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# Economic and Social Thinking at the UN in Historical Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This article begins to examine the history of economic and social ideas launched or nurtured by the United Nations (UN). In 1999, the United Nations Intellectual History Project was initiated, to analyse the UN as an intellectual actor, and to shed light on the role of the UN system in creating knowledge and in influencing international policy-making: this article is based on the first five books and the oral histories from that Project. The starting point is that ideas may be the most important legacy of the UN for human rights, economic and social development, as well as for peace and security. For the authors, this 'intellectual history' provides a way to explore the origins of particular ideas; trace their course within institutions, scholarship, and discourse; and in some cases evaluate the impact of ideas on policy and action.

*You can record the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a story of astonishing technical progress. You can tell it as a rise and fall of powers, or as a painful recovery from modern society's relapses into barbarism. But if you leave out ideas, you leave out what people were ready to live and die for. (The Economist 17 January 2004, p. 72)*

## INTRODUCTION

It may come as a surprise that there is no comprehensive history of the United Nations (UN), either institutional or intellectual. Several specialized agencies have written or are in the process of writing their institutional histories — something that all organizations should do. The Bretton Woods institutions are far ahead in this respect: the World Bank has published two massive histories, on the occasions of its twenty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries (Mason and Asher, 1973, and Kapur et al., 1997, respectively), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has an in-house

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This is the revised version of a paper originally prepared by the co-directors of the United Nations Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) for the fortieth anniversary conference of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in April 2004, which will appear as 'Generating Knowledge in the United Nations', in Peter Utting (forthcoming). The authors are grateful for permission to use parts of the argument here. They also thank the reviewers of this journal for comments on an earlier draft.

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historian who ensures the capture of its place in history with regular publications (Boughton, 2001). The UN story deserves to be better documented if it is to be better appreciated.

The authors of this article are tackling one aspect of this neglected task: a history of economic and social ideas launched or nurtured by the UN. The United Nations Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) began in 1999 and has already produced a host of products that shed light on the role of the UN system in creating knowledge and in influencing international policy-making.<sup>1</sup> Ideas are a driving force in human progress. This is not to deny the role of power and material interests but to highlight the role of ideas in helping to shape interests and constrain the exercise of raw power. Moreover, ideas may be the most important legacy of the United Nations in terms of human rights, economic and social development, as well as peace and security. Because of this, the lack of attention to the UN's role in generating ideas is perplexing. However, this neglect is part of a more general blindness: as Ngaire Woods has noted, 'ideas, whether economic or not, have been left out of analyses of international relations' (Woods, 1995: 164).

The study of ideas, although relatively new in analyses of international politics and organizations, has long been common fare for historians, philosophers, economists and students of literature. Peter Watson, in a recent book on intellectual trends, puts the point dramatically: 'Once we get away from the terrible calamities that have afflicted our century, once we lift our eyes from the horrors of the past decades, the dominant intellectual trend, the most interesting enduring and profound development, is very clear. Our century has been dominated intellectually by a coming to terms with science' (Watson, 2001: 4). Watson's intellectual focus is on science. We would emphasize the contribution of a wider range of ideas in the international arena but share his conviction that ideas are central.

Although the term can have a variety of meanings, 'intellectual history' in our case seeks to explain the origins of particular ideas; to trace their trajectories within institutions, scholarship, and discourse; and in some cases, certainly in ours, to evaluate the impact of ideas on policy and action. We focus upon and seek to analyse the role of the UN as an intellectual actor.

The UNIHP concentrates on the economic and social development side of UN activities. Its output will comprise twelve thematic studies, two volumes of synthesis, and some seventy-five oral histories, all mutually reinforcing. The three co-directors of the project are co-authors of several of the volumes. This article draws upon the first five published volumes (Berthelot, 2004; Emmerij et al., 2001; Jolly et al., 2004; Toye and Toye, 2004; Ward, 2004), and on the oral histories (all of which have been

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1. For further details about the UNIHP, see <http://www.unhistory.org>.

completed) — the two key components of the UNIHP. We have focused on concrete illustrations as the best way to stimulate debate as well as foreshadow what is still to come.<sup>2</sup>

The oral history interviews have been conducted with key participants in the work of the UN, especially in the evolution of UN thinking and ideas. A method of research for preserving and creating knowledge of historical events as recounted by participants in those events, oral history also allows us to identify ideas that never made it beyond closed-room discussions, and to explore the debates about and circumstances of their demise. Our archive includes some seventy-five personal testimonies and recorded life narratives of individuals who have served the UN in key positions as staff members, consultants, researchers, diplomats, or members of commissions. The four living secretaries-general are included. The interviews inform the books in the series, and they also constitute an important product in themselves.

There are shortcomings in concentrating the oral histories on an elite. However, one has to begin somewhere, and one of the justifications for the effort is to rectify a woeful lack of attention to such learning. The importance of the collection of taped memories cannot be over-emphasized, as there is precious little institutional memory at the UN and even fewer resources to capture the historical record.<sup>3</sup> These interviews will be made widely available in electronic form at the conclusion of the project, while one of the UNIHP books — *UN Voices: The Struggle for Development and Social Justice* — will provide a synthesis of extracts from the interviews organized across themes (Weiss et al., forthcoming).

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2. Readers can also look forward to the following volumes over the next two years: Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Louis Emmerij and Richard Jolly, *UN Voices: The Struggle for Development and Social Justice* (2005); Neil MacFarlane and Yuen Foong-Khong, *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History* (2005); Sarah Zaidi and Roger Normand, *The UN and Human Rights: The Unfinished Revolution* (2005); Devaki Jain, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (2005); Olav Stokke, *The UN and Development Cooperation* (2006); Tagi Sagafi-nejad in collaboration with John Dunning, *The UN and Transnationals: from Code to Compact* (2006); Nico Schrijver, *The UN and the Global Compact: Development without Destruction* (2006); and Ramesh Thakur and Thomas G. Weiss, *Global Governance: A History of an Idea and its Future Prospects* (2006). There will also be a concluding volume, providing a synthesis of major, forward-looking conclusions: Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij and Thomas G. Weiss, *The United Nations: A History of Ideas and Their Future* (2007).
  3. There are two important exceptions. One is the archive of the oral history compiled by Yale University, which contains interviews of persons involved in the political and humanitarian activities of the United Nations. The other is the archive of UN papers in the Bodleian library in Oxford. This is a collection of personal papers, diaries and other writings of British subjects who have worked in or alongside the United Nations in different places and at different times.

