

A FRESH LOOK AT THE ROLE OF ECOSOC  
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comprehensive work programme for the United Nations, the compilation and codification of work completed or in progress, the efforts to come to grips with evaluation of international performance. If the Council is to develop its role in this area (and we suggest that it be looked at as the major role), we should be clear about what we mean by the word "co-ordination".

ADMINISTRATIVE CO-ORDINATION

Co-ordination is often seen as nothing more than a restraining function, the weeding out of marginal projects, the imposition of rules and procedures, the settling of jurisdictional disputes - in short, what might be called administrative co-ordination. Restraint from the centre undoubtedly has its part to play. Only at the centre, after all, is it possible to have some notion of the competing claims on resources. The limits of funds, personnel, and even time, available alone require someone, somewhere, to be in a position to reconcile these competing claims. We have all accepted this principle in our national governments; it lies at the very heart of planning and is the motive force behind the use of priorities. I do not think any of us would deny the same need for United Nations machinery.

But there is another, more vital, aspect to co-ordination - the appraisal of existing United Nations efforts with a view to identifying gaps, shifting emphasis and indicating new directions. In this sense, ECOSOC has a responsibility to serve as a focus for the thinking of the United Nations on the general questions which development poses and the policies which development demands. This aspect of co-ordination can go still further. The Council could be not only a focus for international thinking but a catalyst for international action where such action is required. In almost every case, that action will be put in train by some other body within the United Nations, a body specifically established and equipped to do the job; but the Council has a role to play in providing the stimulus.

RISK OF HAPHAZARD APPROACH

Through the very variety of specialized bodies we have set up, we may be running the risk of a haphazard approach to economic and social development.

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We have redressed some inequalities but there may well be others. Are we, to take an example at random, placing sufficient emphasis on the application and adaptation of new technological developments to the needs of the developing countries? Is the United Nations system directing enough effort towards analysing the effects of demographic change? Is the current emphasis on agricultural production sufficient for the needs of self-sustained economic and social development? These are purely random examples; it may be that, in each case, no more emphasis, no change in direction, is needed at the moment. But it should be ECOSOC that keeps a watchful eye on the workings of our complex international machinery and signals the need for a drop more oil here or a bit more weight there as the need arises.

We recognize that there is some concern that a strengthened Council may intervene in the substantive work of the specialized bodies, both within the United Nations itself and within the United Nations system. There are particular fears that the Council might cut across the work of UNCTAD. In our view, the Council should not become engaged in any way in substantive operations. To use an industrial metaphor in an age of increasing industrialization, international machinery has been set up to produce certain results. It is no part of the Council's work to take over the production line. Rather its role must be to see that the machinery works smoothly, that the individual components work together, and that the end products meet the needs of the international community. The same governments represented around this table are the same governments represented in UNCTAD, in the Functional and Regional Commissions, in the standing committees, and in the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations system. Co-ordination within individual governments is our best guarantee of co-ordination on an international plane.

This role of co-ordination on the broadest of policy fronts is the role which we think the Economic and Social Council might develop for itself. It is both ambitious and difficult. Even under the most auspicious circumstances it could not be achieved overnight, or even in the course of several years. Certainly, it cannot be brought into being simply by saying this is the way matters should be handled. Nonetheless, we think it is practicable and worth trying....