

The UN and Development Thinking and Practice

Abstract

Over the 60 years of its existence, the UN has led the way in a large number of areas of economic and social development. It has made major and pioneering contributions – nationally and internationally – in the setting of development priorities, in analysing strategic issues, in developing a statistical system to quantify them and in the formulation of recommendations across a wide field of important policy matters. With the benefit of hindsight, one can see not only that the UN has often led the way but that it has often also been right when others – in particular, the Bretton Woods institutions – have been opposed, doubting or reluctant to follow. Yet, often – five, 10 or 15 years later – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and others have changed their mind and moved to adopt the very policies or approaches that they had rejected earlier.

Unfortunately, and despite this evidence, the Bretton Woods institutions still receive overwhelming support and funding from the donor countries. In contrast, the UN funds and institutions are treated as marginal in matters of economic and social policy-making. The UN receives much less funding. This article argues that the time has come for major rethinking and some redressing of the balance. International action on development would be greatly advanced if policy-makers, especially those within donor agencies, gave more attention to the ideas of the ‘New York dissent’ and less to those of the ‘Washington consensus’.

Keywords: United Nations, social development, economic development, economic and social policy-making, development priorities, Bretton Woods institutions, World Bank

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In *Ahead of the Curve* (Emmerij *et al.*, 2001), the first volume of the UN Intellectual History Project, we added a question mark after the title. Had the UN really been ahead of the curve as much as our first review of the evidence seemed to suggest? Now, four years later – with nine volumes completed or in press – we believe the question mark should be dropped.

Over the 60 years of its existence, the UN has led the way in a large number of areas of economic and social development. It has

made major and pioneering contributions – nationally and internationally – in the setting of development priorities, in analysing strategic issues, in developing a statistical system to quantify them and in the formulation of recommendations across a wide field of important policy matters. With the benefit of hindsight, one can see not only that the UN has often led the way but that it has often also been right when others – in particular, the Bretton Woods institutions – have been opposed, doubting or reluctant to follow. Yet, often – five, 10 or 15 years later – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and others have changed their mind and moved to adopt the very policies or approaches that they had rejected earlier.

Many examples illustrate this process: concessional finance for poorer countries in the 1950s; goals for a development decade in the 1960s; basic needs in the early 1970s; ‘adjustment with a human face’ in the 1980s; institutional reform as a precondition for transition at the end of the 1980s; issues of women and gender in development, debt relief, the special needs of the least developed countries as well as disarmament for development over several decades. All these are cases where the stone that at first the builders ignored or rejected was later made the headstone of the corner.

Unfortunately, and despite this evidence, the Bretton Woods institutions still receive overwhelming support and funding from the donor countries. In contrast, the UN funds and institutions are treated as marginal in matters of economic and social policy-making. The UN receives much less funding, often being ‘starved into reform’, in the phrase of Margaret Joan Anstee, the first woman Under-Secretary-General. This article argues that the time has come for major rethinking and some redressing of the balance. International action on development would be greatly advanced, I believe, if policy-makers, especially those within donor agencies, gave more attention to the ideas of the ‘New York dissent’ and less to those of the ‘Washington consensus’.

UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice (Jolly *et al.*, 2004) provides much of the evidence to underpin this conclusion. In this article I provide a summary of key steps in the argument – but not, I hasten to add, to discourage any readers from reading or at least consulting the whole book. The article focuses on key areas where the UN has made pioneering contributions:

- (1) framing the issues;
- (2) leading the way;
- (3) opposing orthodoxy and exploring alternatives;
- (4) setting goals and mobilising commitment.

Section 1 provides an overview, showing how the UN's founding and fundamental principles have come ever closer together in its development work over the years. The next three sections deal with areas where the Bretton Woods institutions have largely been absent or hesitant, at least until the last few years. A fifth and final section provides some conclusions for the future.

1. Framing the Issues

One of the UN's most distinct contributions, from its early days and beginning with the charter itself, has been to define a vision and to set out an agenda to achieve it. There were four powerful elements in this vision, each at the time breathtaking in their boldness and universality:¹

- ▼ peace and negotiation in place of war;
- ▼ purposeful and accelerated economic and social development;
- ▼ human rights for all;
- ▼ sovereign independence.

Until the 1980s, these four elements tended to run in parallel, not together or even lightly integrated. Development was mostly taken to be economic development. Mapping out what was involved was largely left to economists – often very distinguished economists, it is true, but nonetheless economists. Over the years, the UN's vision of development shifted, moving from the narrowly economic to a broader, multidisciplinary perspective by the 1990s. People-focused human development² entered in the 1980s, formalised and elaborated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the 1990s and now promoted more generally in the UN, and increasingly incorporating human rights, conflict resolution, peace and peace-building. All are seen today as important ingredients in the construction of sustainable development.

