

Assessment of ECOSOC as Potential Organ of the United Nations

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Abstract

This article outlines the intentions of the UN charter with ECOSOC, one of five charter-based organs of the United Nations. It suggests how they can be fulfilled in its endeavor to develop macro-social and macro-economic strategies beneficial for the entire UN membership for the General Assembly to adopt. Hence, to discuss the world population's economic and social livelihood conditions with member-states sharing memorable constructive experiences so that every member-state can duplicate what works to improve people's livelihood. The potential of ECOSOC in this regard may not yet be fully explored, but holds a promising outcome that does not lead to conflict; on the contrary, it leads to cooperation and peaceful co-existence. And that is essentially what the United Nations is about. ECOSOC is an essential engine for that travel.

Keywords: UN Charter, ECOSOC's mandate, economic conditions, sustainable development goals (SDGs), financing the SDGs.

Introduction: What is ECOSOC?

ECOSOC is the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, one of the five charter-based organs of the UN (UN Charter, 1965). It is assigned the function of “*international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples*” (Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations). Twenty international organizations, regional commissions, and autonomous entities report annually to the Economic and Social Council. ECOSOC initiates studies and reports on global economic and social issues, including cultural, educational, health, and related matters. It discusses the problems in detail and can make recommendations concerning any of them to the General Assembly (UNGA), the members of the United Nations, and the specialized agencies concerned (Article 62). Cross-cutting issues involving multiple entities, such as providing humanitarian assistance, are striking items for debate.

What does ECOSOC look like?

ECOSOC is a mini version of the General Assembly, 54 member states elected by the Assembly for an overlapping three-year term with geographic rotation. About 60 percent of the UN membership has been elected to ECOSOC. The presidency rotates among the United Nations Regional Groups in UNGA to ensure equal representation.

ECOSOC meets twice a year in April and July. Venues of the latter alternate between the UN Headquarters in New York and the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Over 1600 NGOs have consultative status with the ECOSOC and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), reviewing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is convened under the auspices of ECOSOC or the General Assembly. The July sessions, attended by government representatives and adjacent corridors crowded with NGO staffers, have attracted the expression: “The NGO marketplace,” crowded by influencers trying to reach the ears of UN member states. A huge juxtaposition of diversified opinions and attitudes filled the UN then.

What does ECOSOC do?

ECOSOC is the main organ to further economic and social cooperation and development by the UN Charter. It is tasked with the formulation of policy recommendations to the General

Assembly, other parts of the UN system, and member states. It coordinates the UN's economic and social fields, humanitarian affairs included, especially regarding the 20 specialized agencies, regional commissions, and autonomous entities, which all annually report to it. The Economic and Social Council may coordinate the activities of such agencies and entities through consultations with and recommendations to them, through recommendations to the General Assembly and the member states (Article 57 read with Article 63 of the Charter), and is also mandated to consult with non-governmental organizations (Article 71). Based on these reports, ECOSOC can discuss which particular agency/entity lives up to its mandate or the reasonability of and extent to which specific mandates and aid programming overlap in various organizations and entities, in principle, leaving room for inappropriate assistance programming. It may also discuss, for example, if unhealthy competition exists, if one or more agencies guard their turf at the cost of the target population, and if a change of course or thorough reform is recommendable. Mandates of entities were drawn mainly up 50 to 70 years ago and to some extent on a budding basis. A new entity was established when a problem had to be addressed instead of fixing it with what was there or could be, as evidenced by the case of the World Food Programme (WFP) that came into existence in 1966 when FAO was considered inadequate to provide food aid to the world's poorest. Recent UN reform efforts have been an ongoing exercise since 1997 and beforehand. At the age of 78, there is bound to be a need for more to make it fit for purpose: to address the world population's needs. Members of ECOSOC can raise their concerns in the relevant discussion segments of ECOSOC and set their mark on the UN.

As representatives of the General Assembly, ECOSOC does deal with issues of concern to the entire UN membership and would have the well-being of humanity as its guiding star, not merely that of a particular segment. It is "one for all and all for one," as Alexandre Dumas aptly put it. All behind what one needs, and one behind what all need.