## IDEAS AND SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE UN SYSTEM

The UN for us involves not only the organization in New York, but the entire system, including all its specialized agencies, bodies and programmes. Formally, the World Bank and the IMF are part of that structure; in fact, however, they are distinct and we have treated them as such. Throughout the project we have tried to maintain the distinction between the ‘two UNs’: the arena where states make decisions, on the one hand, and the leadership and staff of international secretariats, on the other (Weiss et al., 2004). The ‘first UN’ focuses on states and their decisions and actions. The ‘second UN’ focuses on the secretariat, institutions and staff members of the UN and, for our project, on their contributions to research and thinking.<sup>4</sup>

For us ‘ideas’ are defined as normative or causal beliefs held by individuals or adopted by institutions that influence their attitudes and actions.<sup>5</sup> Ideas are analysed in our studies when they intersect with the UN — that is, when they appear as major thoughts or concepts in UN documents, speeches, or conferences or as analyses, policy decisions or guidelines for action. Normative ideas are broad, general beliefs about what the world should look like; causal ideas are more operational motives about what strategy will have a desired result or what tactics will achieve a particular strategy. At the UN, causal ideas have often taken an operational form, such as the target of 0.7 per cent of national income to be contributed as official development assistance (ODA). An example of a normative idea would be the call for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women or ensuring the rights of the child, and more generally the idea that the international community bears a moral responsibility to promote social progress and better standards of living in all countries.

Historical context, of course, is important, although it is by no means always a determining influence. The International Labour Organization, for example, discussed employment many times during the 1920s and 1930s, to little practical effect — except that some of its ideas helped lay the foundations for post-war UN contributions. The inclusion of human rights in the UN Charter and the adoption of the Universal Declaration in 1948 appear, in historical perspective, mind-boggling in their boldness. In the words of Stéphane Hessel, an early UN recruit who sat at Eleanor Roosevelt’s side in 1948 and later became *Ambassadeur de France*, human rights are ‘what

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4. One of the co-directors presses for recognition of a ‘third UN’, namely the core of non-governmental organizations and individuals who are closely involved with UN decision-making and activities. Tempting as this seems at first sight, to recognize a ‘third UN’ raises difficult questions as to how and where to draw the boundary around such a disparate collection of groups, though as a collective influence, there is little doubt about its growing importance.
  5. This approach simplifies the classic one in Goldstein and Keohane (1993). See also Checkel (1997) and Sikkink (1991).

makes the second half of the twentieth century such an important moment of world history'.<sup>6</sup> Ideas that have mattered over the UN's six decades cover a wide span. Those that emerge from the first five books in the UNIHP series suggest a host of important ideas, from the narrowly specific to the more sweeping. Here are some examples.

Although often neglected, the UN's contribution to the political arithmetic of statistics has been a major influence. Ward (2004) looks at the early, pioneering work of the UN in national accounting and the subsequent move into social and environmental accounting, and also stresses the UN's statistical leadership in such fields as population, employment and gender. The battles over what to count, how to count it, and what to ignore suggest the extent to which UN-generated ideas and conventions have been taken seriously by the member states whose economies are being measured and compared. Dudley Seers summed up the crucial importance of statistics some two decades ago:

We cannot, with our own eyes and ears, perceive more than a minute sample of human affairs, even in our own country — and a very unrandom sample at that. So we rely on statistics in order to build and maintain our own model of the world. The data that are available mould our perceptions. . . . It is for this reason that a statistical policy (i.e. the policy of statistics offices) exerts a subtle but pervasive and lasting influence on political, social and economic development. This is why the apparently dull and minor subject of statistical priorities is of crucial importance. (Seers, 1983: 130)

One question posed by the UNIHP was whether the UN has contributed anything new to development discourse that had not already been said by the classicists and later great economists well before the birth of the UN. Jolly et al. (2004) open with an inventory of ideas on development from Adam Smith to John Maynard Keynes via Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, Friedrich List, John Stewart Mill, Karl Marx, Joseph Schumpeter and others. Standing on the shoulders of those thinkers, the UN has been making contributions to development thinking since 1945, often assisted by outside consultants who later turned out to be intellectual giants in their own right. These contributions include the early and innovative UN work on economic development and global income distribution, and the development of new perspectives on employment, the informal sector and basic needs in the ILO, as well as the influence of the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, UNRISD, and the Bariloche Foundation. The documents outlining the UN Development Decades (UN, 1961) provide snapshots for tracking the evolution of other thinking and ideas from the 1960s onwards.

What is striking is how innovative the UN's work on development policies was during the first twenty-five to thirty years — a not untypical

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6. Unless other sources are given, the citations used in this article are from oral history interviews conducted by UNIHP.

experience of sclerosis, intellectual and otherwise, in institutions. Very early on, for instance, the UN understood the importance of creating an international setting in order for national development policies to have more chance of success. The basic needs development strategy launched by the ILO in the 1970s was a path-breaking attempt to integrate economic growth and income distribution. It was not until the 1990s that another important breakthrough in development thinking made its mark, namely the human development approach elaborated in successive *Human Development Reports*.

One often-overlooked practical contribution by the UN is target-setting (Jolly et al., 2004: 247–75). Ideas that do not have targets for translating them into action often fail to get off the ground. Even so, the recent focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aroused much scepticism (UN, 2000). Yet careful analysis shows that over the last forty years the UN has set some fifty development goals, with a record of performance that is more encouraging than often realized. A number of targets have been fully, or almost fully, achieved — for instance, the eradication of smallpox, major reductions of infant mortality, and the near elimination of polio and guinea worm. Many other goals have been largely achieved in a considerable number of countries. In fact, it is only a small minority of global goals for which hardly any progress has been made: the reduction of maternal mortality is one prime example; another, revealing and very serious, is the 0.7 per cent goal for development assistance in general and the goal for assistance to least developed countries in particular.

