

## THE STRATEGY SMOKESCREEN

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Development is for people and by people. If anything has been learnt from the last few decades, it is that economic and social development cannot be isolated from each other. So any planning begins with people — their needs their aspirations, their capabilities of working for the improvement of their lot. In the present situation, anti-poverty policies have to be given priority. Societies with too glaring gaps cannot survive. In

other words, in poor countries development planning has to begin with the items that people themselves begin with when they build on their own livelihood in a non-industrialized society; these are water, land, food, sanitation, shelter, knowledge. Targets should be formulated based on the ambition to provide freedom from poverty for all. A number of United Nations special conferences in recent years have made exercises in target formulation for poor countries and poor people everywhere; water for all, health for all, employment for all, a sound environment, knowledge of family planning for all and so on. Knowledge to read and write and to count seems to me — on the basis also of the Swedish experience — to be of such fundamental importance for advancement in all other fields of human activity that I cannot understand UNESCO's present unwillingness to push it as the top priority of all development endeavours.

Such targets formulated for each country's specific situation should be calculated in relation to physical resources and reasonable standards: cost-estimated and time-planned. Here the United Nations can be of great service to its members. Experiences from other countries' failures and successes should be made known — not just general statistics or the polished success-stories from the technical assistance treasury. Lessons from neighbouring poor countries should be taught

through special subregional endeavours. The UN organizations could get resources for such services to poorer countries by decreasing the production of repetitive resolutions shortening and dropping conferences — there are said to be 9,000 of them this year — and by concentrating on fewer items. This would also decrease the work load on hundreds of national ministries and would help them provide for higher quality in their participation. Recently in Manila, another 'strategy-like' lengthy resolution emerged from UNCTAD V. It repeated a series of similar texts from earlier years calling for a substantial new programme of action for the least developed countries' development in the 1980's with particular reference to their most pressing social needs. These countries are called upon to plan ambitiously for their own endeavours. At the same time the resolution says that serious plans can be made and implemented only if there is assurance that substantial additional resources are committed from outside.

In my opinion, the likelihood of such assurances (on top of the expected decision to replenish the World Bank IDA funds) is next to nil whatever resolutions may be voted. However, if the poorest countries in collaboration with UN bodies, and making use of the material from the UN special conferences of the 1970s give priority to the most obvious social needs of their poor, and begin to implement such programmes their request for external resources should not pass unnoticed. On the basis of such specified programmes for individual countries, some UN body could make

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aggregate projections in order to see where groups of countries and the world as a whole seem to be moving. Starting from that material, a discussion on priorities could follow which might result in some kinds of 'strategic' statements on bottle necks and possible solutions.

To apply once again the method of overall projections, followed by general so-called strategies and then requests for unspecified support for the economies of poorer countries will produce no tangible result.

The United Nations must do better than produce dead letters. The world has had enough of them. ECONOMIC REVIEW May 1980