Given the prominence it was intended to have by the Charter, the forum for discussing macro-policies, ECOSOC could address all people's economic and social needs and development on an all-win basis. Still, though ECOSOC is singled out as the main organ to promote these three issues worldwide, it is well-known that economic problems have been, to a large extent, left mainly to international financial institutions, such as the Bretton Woods institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, known for supporting developing countries to invest in much-needed infrastructure, yet at times imposing severe loan conditions on such lands, tying them in debts for years – which eventually they were partially relieved from, and in connection with relief of unilateral debt to member states, assisted by the world of art, notably the singer Bono and his campaign for debt relief for developing countries. Much later, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, came onto the scene with essential debate sessions on world economic issues. Nonetheless, it constitutes a significant part of ECOSOC's mandate – and ECOSOC is still alive and kicking - as demonstrated by the message By Munir Akram, former President of ECOSOC, dated 23 January 2021 in connection with the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Economic and Social Council. In outlining ECOSOC's response to ongoing challenges to its work of the most severe health and economic crisis since the UN was established and the Economic and Social Council was created, his message affirms that ECOSOC has the mandate and the responsibility to respond to the challenges and the will to do so (speech ECOSOC, 2021).

Further, financial problems often are the root causes of conflict in the form of inequitable resource allocation within a population, where a minority gets the lion's share, the majority little or nothing, and may even have means taken from. Consequently, the balance in the Charter between resolving socioeconomic causes of conflict and maintaining peace and security is not upheld. In this light, strengthening the ECOSOC secretariat with holistic, high-caliber world economics expertise could help restore the intended balance.

ECOSOC should address economic and social causes of conflict per Article 55 of the Charter. The article promotes: A) higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; B) solutions to international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and C) universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. Where these causes of conflict could not be resolved or alleviated in time, the Security Council would deal with the consequences, primarily through peaceful settlement and, if that fails, through forceful action recommended in Chapter VII of the Charter.

In this connection, ECOSOC may furnish information to the Security Council upon request (article 65). As for the impoverishment of a large part of the world population, a most potent cause of conflict, ECOSOC can develop all-gain macro-economic strategies for the entire world and macro-social strategy that would remove causes of conflict and help ensure that “WE THE PEOPLES” who declared the UN Charter advance economically and socially (Preamble with Article 62.1). Members of ECOSOC would have valuable lessons to share in both fields and could offer input based on experience gained of what works and what doesn’t. The regular sessions of ECOSOC could accommodate that.

As for the impoverishment of a large part of the world population, a most potent cause of conflict, current or potential, ECOSOC can develop for the General Assembly all-gain macro-economic strategies for the whole world and macro-social strategies that could remove causes of conflict and help ensure that everybody advances economically and socially, (Article 62.1 of the Charter).

What comes to mind here is the Global Development Goals (SDGs), which are due to be accomplished by 2030. At this point, halfway into the period scheduled, we are on shaky ground, not because of ECOSOC, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, subsequent worldwide high inflation rates, looming economic crisis, and towering food prices, augmented by conflicts boiling around the globe, though the ground started trembling under the SDGs beforehand—time to get our acts together and move determinedly forward. ECOSOC could be the catalyst for that, more than it already is.

The balance between the deprivation of social and economic conditions of the world population and conflicts worldwide is at stake if the General Assembly doesn’t listen to ECOSOC and the Security Council does neither listen to the Assembly nor ECOSOC. As a result, the world population pays the price with deteriorating living conditions and social unrest or warlike situations. A constructive balance must be found and maintained for benign conditions to settle for humanity. The key word is listening. Those who do not listen do not learn from others; those who do not know are left behind while others move forward. Sharp stratification could ensue, ranging from a few extremely rich to multitudes of extremely poor who struggle to stay alive. ECOSOC is the place where poverty can be addressed in a substantial, comprehensive, and persistent manner.

The following model is suggested to restore a functional balance, which could serve a constructive purpose:

- (i) ECOSOC is the forum for discussing and initiating actions and for making recommendations to the General Assembly in both economic and social matters, including compelling, international economic cooperation for the benefit of all;
- (ii) the General Assembly is the organ for adopting these strategies.
- (iii) ECOSOC is responsible for the subsequent coordination of their implementation by the specialized agencies and entities of the UN, including international financial institutions.

The model would balance attempts to address socio-economic causes of conflict and those to maintain and enforce peace and security in the Charter, i.e., Chapter IX against Chapters VI and VII. It would inspire the United Nations to move forward on the issues of poverty eradication, conflict prevention, and conflict management. That is, striving to manage and lead the world into peace and prosperity.