The terms of trade debate in many ways started the North–South battle. Toye and Toye (2004) recount the story of the terms of trade controversy initiated by Hans Singer and Raúl Prebisch around 1950 (Prebisch, 1950; Singer, 1950),<sup>7</sup> the failure to establish the International Trade Organization (ITO) anticipated as the third leg of the Bretton Woods institutions, and the creation of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The struggle between the Group of 77 and the bulk of the Western country members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and how UNCTAD was squeezed, are also part of this story. The antecedent of this struggle was already visible during the campaign for the Special UN Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED) in the 1950s. The developing countries aimed not only to set up a soft loan agency; they also wanted to create it as a new financial executing agency under UN

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7. The careful review of archival material by John Toye and Richard Toye suggests that Hans Singer may have been the first to identify the downward secular trend in commodity prices and its causes, while Raúl Prebisch saw its wider significance for development policy — adopting the centre–periphery concept — and used his position and leadership to publicize the issues and develop and promote strategies of response, mainly but not exclusively in the form of import substitution policies (Toye and Toye, 2004: 110–37).

control. They succeeded in the first but failed in the second aim. This gave further substance to the struggle between the United Nations and the Bretton Wood institutions, which was also reflected in the idea to replace the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with a new 'Economic Security Council' with a voting system half-way between the UN's one-country-one-vote and the Bretton Woods institutions' weighted model of voting.

Toye and Toye trace the decline of the UN as a vibrant centre of thinking on issues of trade, finance and development, as well as the rise — particularly after 1980 — of a neo-liberal consensus on these issues, orchestrated by the World Bank and the IMF. They advance the thesis that in international organizations the degree of creative thinking (as opposed to the synthesizing and re-cycling of existing ideas) is inversely related to the ability of their top management to exercise strong editorial control over the research process, for the purpose of preaching a doctrine that they think promotes the aims of the organization.

Regional variations are, of course, to be expected and welcomed; the UN regional commissions, with all their differences and idiosyncrasies, provide plenty of substantiation for this generalization (Berthelot, 2004). For instance, the problems of transition in the economies of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union after 1989 constitute a special but not unique case, in which the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was clearly in the lead. It advocated a gradual approach emphasizing institutional reform which, with hindsight, was much better policy advice than the 'big bang' policies emanating from the World Bank and IMF (ECE, 1990, 1991). In part this related to the fact that the ECE had been the only forum during the Cold War in which East and West met *and* worked together on a range of very specific economic issues, including such bread-and-butter problems as road transport and electricity grids. Nonetheless, the 'big bang' advocated by the Bretton Woods institutions and several very visible international consultants won the day. The economic and human costs of this missed opportunity have been, and still are, extremely large (see Berthelot, 2004: 111–20; Emmerij et al., 2001: 146–65). We will come back to this issue later.

The UN regional commissions have launched a number of ideas on economic and social development, each operating quite separately and quite differently, depending on the leadership and objective circumstances with respect to the political and economic situation in their region. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has been the most active in developing policy ideas that it considered crucial for its region, such as the centre-periphery framework, import substitution policies, and dependency analysis. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has worked hard and fought many battles to adapt the orthodoxies of structural adjustment policies to African circumstances. In Asia and the Pacific, there is such diversity at the country level (great successes, steady progress, and erratic performances side-by-side) that the Economic and

Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has been less conceptual and more applied in its approach to development ideas. As West Asia is the most politically troubled region, there has been little room for original economic thinking: the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has been a follower rather than an innovator of ideas. However, it has done important work on water security, gender, and population. One of the reasons why the ECE and ECLAC were so creative, particularly in their early years, was the flare independence of their first executive-secretaries (Gunnar Myrdal and Raúl Prebisch respectively). Dissenting voices were allowed, for example, in the context of dependency theory within ECLAC.

### THE IMPACT OF IDEAS ON INTERNATIONAL POLICY-MAKING

Output from the UNIHP so far suggests four ways in which intellectual debates can have an impact on the framing of development issues. First, UN ideas can change the nature of international public policy discourse and debate and, as a result, can often help states to define or redefine their interests to be more inclusive of common concerns. The litany of changes in vocabulary is one of the most obvious ways to demonstrate that UN ideas have at least altered the way that we talk and think about international development. They have at times transformed the intellectual environment or at least changed the nature of international public policy discourse.

The very focus of the UN on economic development from its early years is one of the key examples of this. Economic development as presented by the UN was the idea of *purposeful* policy and action to accelerate the process of development, an approach initially denounced by some critics as primarily ‘an intellectual or artistic exercise’ at variance with ‘existing realities in underdeveloped countries’ (Frankel, 1953: 275; Emmerij et al., 2001: 42). Purposeful development meant not only changes in national policy and the need for national planning but the recognition that development in other countries, especially in other poorer countries, was a matter of more general international concern. The UN, in the early 1950s, advocated an *international* development strategy to back up the national efforts of developing countries. What happened was the Marshall plan for Europe (implemented outside the ECE) while the developing countries were left in the cold. But the idea of a necessary international development framework was there to stay.

Another area where international discourse has been totally altered by the UN has followed from its leadership in the realm of universal human rights. Over the last half century, the UN has fundamentally transformed the way in which the rights of people all over the world are perceived. In parallel with this has been growing attention to the obligations of governments and other parties — including, over the last two or three decades, transnational

corporations — to demonstrate commitment and practical action in response to such rights.

These are examples of major changes in perceptions and attitudes in which the UN has had a major, and probably *the* major, role in leading the way. There are many others — for instance, in promoting attention to education for all or health for all, in changing attitudes to population policy, to the rights of women and the gender and environmental dimensions of development, to concern for children as a central focus in development policy and strategy and, more recently, to the promotion of human development, as a norm and approach which should underlie all development policy, national and international.

The UN has also had a major impact on thinking and ideas of a more technical sort. For example, the Prebisch–Singer thesis about deteriorating trends in the terms of trade of developing countries changed the discourse about fairness and the reasons to support or reject liberalization of markets, a debate that continues. Ideas about ‘centre–periphery’ and ‘dependency’ that were developed by Latin American economists within ECLA in the 1950s and 1960s altered the discourse on modernization theory, at least for a while.

