

Unesco Director-General

Over the course of the last decades, Unesco, founded in 1945 in a spirit of great enthusiasm, has been beset by a multiplicity of profound crises. A widespread perception has grown up that the organization is over-extended, inadequately managed, and unacceptably politicized. At the beginning of 1985 the United States withdrew from Unesco and was followed, a year later, by the United Kingdom and Singapore.

The Unesco crisis reached its climax during the 11-year tenure of the current, highly controversial director-general, A. M. M'Bow. M'Bow's term is about to expire, and he has said that he will not seek reelection. This offers the hope that, under a new director-general, Unesco will undertake sufficient reforms to increase its effectiveness and create circumstances under which the United States, Great Britain, and Singapore will rejoin the organization. (A hopeful precedent was the U.S. withdrawal from the International Labor Organization, followed by reentry a few years later.)

One of the candidates for the directorship is Abdus Salam, Nobel Laureate in Physics and, for over 25 years, director of the International Center for Theoretical Physics in Trieste. We believe that Salam has qualifications that make him an excellent candidate for this position: he is a person of outstanding intelligence and judgment and a highly respected member of both the developed world (professor at the Imperial College, London) and the less-developed world (citizen of Pakistan and president of the Third World Academy of Sciences); he has a strong commitment to science for its own sake and to scientific development in the less-developed countries—the latter being the chief mission of the Trieste Center; he has a proven record in developing an outstanding, novel institution, including the necessary funding; and he has excellent relationships with the U.S. and U.S.S.R. scientific communities. Although Salam's main interest is surely in science, he is a person of great breadth whom we would expect to give effective direction not only in science but also in the other areas of Unesco.

We believe that if Salam were to become director-general there is an excellent chance that Unesco's operation would be much improved. We also believe that if Unesco could be revitalized, there would be widespread support among the relevant professional communities in the United States for full participation in Unesco by this country.

The reason for this is that a number of crucial global problems can be successfully addressed only with the help of a multilateral intergovernmental organization. For example, field research in the earth and ecological sciences requires that many different nations grant permission for scientists of other countries to conduct research in their national territories. These territories now include the recently established Exclusive Economic Zones, which extend for 200 geographical miles into the ocean from every coastal and island state, and cover about 40 percent of the entire area of the oceans. Under these circumstances one could hope that the United States would soon again play its role as a world leader in the areas that fall within Unesco's mandate.

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Sexual Behavior and Randomized Responses

When I proposed using randomized responses to encourage honest reports of sexual behaviors that may spread AIDS, I was not aware that the idea had been proposed previously. Thanks to Gina Kolata's article "How to ask about sex and get honest answers" (News & Comment, 24 Apr., p. 382), I learned from Robyn M. Dawes that Fiddler and Kleinknecht (1) and Dawes and Moore (2) used randomized responses to investigate sexual behaviors of college students. The form of randomized response used by Dawes and Moore (2) is identical to the one I suggested. Recently Fiering and Hooper (3) analyzed a bivariate form of randomized responses and explicitly suggested its use to study risk factors for AIDS. [Randomized responses were used as long ago as 1965 (4) to find the frequency of illegitimate births and have since been used (5) to study other sensitive aspects of reproductive behavior.]

If properly understood by the persons questioned, the various methods of randomized response (6) should help produce more reliable estimates of the parameters of mathematical models for the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

A less obvious role for these methods was suggested by Eisenman (7), also in response to Kolata's article. Blood banks and the

Food and Drug Administration establish criteria for potential blood donors to disqualify themselves temporarily or permanently; for example, any individual who has ever had hepatitis, engaged in prostitution, or had a male homosexual encounter since 1977 should never give blood; travel in an area where malaria is common disqualifies a donor for 6 months. Eisenman points out that research is needed to refine the behavioral risk factors—such as number of past sexual partners—by which potential blood donors are asked to screen themselves. Randomized responses and related techniques could make that research less prone to distortion and evasion and could improve the compliance of potential donors in the act of offering to give blood.

Randomized response methods deserve to be more widely known and used. As they are used, they need to be refined by research on the methods themselves.

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Famine: Some Additional Aspects

In their article "Famine: Causes, prevention, and relief" (30 Jan., p. 539), John W. Mellor and Sarah Gavian attribute famines to the "decline in food production in successive years brought about by poor weather, war, or both." With the exception of two sentences relating desertification in Africa to increased population and livestock pressure (p. 544), the authors ignore the important role natural resources and their use and abuse play in agricultural productivity, particularly in Africa. Over the last 5 years, a consensus has emerged among national and international government and nongovernment organizations, in and out of Africa, that environmental degradation and poor resource management have contributed to the negative growth in per capita food pro-