Reform of ECOSOC for maintenance of international peace and security and fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As mentioned, ECOSOC could be utilized more in conflict prevention and resolution. There is also room for more involvement in the SDG process, and ECOSOC is potentially improved as per Article 55 of the Charter. In this light, ECOSOC could discuss and devise strategies for improving social cohesion within Member States and ways and means to build inclusive, effective, and accountable government institutions with in-built anti-corruption measures. ECOSOC could also devise strategies for fair and democratic use of natural resources and revenues from taxation to benefit the entire population, including support to vulnerable segments, ensuring that no one is left behind. In short, equitable resource-sharing and promoting equality within the people and government institutions in which the population can have confidence. Members of ECOSOC would have important lessons to share in both areas and could offer input based on experience gained of what works and what doesn't. The regular sessions of ECOSOC could accommodate this kind of experience-sharing.

It is well-known that social cohesion requires understanding within the population of other people's lives and conditions and empathy with one another, especially the disadvantaged. This is best obtained in direct encounters and dialogue among people of different social backgrounds. That requires networking among people, which civil society, including the NGO sector, can contribute as a supplement to what people do on their own accord. The more varied the networking, the more understanding ensues, and the better-equipped people will be to understand one another and feel connected. As connectivity increases, social cohesion will be enhanced. Member states with vibrant civil societies in which citizens relate to one another, crisscrossing the entire nation aided by a large, experienced NGO sector, could offer their lessons learned, such as what has been achieved, for instance, with voluntary work for the support of the vulnerable, or adult education programs where people sign up for a subject of interest and get to know one another, or sports programs with a great popular appeal where *corps d'esprit* is developed, etc. The media, social media included, is already playing a significant role in informing on the situation of the entire population of a country so that everybody knows that hardship exists and where it is found, but can be addressed and improved with the support of fellow human beings, the state and government and NGO institutions. Democratic representation in the governing boards of media institutions is vital to ensure broad-based coverage of the situation of the various population groups in a country. Member states with experience in these fields could offer their lessons learned.

Social cohesion also requires the reduction of inequality, and that takes redistribution of wealth, which in turn takes taxation, with the broadest shoulders contributing most to the national economy, and social welfare programs for those in need so that everybody gets a share of the development of a country and nobody goes hungry. In measuring economic inequality, the Gini coefficient and the Gini index are valuable tools; the smaller they prove, the better (One World in Data, 2023). They can measure development in time and enable countries to follow up with appropriate policies to reduce high values. Countries with experience in making use of the Gini coefficient and Gini index for the reduction of inequality can provide advice to ECOSOC.

Inequality, however, has connotations other than economic ones. Stereotypes and discriminative laws and practices spur inequality. They are best removed by new legislation in which everybody

is equal before the law, irrespective of gender and ethnicity, followed by corresponding training and dialogue with groups where stereotypes flourish within the population. Incorporating the entire human rights regime in national law is essential here. Member states with constructive experience with stereotype eradication could share their lessons with others in ECOSOC. Here again, a balanced coverage by the media of the situation of stereotyped groups is vital so that a fuller picture of them emerges within the population. Also, social media could be a very effective tool to combat stereotypes, even though a stern tone sometimes flourishes. Well-known, concerned citizens could go active on social media, provide information, and campaign against stereotypes. Serving often as role models, they stand a good chance of being listened to. Religious institutions preaching tolerance also play an essential part and could be encouraged to take up the issues regularly and frequently. Member states with constructive experience in combatting intolerance in these or other ways could provide input to ECOSOC.

As mentioned, ECOSOC can develop for the General Assembly all-gain macro-economic strategies for the full world and macro-social method that would remove causes of conflict and help ensure that WE, THE PEOPLES, who declared the UN Charter, advance economically and socially (Article 61.2) and serve as support strategies for the fulfillment of the SDGs. Also, with ECOSOC as THE forum for discussing and initiating actions and for making recommendations to the General Assembly in both economic and social affairs, including practical international economic cooperation for the benefit of all, the General Assembly as the organ for the adoption of these strategies, and ECOSOC responsible for the subsequent coordination of their implementation by the specialized agencies, including international financial institutions, the balance between addressing socio-economic causes of conflict and maintenance and enforcement of international peace and security in the Charter would be upheld.

