:

- a list of the main problems existing in the sector (as seen by the Secretariat, in the light of all the views previously expressed by member States on the subject);
- an account of past efforts to solve the problem (for example, action taken over the past ten years) by governments, under bilateral assistance arrangements, by international organizations and by UNESCO itself, and a description of the stage reached at the time concerned (critical appraisal);
- a definition of the possible role of member States and of UNESCO in solving the problem during the medium-term period under consideration: and a definition of the stage to be reached, i.e. of the objectives;
- proposals concerning ways of achieving each type of objective thus identified.

15. The replies received from member States and the results of the overall review by the UNESCO Executive Board could thus be combined in the form of a "Draft Medium-Term Plan", whose contents would be arranged in the manner indicated in the foregoing paragraph for problem-by-problem consultation, so that they could serve as a basis for a comprehensive and well-informed discussion.

III. The concept of the medium-term plan

16. The essential purpose of a medium-term plan is, I think, to provide in a single consolidated document a complete picture ranging from problems to objectives. This concept differs appreciably from the idea underlying document 17C/4, which is essentially a projection of the description of UNESCO's activities over a six-year period (i.e. four years beyond the period covered by document 17C/5). I wish to stress here that the effort made in document 17C/4 is of great value, but it does not in itself facilitate the identification of objectives, as would a document which began with a definition of the problems.

17. The arrangement of the material in document 17C/4 does not at first sight suggest that medium-term planning is an exercise essentially different from that which precedes the preparation of the two-year programme budget. The logical conclusion of this approach would be to present all the material in a single document. However, I believe that in order to overcome all the difficulties mentioned above, it is essential to have one specific document which will serve as a basis for wide-ranging and well-informed discussions between the secretariat and member States, and which will deal with the problems themselves, before attempting to define the objectives to be achieved.

18. The "Draft Medium-Term Plan" should therefore, in my view, satisfy the following requirements. It should be a "fixed time-limit" plan, outlining a plan of action for UNESCO over six years, since no objective representing a step on the way to the solution of a specific problem can be evaluated or even established if the target date for achieving it can be deferred every two years. This concept of a "fixed time-limit" plan seems to be essential in order to give any consistent meaning to the concept of the objective and to provide a possibility of establishing serious methods of evaluation.

19. Within the framework of the long-term policies which would be outlined, a list of problems for UNESCO should be identified. These could reasonably be limited to about twenty (the example given in the annex for the Education Sector identifies six problems, by way of illustration). For each of these problems, the list would indicate:

- the form in which the problem arises;
- the action hitherto taken to solve it;
- long-term prospects, including the general lines of the solution anticipated for the future;
- the stage selected for the six coming years, i.e. identification of medium-term objectives by the community of member States and by UNESCO;
- the means to be used in order to achieve each objective with, of course, a statement of their financial implications (at least in order of magnitude).

20. In the annex to this document, I have given my own personal idea of a medium-term programme of this kind for the Education Sector. It is not the work of a specialist, and an outline of this kind would of course require revision and correction by the competent persons. However, I did wish to offer a concrete example of a certain concept of the document in which objectives are defined, since this is what I believe the medium-term plan should be.

21. Undoubtedly the problems of the Education Sector, which are mainly development problems, are those which present the least difficulties in an exercise of this kind. In the other sectors, where the "international co-operation" element is much larger, I feel that a resolute step should be taken in the direction of formulating "intergovernmental programmes", as has already been done in document 17C/4 for most of the activities of the Natural Sciences Sector.

IV. Consequences with regard to methods and structures

22. If this concept of a medium-term plan is adopted, the consequences with regard to methods and structures should, I think, be as follows:

23. The period for preparing the plan should extend over about two years, and should include the following stages:

(a) compilation of dossiers by country and by problem: dossiers kept permanently up to date should provide an inventory of the basic data on each of the problems, preferably classified by countries whenever possible (and this is undoubtedly possible in the case of all development problems). This function should be performed by the programming services of each sector;

(b) preparation of sectoral notes (critical appraisals) summarizing the information in the basic dossiers: this work should be undertaken by the programming services in each sector with the assistance of the central programming service, at the beginning of the preparation of the plan;

(c) consolidation of these notes and preparation, problem by problem, of the dossier to be used in the consultation of member States;

(d) consultation of member States;

(e) preparation of the draft plan;

(f) consideration of the draft plan by the Executive Board;

(g) referral of the final draft to the General Conference which is to consider the six-year plan.

