

General Problems

QUESTION 1: In your view, what are the main problems which face the world today and which, by their probable development between now and the end of the century and more particularly over the next decade, seem to you likely to have major impact on the future of societies, on the satisfaction of the aspirations and needs of peoples and of individuals, and on the achievement of "a decent life in the future" and "further social progress"?

Background:

The problem orientation in Unesco's planning dates from the 17th session (1972) when the General Conference set aside the draft plan (17C/4) and asked the Director-General to develop a framework for medium-term planning based on an analysis of the major world problems in the fields of the Organization's competence. The resulting document (18C/4) identified four inter-related problem areas: human rights and peace, advancement of knowledge, development, and harmony between man and environment. Within these four areas 12 problems were identified ranging from human rights and peace to such instrumentalities as concepts and methodologies. They were clearly not formulated on comparable levels of generality, nor with reference to comparable aspects of the world.

The 18th session of the General Conference accepted the definition of problem areas and reduced the number of problems from 12 to 10, mainly by redefining and combining some. But the unevenness of levels of generality and reference remained in the 10 problems which became the basis of the first Medium-Term Plan (19C/4). The definition and analysis of world problems in 19C/4, 20C/4 and 21C/4 have not changed substantially and it seems unlikely that the responses to this question will result in a major shift in the analysis contained in the introduction to 21C/4.

Considerations:

It should be noted that this question makes no reference to Unesco's fields of competence. There is a subtle difference between referring to world problems in Unesco's fields of competence and referring to all world problems and then asking what role Unesco can play in the solution of these problems through contributions in its fields of competence. While the latter approach seems sensible enough, this subtle difference could elicit responses that could potentially add several world problems to Unesco's list and disperse the Organization's efforts even further.