Less successful were ideas about the need for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), developed by the UN in the 1970s, though largely killed off by the end of that decade. Over a much longer period, the UN analysed and emphasized the links between disarmament and development. Interestingly, some of the early leads for this came in the 1950s and 1960s from individual governments (France, the Soviet Union and Brazil) but the UN undertook sporadic work over several decades. This continued until the 1980s, when UNIDIR (the UN Institute for Disarmament Research) was established, and the UN issued the pioneering Thorsson Report on the relationship between disarmament and development (UN, 1982). All this is in sharp contrast to the World Bank and the IMF: the World Bank’s historians comment that ‘arms reduction is sensitive as well as political and was typically avoided by the Bank until — in the aftermath of the Cold War — the presidents of the Bank, first Conable, then Preston, joined Managing Director Camdessus of the Fund, in making borrower’s allocations to defence a matter of greater Bank–Fund concern’ (Kapur et al., 1997: 533).

The second type of influence is when ideas clash, or when sequencing and priorities are disputed, and thus when states need to define or refine their interests as a prelude to policy change. The necessity to balance belt-tightening with the requirements of a ‘human face’ in structural adjustment represented one such dispute in the 1980s. Ideas coming from the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, provided a roadmap to navigate between apparently conflicting priorities and needs (Cornia et al., 1987), a theme strongly promoted by ECA as well. The UN, and UNCTAD in particular, also took the lead in calling for more rapid and more fundamental international action to tackle the debt crisis and to take more

seriously the problems of the least developed countries as a group. Indeed, for most of the issues where the UN has raised awareness of problems and new challenges, it has also generally helped define an agenda for policy and action. This is true in a wide range of development areas from accelerating economic growth, to trade and finance, agriculture and industry, population, education and health, to changing the economic structure of developing countries and international support. The fact that ideas do not routinely override entrenched interests of powerful states is not a reason to dismiss their contribution to altering policies.

The third kind of impact is when ideas influence the formation of new combinations of political and institutional forces, thereby altering prospects for forming bargaining coalitions. For example, early calls to take seriously the Prebisch–Singer thesis about declining terms of trade for developing countries stimulated UNCTAD'S work in the 1960s, while the demand in the 1970s for a NIEO became the veritable glue of G77 solidarity — although like many glues, not always as strong or long-lasting as originally expected. Indeed, perhaps the most spectacular illustration of this phenomenon is the coming together of various groupings of developing countries in order to pursue jointly the calls for changing the rules of the international economic game.

Although the solidarity has weakened over time, other coalitions (of least developed countries, of like-minded countries, of donor governments, of NGOs) clearly represent manifestations of this third impact. A recent illustration is the Doha round of WTO negotiations, at which the possibility existed to establish trade on a more equitable basis than at present with developing countries. When that possibility was not transformed into reality at Cancún in 2003, a new coalition of developing countries decided to break off negotiations rather than continuing to play the game with industrial countries that do not practise what they preach.

The fourth kind of impact is when ideas become embedded in institutions, sometimes in the form of new units or programmes, sometimes in the form of new institutions. UN-critics in Washington and elsewhere are uncomfortable with such growth in organizational forums because they imply a commitment of financial and personnel resources. But what could be a more concrete demonstration of why ideas matter? The establishment of new agencies — including the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) — is the most visible manifestation of ideas taking root. No less striking or important is the 'mainstreaming' of issues (for example, human rights into the formerly 'rights-free' areas of agriculture, trade and environment) and the creation of new units within established bureaucracies (for example, a gender unit in the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, or a whole string of sub-regional organizations within ECA). Perhaps the most spectacular example of this kind of impact is the creation of UNCTAD (Toye and Toye, 2004).

A major task of the UNIHP has been to explore whether the UN has demonstrated unique attributes or a comparative advantage in creating, nurturing, and diffusing ideas, and if it has anticipated global and regional challenges by responding earlier than other institutions. This was implied in the title of the project's first publication, *Ahead of the Curve? UN Ideas and Global Challenges* (Emmerij et al., 2001). As our research has proceeded, we have become more inclined to drop the question mark that qualified that first title. We have identified more and more examples of how the UN has been at the international lead, most notably and most frequently ahead of the Bretton Woods Institutions, in such areas as the setting up of international economic development frameworks, global income distribution, the environment, gender, population, employment, human development, children and human rights.

There is often a disconnect between knowledge creation and implementation. There has, for instance, been a notable lack of meaningful international reaction when an idea is oversold and becomes counterproductive. For example, during the 1980s, the neo-classical development paradigm took hold again with a vengeance. Initially, this neo-classical resurgence in development did not get a strong response from within the UN. It was not until the mid-1980s that a reaction occurred, and even then it came from an unexpected place within the UN, namely UNICEF, and less surprisingly from the ECA — but not from New York.

Why was the UN so late in reacting to an old idea and why so timid? Why did it not confront the Bretton Woods Institutions head on? Why did the world have to wait until well into the 1990s for a more systematic reaction to occur (including, by then, from within the World Bank itself), and then only after many countries of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa had been in a deep tail-spin for a decade or more? Was it solely the might of the industrial countries and their commitment to the neo-liberal model that made it so difficult to resist? Or was it the lack of quality and imagination among UN economists and the accompanying timidity of the UN's organizational leaders? All of these factors played some part, but a clearer answer than we have at present to the overall question will be of the utmost importance for the future of the UN.

In 1996, at a conference on development policies into the twenty-first century, Ajit Singh asked how long it would take Latin American policy-makers to admit that the Washington Consensus had been a failure. 'Five more years', was the reply by people like John Williamson and Andres Bianchi (Singh, 1997: 257–9). What was happening five years later? In 2001, Argentina was in a deep financial crisis, Alberto Fujimori was in Japan, Hugo Chavez in Caracas, Carlos Salinas de Gortari in Cuba, Ecuador was dollarized — hardly a successful picture! Over the last twenty years, the UN has frequently missed the chance to publicize the failures of such over-confident predictions and to point out how its own counter-proposals had been totally ignored.