24. The periodicity of the General Conferences would not have to be changed, but the Conference which elaborates and approves the plan for a period of six years should be considered much more important than the others. The two following Conferences would have to approve the two-year programme budgets, undertake evaluations of the plans as they are being carried out, conduct methodological investigations with a view to improving the machinery, and possibly consider how UNESCO's plan links up with those of other organizations.

25. The present programming structures should be strengthened, particularly in order to allow for the compilation of the country dossiers and the performance of various preparatory, methodological and evaluation tasks. In particular, I think it is essential to develop the programming services in each sector (which have not yet been really organized) and to establish an internal body within the Secretariat - which might be known as the "Programming Supervisory Board" - to co-ordinate all these activities. */

26. The structures of UNESCO themselves should be better adapted to the types of objectives which are eventually defined. In this connexion, I should like to refer to the suggestions made in my report on intersectoral programmes for dividing problems into four categories - problems of development, problems of international co-operation, problems of modern civilization and problems concerning the promotion of ideas or standards. In UNESCO, I do not think that the practical consequences of this classification would concern either the Education Sector, which deals essentially with problems of development, or the Natural Sciences Sector, which deals primarily with problems of international scientific co-operation. On the other hand, the implications might be more important for the Social Sciences and Communication Sectors.

27. With regard to the Social Sciences Sector, I am convinced that steps should be taken to confirm that its function is to study the problems of modern civilization, by entrusting it with the leadership in regard to most of the problems which are now described as interdisciplinary or intersectoral. The objectives would mainly be research which this Sector could carry out itself, or for which it could organize intergovernmental programmes.

*/ Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a body specializing in long-term forecasting.

28. With regard to the Communication Sector, I think it should be made responsible for all the technical problems involved in the promotion of ideas or standards which have been politically approved by the General Conference. This sector seems to me to be experiencing particular difficulties in defining its own objectives, and I think these difficulties are increased by the fact that it is now responsible for purely administrative activities (statistics, library), which have hardly any connexion with its fundamental objectives. If promotional objectives can be clearly identified, it is obvious to my mind that a special structure should be set up to deal with them. The function of these specialized promotional structures, directed by specialists, would be to undertake the preliminary technical studies required for formulating policies (market studies) and to use all the technical media (publications, press, radio, films) necessary for their implementation. This individualization of promotional problems and objectives would have a salutary effect in clarifying all UNESCO's other objectives in all sectors.

Conclusion

29. Such, in brief, are the main lines of action which should, I think, be considered with a view to making further progress on the road to better programming. It is, I believe, essential to bear in mind that it is extremely difficult to define objectives if one considers that objectives must be identifiable results as concrete as possible and marking a definite stage on the way towards the solution of a specific problem. But the definition of objectives of this kind, which would be tantamount to long-odds betting, might perhaps mobilize international public opinion to such an extent that the odds are worthwhile considering. The methods which are proposed in this note for achieving this end ("fixed time-limit" plans, the identification, explanation and consideration of problems in a medium-term plan, the methodology for this plan, the suggestions for changes in structures) are only one solution among many and only a contribution to a collective effort which will have to be undertaken on a considerable scale.

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New York, 17 October 1972

Annex

OUTLINE OF A POSSIBLE DRAFT MEDIUM-TERM
PLAN FOR THE EDUCATION SECTOR

My personal idea of a "medium-term plan" for the Education Sector can be presented as follows:

- The document should state the problems, the objectives which UNESCO intends to achieve and the methods it proposes to adopt for achieving them.
- Consequently the arrangement of the material in the document could be as follows:
 1. A description of the world educational situation;
 2. A list of the main problems which the community of member States must try to solve;
 3. A definition of the possible role of UNESCO in solving these problems by international co-operation or by assistance to member States;
 4. A list of the main objectives to be achieved by UNESCO during the period 1973-1978;
 5. An indication of the methods to be used for achieving each type of objective;
 6. An indication of the methods to be used for preparing the next plan (feasibility studies).
- This outline could be developed in greater detail - on the understanding of course that it is a kind of imaginary framework and not the result of research which must be undertaken on a collective basis and systematically organized - and its development could proceed along the following lines:
 1. The world educational situation in 1972
 - (a) The world of education

Teachers, pupils, students, budgets: main statistics and percentages. The situation could be illustrated by a number of maps showing for each country, for example:

 - The number of teachers in relation to the total population, to the total active population, and to the total active population educated beyond the secondary education level;

- The number of pupils and students, in relation to the total population;
- The number of persons who have completed their secondary education, in relation to the total population and to the number of literate persons;
- The national education budget, in relation to the total national budget and to the GNP;
- Educational productivity: the number of pupils taught annually at different levels and leaving school for employment;
- Lastly, a comparison of the foregoing figures and certain others for 1960 and 1970.