ECOSOC should, from its forthcoming session onwards, discuss and address the detrimental impact of macro-economic conditions on the world population, which, if not resolved, could become a significant cause of tomorrow's strife, resulting in a battle between the poor and the rich as long as one percent of the world population owns as much as all the 99 percent others. Economic issues are a significant part of ECOSOC's mandate, and Article 56, encouraging member states to strive to fulfill Article 55, includes state members of ECOSOC. One or more member states may wish to press for the issue to be entered into the agenda of ECOSOC, and the NGO community within and across member states may want to lobby for it, more than already done. As the Charter foresaw, ECOSOC should strengthen its commitment to promote all peoples' economic and social advancement. This can be done by making the United Nations the leader in all-gain macro-economic policies.

UN agencies, funds, and programs report to ECOSOC, including on activities related to the SDGs. Tight cooperation between ECOSOC and specialized agencies would be necessary to monitor the SDG process and its deliberations with UN entities and member states on the fulfillment. The Secretariat could devise a strategy that appoints lead agencies within the UN system for every SDG, based on which ECOSOC would monitor progress made towards 2030 of UN action every year to supplement other SDG monitoring mechanisms. The more these issues are observed, the greater the chances of fulfilling the SDGs in time. Tight cooperation with social research institutions worldwide is essential so that social science research follows the process, particularly the parameter that no one must be left behind, and provides appropriate advice to the various entities.

Need of a Greta Thunberg for the fulfillment of the sustainable development goals in time

The overarching theme of the 17 SDGs is leaving no one behind. Adopted by all 193 UN member states in a resolution by UNGA at its seventieth session on 25 September 2015 (A/RES/70/1), they are due to be fulfilled by 2030. Hence, all UN member states support the defining instrument.

Half the scheduled period has now passed, and prospects of meeting the targets on time seem dim. The top level of the UN secretariat has announced it in public. The deputy secretary-general was the first to do so at the spring meeting with the Bretton Woods Institutions on 12 April 2023 (UN News A, 2023). Five days later, the secretary-general followed it up with a warning to member states that the agenda for sustainable development goals is turning into a “mirage of what might have been,” pointing out that since the Covid-19 pandemic, the wealthiest one percent of the world population accumulated nearly twice as much new wealth as the rest of it combined (UN News B, 2023). That is within a five-year timespan. So far, it has gone up and down with the fulfillment of the sustainable development goals in uneven sequences. Most are down, with exceptions - global access to the Internet, for example, an issue essential for development. Overall, there is a long way to go to implement the 17 SDGs in time, but the travel has been set into motion.

The 17 SDGs were conceived as equally important and interlinked. At the midpoint, 15 percent is on track, 48 percent moderately so, and 37 percent at stagnation or regress. What matters most to a good deal of the world population is the first SDG, eradicating all forms of poverty. Projections, however, indicate that half a billion will be left in poverty at the end of the period in 2030 if current trends continue. The dream of no more small boys and girls begging for a living in a country seems vague. They may end up dying from poverty instead. The first goal is to upgrade all those in the absolute poverty segment with an income of less than USD 2.15 per person per day, which is by all standards a shallow level of income, not least for families with handicapped adults or many small children that cannot lend a hand to income-generation for the family. Some distance is yet to go (GSDGR, 2023).

As for the second SDG, zero hunger, another SDG high on the public list of priorities, presents a gloomy picture, too. The number of hungry and food-insecure people has risen since 2015, and in 2022 was estimated at 735 million people facing chronic hunger, against 607 in 2019. Projections indicate that by 2030, more than 600 million worldwide will still be poverty-stricken. The SDG is marked by regress (GSDGR, 2023). Here, we find the kids with hunger-swollen bellies and fatigue in the eyes that shock and drive us to act because nobody should go hungry to bed, adult or child, in a world of abundance. That isn't fair. It must be eradicated. Urgent action is required.

Regarding SDG 4, good health and well-being, it is noteworthy that ODA prioritized the development of health facilities in developing countries for many years, and remarkable progress was obtained (GSDGR,2023). There was an understanding in the international community of focusing on improved popular health with substantial support to health facilities and services, of which reducing the under-five mortality rate was an important issue since it gave the population improved health conditions for years ahead. Research by N. T. Mathew and W. Scott at UNRISD monitoring decades of health conditions in the Indian state of Kerala at UNRISD confirmed it in 1985. Against this background, and most notably due to national convictions and efforts, 146 of 200 countries or areas are well underway to reach the target for the under-5 mortality rates. Moreover, the expected lifetime increased in many countries, except countries stricken by war and natural disasters. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, however, progress has been somewhat impeded, and deaths caused by significant illnesses, such as TB and malaria, have increased (GSDGR, 2023)