## LINKAGES BETWEEN RESEARCH OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE UN

From the point of view of intellectual history, it is important to note that ten Nobel laureates in economics (Jan Tinbergen, Ragnar Frisch, Gunnar Myrdal, Wassily Leontief, James E. Meade, W. Arthur Lewis, Richard Stone, Lawrence Klein, Theodore W. Schultz and Amartya Sen) have spent a substantial part of their professional lives working as UN staff members and/or consultants contributing to the UN's ideas and activities.

Notwithstanding such intellectual 'giants', it cannot be implied that most UN ideas and research under discussion emanate from the UN system itself or are directly commissioned by it. The UNIHP approach has cast its net more widely in trying to determine how knowledge and ideas about social development are generated and how they find themselves on or off the agendas of various UN organizations. Trying to identify 'who conducts UN research' (one of the main background questions in the oral history component of our project) is profoundly ambiguous. The UN has sometimes been a 'fount' (or original source) for ideas, but more frequently it has acted as a 'funnel' for outside ideas, a 'forum' where controversial ideas are debated and subsequently modified or a 'font' for their blessing. In addition, the UN has at times provided a 'fanfare' to announce them and at times the 'funeral' for their burial. All these roles are valid components of an intellectual history of the UN because all are parts of a puzzle that can lead to explaining the various types of impacts noted above. The oral history interviews and the books attempt to tease out the importance of various linkages between 'external' and 'internal' ideas. Here we emphasize four in particular that emerge from the oral history transcripts (see Weiss et al., forthcoming).

UN agencies frequently organize expert groups to examine specific issues. In examining the output and impact of such analyses over the years, Mahfuzur Rahman has written: 'The quality and composition of these expert groups varied greatly over time, but they generally had considerable influence on policy decisions of intergovernmental bodies. In fact, expert-group studies in general had more prestige attached to them than authors of secretariat studies could normally aspire to' (Rahman, 2002: xiii).

*In Ahead of the Curve?* (Emmerij et al., 2001: 26–42), we examined the early use of high-level expert committees in three major UN publications that helped define the future international development agenda: *National and International Measures for Full Employment* (UN, 1949); *Measures for the Economic Development of Under-Developed Countries* (UN, 1951a); and *Measures for International Economic Stability* (UN, 1951b). These pioneering reports contributed much new thinking about the situation and needs of developing countries. The process of drafting these reports also pioneered a pattern: each was prepared by a small team of prominent economists from different parts of the world, notably including subsequent Nobel laureates W. Arthur Lewis and Theodore W. Schultz, with support from the UN

secretariat. There was a strong ethical commitment — that the purpose of the report was to contribute to a world of greater economic and social justice with less poverty, and that work for the United Nations was a service to the larger community of states and peoples, in addition to being professional work. These reports, therefore, set a new tone by emphasizing the importance of national and international income distribution, next to economic growth, and of a coherent international development framework within which national policies could flourish.

Many of those interviewed appreciated the role of universities and think-tanks in generating ideas, but they were split about the relative importance of internal and external sources of UN ideas. Gerry Helleiner, now a retired professor of economics, who has frequently been consulted by the UN and other international institutions, remarked that ‘these expert groups are devices for demonstrating that ideas can be shared among people of quite different interests and origin when they gather as independent people, not representing their constituencies’ (UNIHP interview). Sartaj Aziz, who has just assumed a university presidency in Pakistan after a long career in government and the UN, gave his view:

Obviously there is a lot of cross-fertilization of ideas. All the UN agencies which have people who are either from an academic background, or interact with the academic community, do manage to pick up a number of ideas. And the academics, if they come up with major breakthroughs in ideas, like Arthur Lewis’ book, *The Theory of Economic Growth*, or Gunnar Myrdal’s *Asian Drama*, had a major impact on development thinking. So then everybody else built on them... But below that, even less important ideas in institutions which have close interaction with the academic community can become significant. More agencies invite members of the academic community to lead missions, for example, to different countries. They get enriched because they go to the countries. And at the same time, the people learn from them. (UNIHP interview)

Non-governmental organizations and other associations of what increasingly is called ‘global civil society’ — defined as ‘the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks and individuals located between the family, the state, and the market and operating beyond the confines of national societies, polities, and economies’ (Anheier et al., 2001: 17) — are inserting themselves into a wide range of inter-governmental deliberations. How significant is this flurry of activities in terms of generating new ideas, norms, and principles? According to Florini (2000: 3): ‘NGOs are an increasingly important piece of the larger problem of global governance. Although the state system that has governed the world for centuries is neither divinely ordained nor easily swept away, in many ways that system is not well suited to addressing the world’s grown agenda of border-crossing problems’. The presence of alternative voices has become an integral part of world politics in general. The creation of the ‘global compact’ as a result of the Millennium Summit would imply that both non-profit NGOs and increasingly for-profit corporations would need to be included in this ‘third United Nations’ (Ruggie, 2001).

NGOs are seen by virtually everyone among our interviewees as an essential component of ideational change, either pushing forward their own ideas or badgering governments to consider ones already on the table. In terms of specific ideas, most interviewees attributed the recognition of gender and human rights concerns to the advocacy work of civil society groups. Leticia Shahani noted that the UN's influence 'moves like an iceberg. But eventually, again because of the pressure of people and NGOs, the women's issue emerged' (UNIHP interview). Brian Urquhart remarked that, 'the NGOs, god bless them, have made life unsafe for established international bureaucracies' (UNIHP interview).

In specific terms, Jacques Polak remarked that even the IMF has been influenced by NGO pressures. He attributed the incorporation of social policies into the financial mainstream not only to former managing director Michel Camdessus, the Americans, and the British, but also to pressure from NGOs: 'The influence of the NGOs on the Fund', he told us, 'is really more indirect through the US Congress, and through the British Government too, I think. On those two governments, they have an important influence and they guide, to a certain extent, the positions taken by the Executive Directors, how they push the organization' (UNIHP interview).