(b) The world outside the educational system:

- Map showing adult illiteracy figures throughout the world;
- Map showing numbers of children of school age who are not attending school;
- Map giving a comparison of these two latter figures for 1960 and 1970.

(c) Qualitative comments on the educational situation.

To avoid over-generalization in these comments, a distinction should be made between the principal categories of countries from the standpoint of education problems.

Without prejudging the typology to be adopted and the consequent division into categories, it seems that a distinction could at least be made between:

- Countries with full school enrolment (the developed world): type of education problems arising in these countries; difficulties encountered in the different grades of education and their characteristics; chief resemblances and differences between Europe, North America and the socialist countries in this respect etc.
- Semi-developed countries where enrolment rates seem to be relatively high (more than 60 per cent in primary schools, for example): classification of these countries by regions, the relative volume of their financial contribution to education, the efficiency of their education systems, the adult illiteracy situation, the problem of education in relation to employment, etc.
- Countries with a high adult illiteracy figure and low school enrolment rates: chief characteristics and problems.

2. List of the main problems which the community of member States must try to solve

The list of the main problems to be included under this heading can be compiled only on the basis of a study of the type described in the preceding paragraph, undertaken in detail by qualified specialists.

Nevertheless, on the basis of information derived from various UNESCO documents and from document 17C/4 itself, I suggest the following as a possible list:

- A. Adult illiteracy;
- B. The possibility of achieving full school enrolment (at least in primary schools) in all countries where school facilities are inadequate;
- C. The adaptation of education systems to the needs of employment;
- D. The efficiency of education systems in countries with only average enrolment rates;
- E. Renewal of education systems in the developed countries;
- F. Life-long education.^{1/}

3. Definition of the possible role of UNESCO in solving these problems by international co-operation or by assistance to member States

- Description of the manner in which these problems have been dealt with over the last ten years by member States, under bilateral assistance arrangements, by other international agencies and by UNESCO.
- Results obtained. The apparent insolubility of some of these problems by traditional means in the short term.
- Value of the most recent experiments, particularly in the use of audio-visual methods to facilitate teaching and literacy work (problems A and B above), ^{2/} and of experiments with inter-disciplinary advisory teams to frame educational policies for the solution of problem D, etc.
- Distinction between matters which are the responsibility of member States themselves and action which UNESCO can take to help them or facilitate co-operation between them.

^{1/} This is not an exhaustive list and is only suggested as an illustration, subject to correction or revision. For instance, the problem of the qualifications of teaching staff might also be included. The important point is that the essential problems should be included in a list which is as short as possible.

^{2/} cf., in 17C/4, paragraphs:

1137 to 1139: Development and adaptation of the technologies of education to the needs of member States.

1147 to 1157: Generalization of the use of modern materials and techniques and assistance to member States.

4051: "Industrialization" of methods in literacy work.

4018: Use of satellites.

4. Determination of the main objectives to be achieved by UNESCO during the period 1973-1978

The analyses outlined in the three preceding paragraphs are designed solely to assist in determining possible objectives for UNESCO during the next six-year period.

Determination of the objectives is, of course, the most difficult and delicate task, since it involves:

- identifying areas in which UNESCO's impact on the fundamental problems of the international community can be most effective,
- finding a formulation which is as specific as possible and will have the maximum possible effect in mobilizing efforts,
- helping the General Conference to make a difficult political choice, etc.

The following examples are therefore formulated solely with the intention of providing some idea of the form which the objectives might take.

Problems A and B: adult illiteracy and the possibility of full school enrolment.

These two problems are dealt with together for two reasons, as follows:

- the use of audio-visual aids for radically changing educational methods, at least at the primary level, and for "industrializing" literacy work, holds out a genuine hope of providing a solution to both problems much more quickly than with the traditional methods hitherto used. 1/
- the eradication of illiteracy, a distant but fundamental and noble objective, depends on the joint solution of both these problems.

As already indicated document 17 C/4 does certainly mention these possibilities, but in a dispersed and comparatively tentative way which does not seem to be in line with the knowledge already acquired and the possibilities already explored.

Historically it seems to be clear that:

- for solving a problem such as the eradication of illiteracy which had hitherto seemed to be almost insoluble (cf. 17 C/4, section 1.25 - Literacy - paragraph 1256),

1/ Other "alternative strategies" might also be considered.