The following example, SDG 4, quality education for everybody, proficiency of literacy and numeracy, though partially up to targets, reveals one of the better stories that also marks the SDG implementation process, The pandemic resulted in a setback of previous gains in reaching targets, with the closure of schools worldwide and annual financing gaps in education faced by lower and middle-income countries. In autumn 2023, 244 million young people were estimated to not attend school by UNESCO (UN News C, 2023), and one in six countries assessed to fully achieve

the goal by 2020, while 84 million children and adults are still out of school in 2030 (GSDGR, 2023). The picture we have of kids carrying books under their arms and striving to get to school, with or without shoes on their feet, will not be complete but marked by partial emptiness. Those who do not get educated are a token of a world community that does not sufficiently care for its people. The world cannot function as it could without quality education for all its inhabitants: “WE THE PEOPLES of the United Nations who declared the Charter for humanity. Further, for young people, universal quality education is the most important SDG since it frames them for a sustainable future and enables them to run the world from their perspectives (UN News D, 2023). They represent the future and need to be listened to. The better qualified they become, the better they will be up to the job. It is in humanity’s best interest to invest in its young people.

Moving on to SDG 6, universal coverage of clean water and sanitation, a lot has been achieved. More needs to be done. Despite significant progress in previous years focusing on access to clean water and sanitation in national and multinational development programming, billions of people were in 2022 without clean water and sanitation, and rural populations were worst hit. While water efficiency had risen by 9 percent, water stress, and scarcity are significant concerns in many parts of the world, and 2.4 billion people were wrestling with life in water-stressed countries in 2020. Current rates of clean water and sanitation programs would need to increase by three to six times to meet SDG 6 by 2030 (GSDGR, 2023.). There is a common perception that overconsumption in one country of ample water supply will not negatively affect the water supply in water-stressed countries. Yet the reality of the situation suggests otherwise since the planet has been discovered to possess a limited capacity to regenerate its water supplies. Hence, exercising a water economy in countries of water abundance could ease water stress elsewhere. There is a certain limited planetary quantity annually available to the global population. It is up to us to share it in a way that leaves nobody short of it, and do not forget that three days without drinking water can blow the candle of life out in the human body. We cannot have it on our conscience that long showers of running water to keep our bodies clean or watering plants in our gardens to spur profusion of flowers at times of restriction contributes to a lack of drinking water needed for survival elsewhere, child or adult. Responsible consumption of water is called for—better today than tomorrow.

On a more positive note, global access to the Internet, a part of SDG 9 relating to industry, innovation, and infrastructure, seems almost complete since more than 95 percent of the world population has mobile broadband access, at least 3G. Connecting up the frontier, however, proves difficult. Still, almost all of us can now surf the Internet and look up whatever we want to learn about. We can follow whatever is happening almost all over the planet, find out how our dear ones on the other side of the globe are faring through face-time conversation, look up gainful employment opportunities, and go for the good ideas presented on the screen—a live reality showing up just in front of us. An immense discovery, the Internet, and we are a part of it, using it assiduously.

As concerns SDG 13, climate action, the Paris Agreement of 2015 acceded by 193 member states and three other areas made it crystal clear that global, rising temperatures driven by the worldwide greenhouse gas emission of CO₂ and methane, need to be kept at a global surface temperature under 1.5 degrees Celsius - the critical tipping point – in 2050 at the latest to be sure to prevent the vast disasters in its wake which we have been subjected to over a protracted period (The Paris Agreement, 2015). The climate change emanating from Mother Nature and humankind by burning unsustainable energy (coal, gas, and crude oil) and land use, and untenable consumption patterns since the preindustrial age in 1870 needs to be checked by all member states, of which so far, merely one has turned its official policy to do by law. Presently, the rise amounts to 1.1 degrees (NASA, 2023) and is heading towards 2.5 degrees, as indicated at the WMO press conference on 14 July 2023, followed by August 2023, then September 2023, as the warmest month measured ever. At the same time, the window for adjusting to the 1.5-degree