At the same time, others were uncomfortable with either the non-representative character or the clear political agendas of NGOs. The late Bernard Chidzero drew upon his experience in Zimbabwe:

There may be a tendency on the part of some NGOs to operate as agents of multinationals or transnationals... If they can remain in the areas of serving mankind without taking sides with political groups, they will serve a very useful purpose. But, if they become associated with eroding or opposing parties, they become part of a political system. They become political agents. And, I think, this would destroy or minimize their roles... [and] bypass certain market forces and civil government bureaucracy. That is a virtue but it is also a danger, because the NGOs... may be promoting projects which are not those of government, or which are even anti-government. (UNIHP interview)

In a similar vein, after leaving the secretariat and returning to his home country Sierra Leone, James Jonah did not wish to have uniform categories of 'saints' or 'sinners':

Not all of them are solid. Some of them are outright 'crooks', sorry to say, engaged in smuggling commodities and diamonds. In Africa in particular, some of these NGOs have links with rebel movements. I think that raises questions. Governments are raising questions — and I know we did in Sierra Leone — about the accountability of NGOs in terms of how they run their show. Because they are politically powerful in many countries like the United States, and in Europe, these governments channel their assistance through NGOs. (UNIHP interview)

A particular type of international expertise — which combines knowledge and political visibility and has been influential in nourishing economic and social ideas — has emanated from reports of independent commissions of eminent persons. This technique was launched in 1969 with *Partners in Development*, the report of a commission chaired by Canadian Prime

Minister Lester B. Pearson (Commission on International Development, 1969). The Pearson Commission was followed by a host of others, including: two commissions on development issues headed by German Chancellor Willy Brandt (Independent Commission on International Development Issues 1980, 1983); on common security by Swedish Prime Minister Olav Palme (Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, 1982); on environment and development by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987); on humanitarian problems by Iranian and Jordanian Princes Sadruddin Aga Khan and Hassan bin Talal (Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, 1988); on South–South co-operation by Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere (South Commission, 1990); on global governance by Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson and Guyana’s Shridath Ramphal (Commission on Global Governance, 1995); and on culture and development by former UN secretary-general Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995). The two most recent ones have been on humanitarian intervention and state sovereignty by Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and Algeria’s Mohamed Sahnoun, issued in 2001 (Independent Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001) and on human security by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, issued in 2003 (Commission on Human Security, 2003). There are also such commissions that are recalled more by the names of their sponsors rather than of the chairs — for example, the report to the Club of Rome on the limits to growth (Meadows et al., 1972, 1992) and the Carnegie Commission (Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997).

These commissions get mixed reviews from our interviewees, with many judging them to have produced creative new ways to deal with emerging or problematic issues — ‘sustainable development’ emanating from the Brundtland Commission is cited by virtually everyone as ‘squaring the circle’. The concept was first developed in UNEP several years earlier as Mostafa Tolba, executive director of UNEP from 1973 to 1992, explained to us: ‘Maurice Strong came up with “eco-development” in 1974. In 1975 it became “development without destruction”, and by 1981 “sustainable development” had been crafted’ (UNIHP interview). But it was the Brundtland report that brought the term and the idea into common international parlance in 1987, after which it has become a staple of public policy.

Coming back to commissions in general, judgements about the quality of the analyses as well as the ultimate political impact of such commissions vary substantially across our oral history interviews. However, the three functions that emerged most clearly are awareness and consciousness-raising; advocacy for particular ideas; and lending legitimacy to programmes and ideas. Some interviewees qualified their success, and thought that they could only be successful when their initiatives are backed by major powers, and when the subject matter is narrowly focused. Gerry Helleiner thought that ‘if you put the right kind of group together, a mixed

kind of group, it does have an impact on people. It is like social scientific research. The impact may not occur for 25 years' (UNIHP interview). Bernard Chidzero was more positive: 'I think these commissions were not just academic exercises. They were intended to produce results which would be applicable to real situations and which would necessitate governments' policies and institutional arrangements. . . . [They] have generated an awareness of the real problems which we face, not just of academic ideas. They have underpinned the necessity for governments to take action' (UNIHP interview). Sadako Ogata was less enthusiastic about the efforts of the 1990s than of the 1970s: 'The utility of the big commissions has receded in the 1990s. That's my impression. So in terms of agenda-setting, I don't know how far commissions can provide impetus. Is it because the world is saturated with too much information? Globalization? Maybe, but I think it is difficult to see who is really setting the agenda now' (UNIHP interview). Ironically, Mrs Ogata subsequently agreed to co-chair the Human Security Commission, so perhaps her assessment has become more positive.

Global, ad hoc conferences are seen as important occasions to push ideas, and there is no doubt that on issues like the environment, women, human rights, population, and children they have been of crucial importance. At the same time, many interviewees wondered about their cost-effectiveness, especially now that follow-up has been routinized in the form of +5 and +10 conferences (organized five or ten years after the end of a gathering). Viewed from the vantage point of the beginning of the twenty-first century, it may be difficult to believe that as late as the 1960s environmental degradation, population growth, urbanization, and women's rights were being discussed in specialized circles but were largely invisible on the radar screen of international development. This changed during the 1970s, and one clear reason was that the UN system launched a series of global conferences on emerging global challenges (Fomerand, 1996; Schechter, 2001; UN, 1997). The major goals of these conferences were to raise awareness of common problems, to promote a change in the dominant attitudes toward them, to define solutions, to generate commitment and to stimulate the establishment of programmes of action to confront the challenges.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference was the first of the series and, from this perspective and in virtually everyone's opinion, a resounding success. The worldwide publicity that it generated contributed to the inclusion of environmental concerns in national and international policy discussions and in the recognition that environmental challenges had to be tackled as part of development in poorer countries, not instead of it. Environmental problems have played a crucial role in the growing awareness of interdependence and problems that countries could not solve alone (Commoner, 1971). The Stockholm conference illustrated the importance of naming a forceful personality like Maurice Strong to head the effort and of choosing a sympathetic host like Sweden. It also demonstrated the importance of intellectual preparations by experts at Founex (UN, 1971) before the actual

conference, as interviews with Ignacy Sachs and Michael Zammit-Cutajar (who were there) also indicated.