Following the Millennium Summit, the UN has placed great emphasis on poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals. These are set in the broader frame of the Millennium Dec-

1 For an elaboration of each, see the article by Louis Emmerij, 'How Has the UN Faced up to Development Challenges?', in this volume.

2 Throughout this article, human development is used to characterise a people-centred approach to development strategy as a whole, not just to support and expenditure for education and health. *The Human Development Reports* have articulated most fully what this would involve.

laration (Annan, 2000), which made clear that the goals for poverty reduction are only part of a much broader and fuller agenda for sustainable development. In the Secretary-General's report of 2005, *In Larger Freedom* (UN, 2005), the four components have been most coherently brought together.

The UN's initial focus on development as an economic process was in line with thinking about economic development at the time. The UN issued three major reports on economic development in 1949 and 1951 (UN, 1949, 1951a, 1951b). The starting point for the first was strongly Keynesian – how to achieve or maintain full employment, a pre-occupation fired by the memories of the Great Depression in the 1930s. The first report was theoretically and intellectually pioneering, elaborating the international conditions and policies required to complement and make possible in each country national policies for full employment. John Toye and Richard Toye refer to this as 'extreme Keynesianism' and it took little time before the approach proposed generated strong political opposition, especially from the United States (Toye and Toye, 2004: 99–102).

The application of Keynesian policies for demand management as the key step to achieve full employment in developing countries also raised doubts. Soon this initial frame of reference gave way to a perspective more in line with the economic realities of developing countries. The second report, *Measures for Economic Development of the Underdeveloped Countries*, issued in 1951, 'identified the rapid creation of new employment as the main part of the solution and long term economic development as the critical condition for achieving it' (UN, 1951b: 9). But the priority for poor countries was shifted from demand management to the need to raise savings, investment and thus the rate of economic growth – an analysis that was pioneering for the time. Although the analysis was broad, rich and subtle – covering, for example, stable and democratic government, land reform and equitable taxation, education and health, planning and market incentives – the goal was narrow and economic: an acceleration of economic growth.

By the 1960s, the importance of economic development was rising on the UN agenda, greatly stimulated by the many newly independent countries that had become or were about to become UN members. In 1961, President Kennedy proposed in a speech to the General Assembly that the 1960s should become a 'development decade'. Almost all parts of the UN became involved in elaborating what this should involve, with the collective response published in 1962 as *The UN Development Decade – Proposals for Ac-*

tion. Although it has often been suggested that this was solely focused on an acceleration of economic growth, the opening foreword by U Thant, then acting Secretary-General, makes clear that even at that time a more subtle perspective was beginning to emerge. He wrote: ‘Development is not just economic growth, it is growth plus change.’

Later the same report quoted the Economic and Social Council’s Committee on Programme Appraisals, saying:

One of the greatest dangers in development policy lies in the tendency to give the more material aspects of growth an over-riding and disproportionate emphasis. The end may be forgotten in preoccupation with the means. Human rights may be submerged and human beings seen only as instruments of production rather than as free entities for whose welfare and cultural advance the increased production is intended. The recognition of this issue has a profound bearing upon the formulation of the objectives of economic development and the methods employed in attaining them (UN, 1962: 10–11).

The reference to human rights and cultural advance showed a glimmering of a broader approach to development, but at the time there was little follow-through, either in the goals of the decade or for some years thereafter. Development still mainly meant economic and social development.

In the 1970s, the International Labour Organization (ILO) led the way in shifting the focus back to employment, but with a much broader exploration of the meaning of employment and the issues involved. Underlying an apparent ‘lack of jobs’, the ILO argued, were, in fact, three different and distinct types of employment problem: the frustration of job-seekers unable to obtain the type of work or the remuneration they judged reasonable; the low level – in fact, a poverty level – of incomes obtained by many producers and their families, whether in self- or family employment or in wage employment; and underutilisation and low productivity of the labour force, both male and female, reflecting the inefficiency in the way labour was trained, deployed or supported with other resources (ILO, 1972).

In response to these broader concerns, the ILO proposed that development policy should be broadened to encompass a diversity of actions to deal with all three problems. Over the 1970s, this led to more comprehensive analysis, linked to specific attention to actions that would help reduce poverty, which in turn led to strategies of redistribution with growth and basic needs. These formed the cutting edge of the UN’s contributions to development thinking about

national policy in the 1970s, formally set out in the resolutions of the World Employment Conference in 1976. The ILO's analysis and reports had an important impact on the World Bank, whose president, Robert McNamara, was already giving strong emphasis to poverty reduction and who later in the 1970s emphasised basic needs.