formula is closing according to the WMO. The reality is that Increasing temperatures contribute to speeding up the evolution of foul weather conditions and devastating impact. Catastrophes for decades with excessive heat in parts of the planet, drought, torrential rains, flooding, rising sea levels threatening to swallow up low-lying SIDS (Small Island Developing States), thundering storms, hurricanes, etc. Hardly any member state escapes it. People are losing everything, their homes, family members, jobs, and entire livelihoods – while societal infrastructures, which took decades to save up for and establish, get demolished within hours. Massive human effort and financial input have gone down the drain, leaving misery, individual and societal frustration, and unfulfilled hopes of a promising future. Nonetheless, it is commonly known that trees absorb CO₂ and turn it into oxygen. In 2019, an international research team, in a report for the International Climate Change Panel (ICCP), identified vacant land distributed around the globe suitable for trees: at the size of the territory of the USA or about ten times that of Egypt. Were these areas afforested, global greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced by two-thirds, according to the scientists (National Geographic, A, 2019). The planet would get a good deal more forest cover, people areas for picnics and other leisure activities, and humanity wouldn't be so dependent on the Amazonas to serve as the lungs of the globe. Why continue down a misleading road when it is time to change direction? And why not get scientists worldwide to contemplate how to turn extreme weather events into our advantage? Eight years ago, that same magazine pointed at the prospects of tapping the enormous voltage of tornados, forceful enough to light up megacities if used to supply humanity with much-needed energy - before they unfold and become devastating on a massive scale (National Geographic, B, 2015). Scientists could be delighted to pick up the glove and throw themselves into that endeavor if not yet sufficiently done so.

In the above picture of the destructive effects of climate change, vulnerable communities, which have contributed least to it, bear the brunt of its devastating impact - some of which could have been mitigated had we been more observant of the surge of extreme weather and climate events occurring in every region of the world, and of what meteorologists warned about for decades – and acted accordingly: To check the changing climate conditions effectively by substituting fossil fuel with clean, green energy sources and adjusting lifestyles to the new reality with strengthened cross-sectoral policies. On average, the global population's footprint per capita of CO₂ emission amounts to about 6 tons annually, up from 4.8 in 2017 (Our World in Data, 2023). Still, it should not exceed 3 tons to not exhaust the planet's resources, according to the IPCC – and to not arrest its capacity to regenerate its resources annually, such as water. Humanity is depleting the earth's resources – cutting the branch we are sitting on, hanging over the abyss - by speeding up climate change through continued use of fossil fuel and unhelpful policies rather than arresting it.

The world population, however, does not, in equal measures, exhaust the planet's capacity to regenerate its resources. Considerable variation exists among member states. In 2023, it was documented that if all of humanity consumed like the people in the one country doing it least, the planet would arrive at that stage on 20 December 2023, whereas if doing it like the one most - already on 20 February 2023. The former situation relates to a low-income developing country, the latter to a high-income, industrialized member state (overshoot day, 2023). There is an apparent deficit if it represents the reality of the situation, which needs to be urgently addressed. Otherwise, the future of human and animal existence on the planet, in the long run, could be outbalanced by overconsumption of what is damaging to all. Who would venture to take responsibility for that?

Notwithstanding this, addressing climate change in time attracts far more world attention than the necessity for SDG fulfillment. Youngsters, the famous Greta Thunberg with supporters, and dedicated politicians worldwide have advocated climate change mitigation, which, although not yet to effectively activate the world population to address the scale of the change, is on the move. Newspaper reading confirms it. In various countries, national legislation to combat climate