Overall, our interviews drew mixed reactions about the value of global, ad hoc conferences. Most were supportive, agreeing that public opinion was mobilized and long-run dynamics altered, but some were dubious about the precise impact and especially the cost-effectiveness of such gatherings. Gert Rosenthal thought back to his experience as a national and international civil servant:

I happen to think that one of the things the UN does best is to impact on public awareness through either global conferences or reports or just the repetition of certain topics. Sooner or later, people start repeating certain basic propositions. Usually they are born in the UN secretariat, or the UN secretariat buys in when they are developed somewhere else and popularizes them. The UN does that very well. It takes time. No single document, no single conference is a watershed event. Oftentimes a report's ideas find sudden wide repetition in public circles up to five years after [the report's] release. (UNIHP interview)

James Jonah also pointed to the potential of conferences for institution-building:

The general view was that they are good in terms of raising consciousness. That is one major goal which I would accept. But frankly, realistically, and honestly, it was also as a bureaucratic device by the secretariat to create institutions. If you look, many of these things came out of the conferences. Someone in the secretariat would be planning, 'How many posts am I going to get?' ... Most of it is conceived by people who want to advance their careers. (UNIHP interview)

One crucial difficulty in unpacking the exact influence of the UN *vis-à-vis* other means of promoting ideas is that people often wear many hats — at the same time, or certainly over the course of careers. There is the added problem of ideas that are 'in the air', as is so often the case, also in the field of science (Kuhn, 1962). This makes it difficult to determine where exactly an idea originates.

An excellent example of this phenomenon and of the problems in determining the precise role of the UN in the production of key ideas comes from the 1970s (Emmerij et al., 2001: 60–79). The ILO developed and launched the so-called basic needs approach to economic and social development. But where did this idea come from? Did it come from within the secretariat of the ILO World Employment Programme or from outside? The origin of the idea is difficult to unravel. In a 1942 article, the psychologist Abraham Maslow had already talked about basic needs as the lowest step on a five-rung ladder that culminated in spiritual and cultural needs (Maslow, 1942). India promoted a strategy of meeting 'minimum needs' in the early 1950s, heavily influenced by the economist Pitambar Pant. During the 1970s there were at least three places where the idea of basic needs was developing: the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, culminating in the publication 'What Now? Another Development' (*Development Dialogue*, 1975); in Argentina, where the Bariloche Foundation publication *Catástrofe o Nueva Sociedad: Modelo Mundial Latinoamericano* (Herrera, 1976) dealt with an analogous

approach; and in Geneva, where the ILO, preparing its 1976 World Employment Conference, produced a draft report in 1975 and a final one in 1976 in which the concept of basic needs took pride of place (ILO, 1976). How can one disentangle the exact origin of this idea, when several individuals were involved in all three projects?

This is the norm and not the exception. An idea ‘suddenly’ appears in different places at the same time. However, in terms of the UNIHP, the important thing is that in 1975–6 it surfaced and gained international policy traction, especially because of the UN setting. As Fernand Braudel argues, ‘For an idea to be successful it must come as a spark that enlightens the environment... Ideas are nothing in a vacuum; a culture must exist to receive them’ (Braudel, 1985: 632).

### **IS UN RESEARCH SUFFICIENTLY CRITICAL?**

Is independent and critical thinking within the UN system alive and well, or is it being weakened and compromised? In interviews as well as published memoirs, UN secretaries-general basically confirm that political and security crises tend to fill all the available time, and that economic and social issues assume a lower priority. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar wrote:

Coming from the Third World, I was especially unhappy during my ten years as Secretary-General with the failure of the United Nations to work as a system more effectively for economic and social development... It can be persuasively argued that, over the years, there has been inadequate leadership on the part of the Secretary-General and the UN Secretariat in placing the United Nations in the forefront of economic thinking... Moreover, the political and administrative demands on the Secretary-General have always come first. (Pérez de Cuéllar, 1990: 4–5)

In spite of this tendency, the present secretary-general, Kofi Annan, has taken the lead at the Millennium Summit, and in pressing for action to reduce poverty and to implement the MDGs.

In trying to determine the UN’s comparative advantage in the production or commissioning of research, a direct comparison with a social science faculty of a major research university is not appropriate. The UN’s emphasis is on applied research and workable policy recommendations and not on the generation of basic knowledge — the focus of the UN system is as much, or more, upon the politics of mobilizing political support for new undertakings as on probing basic scientific facts. The UN’s comparative advantage thus lies in doing something about global warming through a Kyoto or Montreal Protocol, not in measuring ozone levels.

So what happened to particular ideas within the UN? In tracing the sources and distortions of ideas, it is necessary to explore the importance of leadership within the UN and the specialized agencies, as well as the contributions by international civil servants. Other relevant factors include the part played by institutional rivalries or coalitions, particularly tensions

within the UN system, and between the UN bodies and the Bretton Woods institutions, which for our purposes are *de facto* independent even if *de jure* they are part of the system. The impact of rivalries or even of outright hostilities, within and among diplomatic coalitions, is an important and under-documented variable. We also seek to determine how the 'culture' of the UN — for example, its institutional style and hiring practices — impacts upon the amount of attention which ideas receive, and thus influences which ideas can be heard and eventually implemented. Analysing failures is as important as analysing successes in terms of understanding the UN role in facilitating consensus, and in perpetuating or exploding myths and reigning orthodoxies. The effort to document less as well as more 'successful' UN ideas is one means to foster more fruitful international discussions, negotiations and common approaches.

An example of the vagaries of measuring 'success' comes from the UN's approach after the physical collapse of the Berlin Wall and the ideological collapse of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. There were two schools of thought about the way ahead. The first was the 'impatient' school emanating from the World Bank, the IMF and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), as well as from several high-profile Western consultants. They were in favour of shock-therapy, undertaken as quickly as possible whatever the point of departure and regardless of the presence (or absence) of certain institutions like financial and banking facilities. The second school — promoted by the UN and particularly by the ECE — argued for a more cautious, gradual approach. Modernization was not a quick fix, but demanded appropriate institutions, careful trade liberalization policies, substantial inward transfer of resources, free access to major markets on which export-oriented growth could be based, and a sensitive treatment of the complicated heritage of 'social welfare'. This more deliberate approach stressed the need for wide social backing for a reform programme, in order to maintain a social consensus in favour of a shift to the market. It also underlined the painful effects of transition on the population.