- or for hastening full school enrolment, which has almost been abandoned as an official quantitative objective as a result of the qualitative set-backs experienced during the last ten years,

it is essential to make a determined effort to speed up the introduction of these new techniques in conjunction with appropriate teaching methods.

An example of this kind gives some idea of the risk involved (or which ought to be involved) in the choice of an objective. Either the objective is too ambitious and, since it is obviously not going to be achieved, it does not help to mobilize efforts; or it is not ambitious enough, in which case the risks are avoided but the objective no longer has any impact or mobilizing effect.

It is therefore essential to steer a course between these two hazards; and this is possible only on the basis of extremely detailed preliminary studies.

However, it would seem that the studies and experiments already carried out in this field give grounds for believing that it is now possible to envisage eradication of illiteracy within the foreseeable future, and full school enrolment without a serious decline in the quality of teaching, and all this at a cost which has not yet been estimated but which will be considerably lower than the cost of the traditional methods hitherto used (cf. Report of the International Commission on the Development of Education, chapter VI).

If this is so, it would seem that the search for possible objectives in these two fields might be directed towards the establishment of a definite plan for the eradication of illiteracy in the world. A period of six years would seem reasonable for preparing such a plan, which might be the subject of an intergovernmental programme with UNESCO acting as co-ordinator, adviser, expert and organizer of the experiments required.

A plan of this kind might include:

- definition of the new methods using audio-visual techniques,
- definition of teaching models including the use of these methods,
- estimates of costs adapted to various countries,
- establishment of institutional organization models for each country,
- estimates of time-limits within which the two objectives - eradication of illiteracy and full school enrolment - can be achieved.

Preparation of the plan should of course be accompanied by experiments, and at the time of its publication the first results of these experiments should also be published as a guarantee of its credibility.

Such a plan is of course merely a more ambitious and systematic presentation of the objectives which are to be found dispersed among the programmes of the different sectors or in the experiments already undertaken in the context of aid to member States. But the definition of concrete and precise objectives designed to have a mobilizing effect is nothing more than an exercise in presentation and formulation accompanied by commitments concerning achievement.

Problem C

The problem of the adaptation of the education system to the needs of employment is one which concerns all member States regardless of their level of development. It is another problem for which certain elements of a solution (planning of education, curricula, structures and methods of education) are provided in many aspects of UNESCO's programmes; but a clear, precise and concrete objective for the solution of this problem has not yet been defined and is in fact not very easy to define.

I must admit that I find it difficult to make up my mind in this case regarding the type of objective. It might be:

- the publication of an exhaustive and comprehensive study on the problem, and particularly on the reasons for its existence,
- experiments in reducing unemployment among persons with a secondary education in certain selected countries where the problem is particularly serious,
- preparation of an intergovernmental programme on the subject.

Problem D

Efficiency of education systems in countries with only average enrolment rates.

Document 17 C/4 itself provides an example of what can be done in this respect, since it recognizes the necessity of selecting a number of countries (studies with a view to the preparation of national critical appraisals proposed in paragraphs 1056-1067, selection of six countries, two for each two-year period).

The objective in this case might be key critical appraisal experiments and attempts to produce far-reaching improvements in the weaker education systems with the help of interdisciplinary UNESCO teams. It might also include a programme for the training of experts, a detailed programme complete with figures.

Problem E

The problem of the renewal of education systems in developed countries.

The preparation of an "intergovernmental programme" seems to be a possible type of objective in this case as well.

Problem F

Life-long education.

In this case, key experiments in a limited number of countries which are as different from one another as possible would seem to be one possible objective.

Remarks on the formulation of objectives

Generally speaking, the task of formulating objectives is extremely difficult. It should not be undertaken in an improvised manner, and in any case it always involves a risk of error. The only studies which should be undertaken are feasibility studies, or in any case a distinction in time should be made between preliminary studies, basic studies and the possibilities of action in one form or another. The objectives most easy to formulate are probably those which are historically the most important and the most easily accessible. A hierarchy of objectives should also be proposed.

5. Indication of the methods to be used for achieving each type of objective

What is needed here is a description of methods, and I personally would believe that they should be described in more or less the same way as in document 17 C/4 but more succinctly (the indication of the financial implications is in any case essential if one wishes to remain specific).

6. Long-term objectives and the preparation of the next plan: grouping of feasibility studies and research.

This last section should strive both:

- to include long-term forecasts (what are the probable long-term trends),
- and to provide a list of feasibility studies to be undertaken while this plan is being implemented, in order to help in the preparation of the next plan.

This should make it possible to regroup in a coherent manner all studies and research whose results do not lead to immediate action or relate to objectives which have already been formulated in this plan.