

THE UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Report on the Institute; Activities as of October 1968

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, which started work in 1964 in Geneva, has recently published the first edition of a bulletin which describes the work currently undertaken at the Institute and provides short summaries of recently completed projects.¹

The Institute's main concern is research into problems and policies of social development and relationships between various types of social development and economic development during different phases of economic growth. While training has not so far been one of its activities, the Institute is at present (October 1968) participating at the request of the United Nations Office of Technical Cooperation and the Division of Social Development in a Social Planning Course for government officials of developing countries.

The Research may be described under four programmes:

- I. Empirical studies of the interrelations between social and economic development;
- II. The methodology of social planning;
- III. The introduction of social change and innovation at the local level;
- IV. Regional development research.

In order to facilitate its own studies (mainly in *Programme I*) and as a contribution to similar research elsewhere, the Institute has established a Data Bank for electronic processing, which at present contains approximately 100 social and economic indicators, listed in *Research Notes*, for the year 1960 or thereabouts covering 115 countries with a population in 1960 of one million or over. The collection of data is continuing to fill gaps in the coverage for 1960 and to add data for 1950 and for 1965.

The Data Bank has been most intensively used in connection with a study of the "Contents and Measurement of Development" which is now in progress. An attempt is made to supplement the most commonly used index of development, *per capita* national income, by measures which reflect more adequately the economic and social aspects of development, as well as structural and distributional aspects.

Research Notes outlines the consecutive phases of this study and gives some preliminary findings.

The first step, following the compilation of the statistics in the Data Bank on variables that might reasonably be regarded as indicators of development, was an analysis of the interrelations of these indicators by means of correlation matrices, for all countries and for developed and developing countries separately.

Secondly, a reservoir of indicators was formed by selecting from the matrices those indicators that showed relatively high average correlations with the other indicators but were not obvious duplicates of one another. The selected indicators were also required to meet certain other criteria; for example, data had to be available for a minimum number of developed and developing countries and an attempt was made to obtain coverage of a wide range of sectors. In this way 42 indicators were selected from the original 100.

Thirdly, the reservoir of indicators was further reduced to 24 indicators, each having the following properties: (a) a statistically significant average correlation with the other 41 indicators, at least as high as 0.60; (b) correlation coefficients of ≥ 0.60 with at least 20 other indicators in the reservoir; (c) a correlation of less than 0.90 with any other indicator with which it could be considered to overlap by definition. This core may be said to reflect or represent the essence of development, in a cross-national statistical sense, given the available data.

Work is now under way to build up a unitary index of development by combining the 24 indicators. Trial runs suggest that the resulting index may give a somewhat different ranking from that obtained by *per capita* national income, and a somewhat different picture of the relation between developed and developing countries.

Another approach to the quantitative analysis of development in this study (which is also used in the construction of the unitary index) involves setting up empirical "correspondence

¹*Research Notes, A Review of recent and current studies conducted at the Institute, No. 1, June 1968, Geneva, available in English, French and Spanish. The second issue (July 1969) is now also available.*

points” between indicator scales, so that it will be possible to state what value on a given scale (say 50 years on the life expectation scale) in practice corresponds to what value on every other scale (e.g., school enrolment, *per capita* energy consumption). An illustrative example is given in Chart 1.²

It will be seen from Chart 1 that the \$500 *per capita* GNP³ line appears to act as a kind of threshold for a number of indicators. Below this line relatively large intervals on the scales of social indicators and of those relating to the structure of the labour force correspond to fairly small intervals on the scales of more specifically economic indicators such as *per capita* consumption of energy and steel. The opposite is the case for points above the \$500 *per capita* GNP line.

The correspondence points method, used in Chart 1, reveals the patterns of development as they normally exist, but it does not demonstrate casual relationships nor does it necessarily reflect optimum patterns of development. (Patterns of fast-growing countries may differ consistently from the norm.) However, certain hypotheses are suggested by the existing patterns, which might be tested further. The Chart may also be used by national planners to detect possible imbalances as between different factors of development in their own country, though the determination of actual imbalances is a matter that can be decided only in the national context.

Other work in this project includes an experimental approach to the determination of the *distribution* of levels of living and income in circumstances where direct data are not available. This approach is based on the discrepancy between a country's levels of development on different types of indicators, for example between the level achieved, on the one hand, in certain basic indicators of elementary needs, such as health and, on the other hand, the level achieved in indicators of “affluence” such as the possession of private motor cars. A preliminary analysis has shown a high correlation between (a) a few available and presumably reliable figures on income distribution, and (b) the measure of discrepancy between a country's rank in life expectation and its rank in motor cars per 1,000 population.

While the work so far described has been based on cross-national comparisons for 1960, this is being supplemented by inter-temporal analysis of specific countries for the period 1950 to 1965.

An attempt will be made also to develop a typology of countries according to certain items which may be regarded as “given”, such as area, climate or geographical location, which development planning cannot normally change, but of which it should take account.

A separate study of the Institute has followed up the thesis that relatively high social levels (in relation to *per capita* GDP) are associated with above-average economic growth (and inversely) by examining the relationship between economic and social factors within the national context of six countries (Ceylon, Chile, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mexico and Morocco).

Work on the methodology of social planning, *Programme II*, is concerned with general approaches and analytic methods by which social policy and social planning can be better integrated with economic policy and economic planning in the interests of overall development.

