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### STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES BASED ON THE USE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

#### COMMUNICATIONS REGARDING THE USE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS IN THE MODIFIED METHODOLOGY FOR FORMULATING THE UNITED NATIONS SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS

##### Addendum

Letter dated 10 May 1984 from the Director, Office of Statistics,  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
addressed to the Director, United Nations Statistical Office

Further to my letter of 6 January 1984 I would like to convey to you our position on the above subject.

First, we wonder whether non-economic variables can supplement a strictly economic index such as national income in determining "capacity to pay". The former can be (and are in many cases) associated to a proper societal context and carry a set of normative concepts such as the establishment of goals or concerns, their achievement, justice in the satisfaction of human needs, etc. They may be, and often are, independent from wealth. Thus, two countries with comparable incomes per capita might present rather different performance as regards health, nutrition, education, employment, housing, etc. This can be explained by their success or failure in formulating and enforcing adequate social policies very often depending on administrative skills (rather scarce in many cases and mainly for historical reasons).

Secondly, we have to deal with the validity of literacy as a measure of the level of "educational development". It is clear that educational development, as development itself, is multidimensional and does not allow any specific simple index to act as a proxy for the whole system's comprehensive performance. It is also evident that literacy is a major dimension in assessing levels of educational development. However, it is, together with the level of educational attainment, a "stock" concept that needs to be

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supplemented with other indices such as: enrolment ratios, intake ratios, successful completion, level transition, wastage, expenditure, etc. In short, literacy is a necessary indicator to assess educational development although it is not sufficient. Thus, two countries could have similar literacy levels but the attainment of their adult population - both quantitatively (i.e. graduates from secondary education and from higher education) and qualitatively (a more or less adequate balance between types and fields of training, e.g., science and technology, engineering, medicine, versus humanities) - would make them rather different in terms of "educational development".

Besides the validity and relevance aspects it is useful also to keep in mind the time span required by many countries for releasing their literacy data (sometimes more than 5 years).

To sum up, it is practically impossible to group countries according to their literacy levels due to the fact that a large number of their recent figures are not available. Our estimations are only reasonably reliable for those having data from censuses or surveys during the last 10 years or so, which leaves a high proportion out of such a group.

However, I would like to repeat our reservations as to the convenience of using educational development (once it is defined) as a discriminant criteria for the formulation of the United Nations scale of assessments. If, notwithstanding, it is found essential to choose an indicator in this field, we believe that the overall enrolment ratio (composed of aggregated enrolment at all levels of education over relevant population) gives an approximation to present educational effort and it presents furthermore the advantage of being available for practically all countries. None the less, it is unfortunately not possible for us to provide the norm of this indicator by which different levels of educational development can be distinguished.

I do not think that the content of this reply should be treated as confidential, and we would very much appreciate your letting us know the approach eventually retained by the Committee on Contributions.

Your reaction to this letter would also be most welcome.

(Signed) H. BEN-AMOR  
Director  
Office of Statistics

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