change is under preparation, for instance, Denmark. Yes, climate change does pose a threat to all humanity. Still, the other SDGs represent severe ills for humanity that have lasted for decades, if not centuries, and that need attention, too. A Greta Thunberg to advocate their cause would be good to facilitate engagement of the world population and governments of member states to spur required funding to flow in. If this doesn't happen, the risk is that climate change will absorb a significant part of the funding for global issues at the other SDGs' expense. That differs from the intention of the General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/1, codifying the SDGs that all member states were behind. It is not either; it is both, and funding for both needs to be found. The UN has long received voluntary, substantial funding from affluent segments of societies worldwide. A concerted campaign directed at these groups to support the fulfillment of the SDGs with donations of, say, a percentage of their fortunes above the level of USD 100 million could prove constructive – in optimal circumstances perhaps substantially help to do the job. The campaign could aim at matching the level of remittances sent home annually by migrant workers in 2022 to some extent, amounting to almost USD 800 billion, according to the World Bank (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Where in the UN did the SDGs come from? Everywhere within the UN membership is an answer, just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two subsequent Human Rights Covenants, the International Covenant of Political and Civil Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both of 1966, which turned the Universal Declaration into international law, emanated from a shifting group of small UN member states that took the process forward, based on the principle where one member state ceased to push for support, others took over. Today, these covenants regulate humankind's conditions in countries of ratification worldwide. The SDGs were defined in a yearlong consultation process under the auspices of the UNDP as a follow-up to the Millennium Goals process from 2000-2015, set out as eight internationally measurable goals in 1996 by the OECD Development Assistance Committee. The SDGs are built on substantive elements of UN development policies during a protracted period, such as allocating 0.7 percent of GNI to ODA, endorsed by the General Assembly in 1970 (A/RES/2625,1970), initially suggested by late Nobel prize winner Jan Tinbergen, later supplemented by 0.15 to 0.20 percent to least developed countries. We owe Tinbergen a note of thanks for leading humanity into a mode of development-sharing. Initiatives like that contribute to getting multitudes better off. Now, it is up to others to follow in his footsteps. ECOSOC, as such, seems not directly involved in defining the SDGs but is considered instrumental in the evolution of the 2030 Agenda for Development and the 17 SDGs (speech ECOSOC, 2021). Still, many governments and NGOs accredited to ECOSOC were, in addition to, experts and committed individuals of ECOSOC member states. More than 4 million people were estimated to participate in the process.

The history of the SDGs is a little longer. The idea of Sustainable development goals was born at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, which decided to create an open working group under the auspices of the UNDP, consisting of members from 70 member states, which came up with a draft of 17 suggestions two years later. The suggestions were thoroughly considered in member state negotiations, the final wording agreed, and the preamble and declaration attached to the SDGs adopted by the General Assembly in 2015. In the course of this process, and simultaneously with the endeavors of the working group, a comprehensive consultation process unprecedented in the history of the United Nations took place as a three-year-long consultation with all stakeholders and people's voices (UNDP, 2023). It is here that the millions of participants come into the picture.

One reason for the UN to decide on the SDG process surfaced with Kofi Annan when he assumed the position of secretary-general of the UN in 1997, and noted that the Millennium Goals process was heading towards halving the population living in absolute poverty globally because of the world's attention to the issue spurred by substantial donor countries- and media commitment.

What worked in the period 2000-2015 might work in 2015-2030, too, was the thinking at the Secretariat. Not until later did it become clear that primarily three UN member states, China, India, and Brazil, on their own, at a time of high national economic growth rates, succeeded in unilaterally lifting hundreds of millions of their inhabitants out of poverty. Still, donor and media attention would have eased the way.

What can citizens of the world do to fulfill the sustainable development goals?

The population and national institutions could be involved; some are already more so in fulfilling the SDG plans than others. A place to start is to inform the people of the contents of the SDGs. Here, libraries come into the picture and can be found all over the globe, including in its remotest places. Traveling to refugee camps at the edge of nowhere confirms it. It may not be called the library, but the center of documentation it is. Add to this NGO action, and we have the ball rolling. Shining examples exist of NGO-action in collaboration with libraries of the locality with or without government funding, doing a fantastic job of popular education. (Global Seniors, 2019). Learning about the SDGs is an essential start for fulfilling all 17 goals.

Once we have digested the SDG messages, we can assist in spreading the knowledge of the goals, develop good ideas on how best to achieve them - and help keep governments firm on honoring their obligations to fulfill them.

We can, for instance, reduce our water consumption so that our planet will have enough water to supply all its 8 billion inhabitants daily. As mentioned, Mother Earth does not contain sufficient water supplies to fit the enormous consumption pattern we display. That would take more than one planet. Or, we could think about increasing food production by growing vegetables and fruits wherever possible, with or without access to a strip of land – in cities, pots at window sills would do - and delimit food wastage by sharing surplus food with those in need of it, so that those who suffer from hunger gets more to eat and can improve their health conditions.

It is the responsibility of all of us to accomplish sustainable development goals by 2030. A must to be remembered.