The projects here are as follows:

1. A planning model with social objectives as final aims.
2. An illustrative model based on the “fastest economic growth that is socially admissible”.
3. A system-type approach to the integration of economic and social planning.
4. Decision-making in social allocation and analysis of cost-effectiveness methods.
5. A suggestion for an empirical production function representing the productivity effect of social factors.
6. Measuring social variables in real terms and the level of living index.

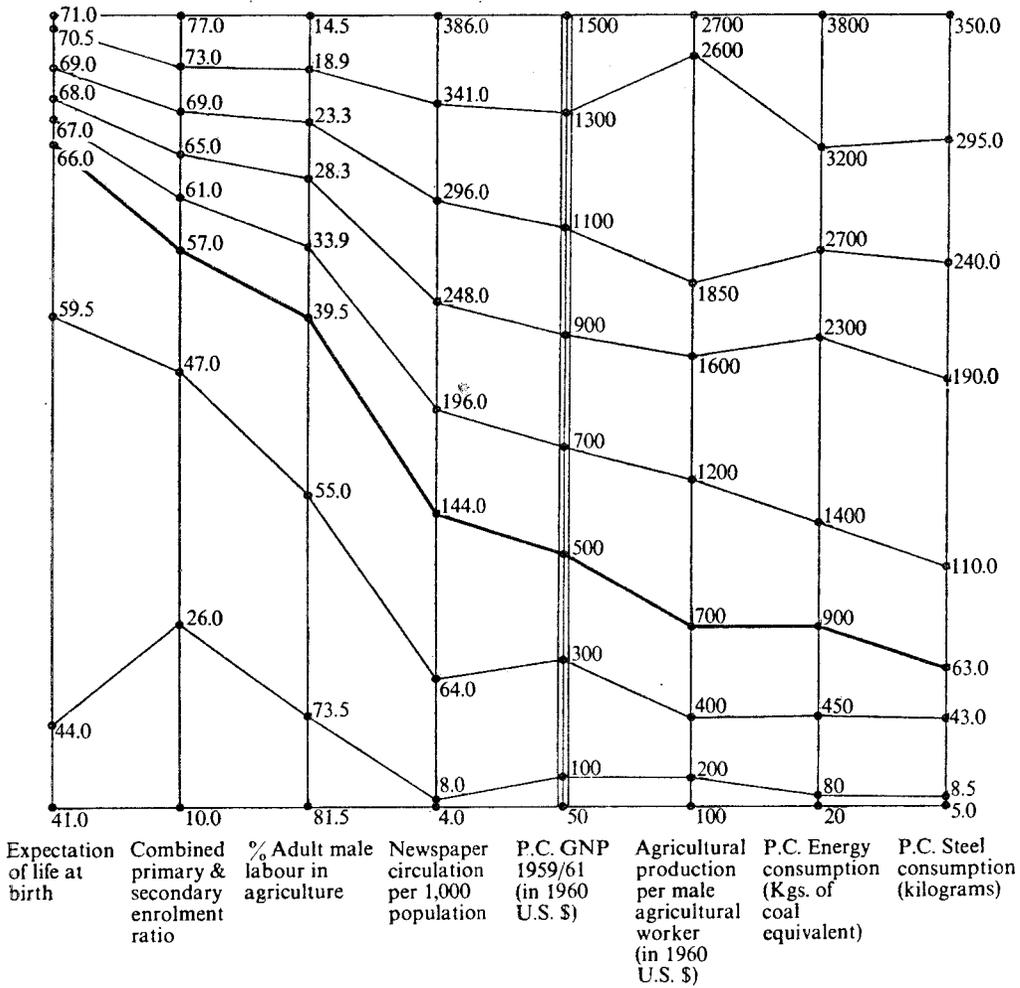
Programme III, the Institute's largest programme, deals with the introduction of social change and innovation at the local level. Field surveys are being undertaken to determine the factors that influence popular participation in development projects. Such factors include the methods of introducing change, the experiences and attitudes of the local populations, learning and socialization processes, organizational and institutional framework for participation, the management of change, etc.

²Continuing work on the analysis of correspondence points since the publication of *Research Notes* has made it possible to show here a more detailed diagram than is contained in the booklet.

³It should be noted that *per capita* GNP is not one of the indicators in the core. It has been included in the chart to facilitate reference to a familiar and widely used indicator.

CHART 1

CORRESPONDENCE POINTS FOR SELECTED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS, AROUND 1960



Project titles are as follows:

1. Survey of reactions of local populations to innovation and change.
2. Rural institutions as agents of planned change.
3. Organization of land redistribution beneficiaries.
4. Mail-surveys of experts in industrial management and vocational training.
5. Research on preparation of children for modernization in developing communities.

A Centre was set up in 1967 within the Institute to carry out research on Regional Development (*Programme IV*) in the framework of the more general United Nations Research and Training Programme in Regional Development (regions in this context are areas within a country). Work has begun on the following four projects:

1. Regional development—Experiences and prospects (in the different developed and developing areas of the world).
2. Information systems for regional development planning.
3. Sociological aspects of regional development.
4. Centres of growth as instruments of regional development and modernization.

The Institute is also providing the research component of a research-training centre in regional development being set up in Japan.