The ECE's framework for transition focused on comprehensiveness (how much to change), speed (how to introduce change), and sequencing (what to change first). It presented a set of institutional reforms to be implemented at the outset: property rights, micro reforms at the enterprise level, the establishment of a commercial banking infrastructure, social safety net and labour market changes, as well as macroeconomic stabilization and price liberalization in the short run. Reforms with a lower priority would come later, including current account convertibility, easier foreign investments, and so forth. Finally, the ECE proposed changes that simply could not be addressed in the short term, such as large-scale privatization, the creation of an adequate regulatory environment and of capital markets, and reform of the pension system.

Should the ECE's ideas be counted as a failure because they were not implemented? There are several reasons why the ECE approach did not prevail: most importantly, it had no resources to put on the table, whereas the international financial institutions (IFIs) backed their ideas with billions of dollars of investments and grants — although not as many billions as they first argued would be necessary. The UN obviously had the experience (it was the only organization in which Eastern and Western Europe had previously co-operated) and the better strategy (as subsequent experience in the region, as well as the experience of China, have shown). But superior ideas do not necessarily win out in the face of superior resources.

Another important and potentially disturbing consideration is the extent to which UN research — whether conducted in-house or commissioned — is obliged to be 'politically correct'. The next question which arises is, whose definitions carry the most weight in determining correctness? Those of the major donors? Those of the countries most affected by a topic? The leadership in a particular secretariat? Or all of the above?

While the jury is still out on this question, the work of the UNIHP so far suggests that a great deal of vision and creative thinking emerged, especially from the first generation of UN leaders, and that the input of their colleagues and academic consultants was considerable. In later decades, and particularly since the 1980s, the vision was less bold, the ideas more blurred, and the UN, at least in the development arena, often sidelined. This was less a question of political correctness than a failure to speak out with analytical boldness. In the 1990s, with a new emphasis on human rights and human development, there was a revival of UN vision and intellectual creativity, and a new visibility often linked to the next generation of global conferences and summits. Economic backing and resources, however, remained concentrated in the Bretton Woods institutions, thereby limiting the application of many ideas.

In keeping with this, the role of neo-liberal orthodoxy and Western influence remains internationally dominant, even though collaboration across the different agencies of the UN and between the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions is encouraged — and, on occasion, actually takes place. In particular, the Millennium Summit of September 2000 outlined a new development agenda for the UN and opened up possibilities for a new and more balanced partnership with the Bretton Woods institutions and with the WTO. It is worth noting that this is the first time the World Bank and IMF have accepted outcome goals, as opposed to the process goals of structural adjustment in the 1980s.

It is difficult to assess whether or how far these new possibilities will be carried forward into action, as terrorism and war have now moved to centre stage at the United Nations and elsewhere. But development remains a central priority for the new millennium and the UN, with its universal membership and truly worldwide concerns, is in a unique position to contribute to new thinking. Indeed, without it, we will not only fail to see

progress towards the eradication of poverty and the achievement of economic and ecological sustainability and greater justice, but the situation will actually worsen.

## CONCLUSION

It is too soon to draw all the threads of the UNIHP together but even now some conclusions for action seem clear. We would like to conclude by putting forward four propositions that have emerged from our work to date.

First, the UN has had a more positive and pioneering record in the economic and social arena than is generally realized. This performance compares favourably with that of the Bretton Woods institutions, yet funding for development has increasingly flowed to the latter and away from the UN. The UN's record in economic and social ideas and action deserves to be better known and the imbalance in funding corrected. From its inception through to the 1970s, the UN has been a highly innovative body with ideas on terms of trade, the international dimension of economic development, centre-periphery analysis, and alternative development strategies. From the beginning of the 1980s, the initiative shifted to the Bretton Woods institutions, not so much in terms of ideas but of influence and power. However, as of 1990, the UNDP-sponsored human development approach has become an important alternative to the so-called Washington consensus.

Second, there has been an interesting trend of late towards a closer collaboration between the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN. 'Ownership' of development projects and initiatives by developing countries themselves are now considered essential, but the driving force for economic policy still rests with the IMF and the World Bank following the 'Washington consensus' orthodoxy. This is true both of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and of actions in pursuit of the MDGs. The historical record of performance suggests that this is still too narrow an approach and at variance with what is required to achieve the MDGs. The multi-disciplinary approaches of the UN need to be given much greater attention both in analysis and action (by the UN itself as well as by other bodies), especially at country level, and to be backed up with more staff and more resources (Fukada-Parr, 2004).

Third, the UN's most important contributions in ideas and thinking have come from a diversity of places and people. Leadership in ideas has shifted over the years, waxing and waning in different agencies and institutions, though usually linked to some common factors: boldness of vision and leadership; high quality of professional analysis that is both multi-disciplinary and pragmatic; close attention to country-level specifics and realities; freedom from tight government or bureaucratic control; and strong commitment to justice. These are the characteristics which need to be protected and carried

forward in the organization and practice of the UN's future research and analysis. Boldness of vision and leadership have been on the decline in the UN, and elsewhere, as bureaucratic and financial constraints have increased. Creative moments are limited in time everywhere, but particularly in an institutional environment. Nevertheless, we can try to establish the kind of organizational culture which will allow space for, and facilitate, these flashes of creativity, and to maximize the number of 'sparks that enlighten the environment'.

Fourth, quasi-university public research institutes like WIDER (World Institute for Development Economics Research) and UNRISD (UN Research Institute for Social Development) have a special place. They hold out a credible hope for re-igniting the creative intellectual flame in UN economic and social work. Their mission is to pioneer applied research, to undertake policy advocacy and to strengthen capacity in the area of sustainable growth. They have research staff and worldwide networks of collaborators, thereby avoiding the problems of motivation that bedevil organizations that rely too heavily on permanent staff. Governments contribute funding to projects that they wish to support, thereby introducing multiple accountabilities that reduce the scope of a single country to exercise an overbearing financial leverage on the intellectual direction of the organization in question.

In the light of all this, the future is anything but bleak. We should be able to inject some of the excitement and creativity of the early years. In the words of our colleagues John Toye and Richard Toye: 'it is still possible to believe that international organizations can be creative intellectual actors, and that there will be more intellectual history of the United Nations to be written in the future' (Toye and Toye, 2004: 298).

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