The SDG funding situation

On 18-19 September 2023, a halfway SDG summit took place at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in connection with the launch of the 78th session of UNGA. It was recognized that achievement of the SDGs is in peril and that at “the midpoint of the 2030 agenda...the progress on most of the SDGs is either moving much too slowly or has regressed below the 2015 baseline” (UNGA resolution A/RES/78/1). The Forum reaffirmed that it would act urgently to realize the SDGs, leaving no one behind, with the endeavor to reach the furthest behind first. This involves an enormous investment in education, health facilities, green energy, transport, sustainable agriculture, protection of Nature, and other issues. It was recognized that countries with meager means need support to fulfill the SDGs, and that international development financing is to be substantially enlarged. An enlargement is calculated to be about USD 4 trillion, with at least USD 500 billion annually up to 2030 (GSDGR, 2023). The funding was to be contributed by the whole world, partially granted as development aid and partially as low-interest-rate loans. It was, as mentioned below, during the General Debate of the Assembly, suggested by President Joe Biden, 46th President of the USA, and, as such, representative of a founding father of both the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions, that the latter could step in to help make funding available for the SDG fulfillment process (Biden, 2023). On his part, the UN secretary-general requested member states to lend a hand to developing countries through debt relief and each country to design a plan with clear benchmarks for how much poverty eradication they would concretely ensure by 2030.

What else could ECOSOC do for the SDGs?

ECOSOC could look at severe issues at risk of being insufficiently addressed by the international community and speed up the implementation process through attention and debates, especially if consistently well-covered by the media. Air pollution is an example. It is a global, significant, fatal, not merely urban phenomenon killing multitudes of people annually. Some controversy seems to exist, whether it is number one or number two, after tobacco, which costs people their lives on a big scale, and the sad story is that countries with the highest rate of air pollution also have the least means to prevent it. Further, air pollution must be tackled with climate change as they interact, mutually worsening one another, as the World Meteorological Organization pointed out on several occasions. Further, according to the World Health Organization, the expected lifetime would increase by 2.3 years globally if air pollution were diminished permanently by lowering the magnitude of harmful particles from the air stemming from vehicles, industrial emissions, wildfires, and linked to lung diseases, heart diseases, cancer, and strokes (GSDGR, 2023) - and to rising temperatures worldwide. Many member states have devised successful policies to restrict air pollution and would have important lessons to share with others on what works and how much – and what doesn't. On that basis, ECOSOC could devise strategies to restrict air pollution with clear benchmarks inspired by WHO recommendations for limits of harmful particles in the air to ensure good public health, such as the recommendation limiting the concentration of PM_{2,5} from surpassing five micrograms per cubic meter (WHO, 2023) - the PM_{2,5} being small airborne particles primarily stemming from burning of fossil fuel that can move into lungs and blood vessels in the human body. The magnitude of member states that do not live up to the WHO recommendation is quite comprehensive; for example, up to 98 percent of the population in Europe (where data is available) have been found to live in places that do not live up to the WHO recommended level. An ECOSOC strategy for air pollution could make a huge difference and reduce the unnecessarily high mortality rate. An essential part of it is to indicate funding prospects for low- and middle-income member states before presenting it to the General Assembly for adoption, such as from the Bretton Woods institutions, which were, as mentioned, suggested to open up for funding of SDGs by the representative of a founding father at the 78th session of UNGA in September 2023, (President Biden, 2023). ECOSOC should ensure that these strategies are implemented by concerned UN agencies in collaboration with the NGO community—similarly, with other severe issues that are not sufficiently addressed.

Conclusion

ECOSOC is mandated to examine social and Economic Affairs. Still, in the course of the UN's history, economic issues have mainly been left out of ECOSOC's attention and dealt with by the international financial institutions. ECOSOC could devise strategies to arrive at equal and fair resource distribution within a population so that everybody feels they are getting a share of it. In this context, input from member states on how to share resources with the entire population is vital.

ECOSOC could serve as the organ in which member states speak up and provide input from the empathic world into the social causes of conflict. Without empathy, the world would collapse. Ideas should be injected into the discussions of ECOSOC, which ensures societies with room for everybody, in which everybody gets a measure of fortune, not just one chance in life, but many, and those not like others tactfully integrated. This means societies of great cohesion, with a general feeling of responsibility for others, with communities based on the conviction that there is potential in everybody and everybody has the right to a proper life. Nobody should sink to the bottom of society if it can be avoided. This societal model is in demand worldwide but takes international cooperation to achieve. When a part of the world population is faring poorly, it is in the interest of all to find solutions to meet the challenge, for it is unacceptable and also holds

potential for clashes between the poor and the rich. The United Nations should always be the locomotive of international cooperation. ECOSOC is an essential engine for that travel.

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