Within the UN, over the 1970s, the development agenda was also being broadened by a succession of pioneering international conferences. These focused on environment and development (1972), hunger and world food problems (1974), population growth (1974), human settlements (1976) and science and technology (1979). The first of the World Conferences on Women, held in Mexico in 1975, probably had the most impact of all. Not only did it energise women and women's movements from all over the world, it led directly to the creation of UNIFEM (the United Nations Development Fund for Women) and INSTRAW (the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) and to CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted in 1979.

All of these carried forward development thinking and achieved considerable and substantive consensus, at least with respect to national policy. The important exception was the sixth special session of the General Assembly held in 1974 on the New International Economic Order (NIEO). Stalemate on this theme continued with little progress until the end of the 1970s, when the industrial countries effectively managed to remove the topic from the international agenda. Efforts by developing countries to introduce the issues were met with the interesting and ultimately tautological argument that calling for an NIEO did not help dialogue, meaning essentially that the industrial countries did not want to talk about it.

In the 1980s, with rising debt and world recession, action on many of these broader perspectives and priorities for development was brought to a shuddering halt. With strong political and financial support from the industrial countries, the locus of international economic policy shifted to the Bretton Woods institutions. For the next decade, the IMF and the World Bank dominated the international agenda for development, with a priority focus, initially on stabilisation, later on structural adjustment.³ Stabilisation made no pretence at achieving growth in the short run. In contrast, structural adjustment gave priority attention to three objectives – reducing inflation, correcting

3 A full description can be found in Kapur *et al.*, 1997, Chapter 7 on 'Demotion and Rededication, 1981 to the mid 1990s'.

imbalances in deficits and restoring economic growth, in that order of priority. The first objective was generally achieved, sometimes the second, rarely the third. The development agenda had been narrowed – to such an extent that, when the statistics came in, the 1980s were christened ‘a lost decade for development’ in both sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

The UN was left to take on the role of constructive dissent. In 1985, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) began promoting the need for ‘adjustment with a human face’⁴ and issued its two-volume study in 1987. Meanwhile the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was mobilising for alternatives in Africa. In 1989, ECA issued the African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment Programmes (AAF-SAP), adopted by the General Assembly in November.⁵ By 1990, UNDP had prepared the first of its annual human development reports, setting out a more fundamental alternative to Bretton Woods orthodoxy.

The human development approach was inspired by Mahbub ul Haq, the economic visionary and Pakistan’s former Minister of Finance. Human development was given theoretical foundations by the philosophical analysis and creative economic thinking of Professor Amartya Sen, who was later to receive the Nobel Prize for Economics. Human development was defined as a process of enlarging people’s choices and strengthening human capabilities (UNDP, 1990: 1). Successive human development reports over the 1990s broadened further the development agenda by exploring what a human development approach would mean for a number of priority areas: the concept and measurement of development, development financing, human security, women’s equality and gender, economic growth, poverty, consumption, globalisation and human rights. Each of these pioneered a new approach, not as an add-on to orthodox economic development but as a broadening of the rapidly evolving concept of human development, which rested on fundamentally different foundations (Sen, 1999).

Also in the 1990s came the second round of global conferences and summits, reinforcing earlier priorities for environment, human rights, population, social development, gender equality, food security

4 In its report, *State of the World’s Children 1984*, UNICEF started calling for a broader approach to adjustment and a two-volume study was published in 1987 (Cornia *et al.*, 1987).

5 *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation*, General Assembly Resolution 44/49, 17 November 1989. The full story is told in Adedeji, 2004.

and urban development. These culminated in 2000 in the Millennium Summit, which adopted the Millennium Declaration and a programme of action focused on poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. By this stage, new efforts had been made to establish closer links between the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions, with the result that the Bretton Woods institutions accepted the Millennium Development Goals.

Over this long period of more than half a century, the four major concerns of the UN in 1945 came ever closer together – though they took most of the 55 years to do so. Human rights became integrated in human development, which articulated a philosophy and strategy for economic development and human advance. Conflict resolution became accepted as an essential condition for development, with the UN issuing *The Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali, 1992), setting out international strategy for conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace-building and peacekeeping. Recently, this has been taken further with the proposals for creating a Commission on Peace-building as a sub-committee of the Security Council. Peace, development and human rights were no longer separate pursuits, but seen and promoted as integral parts of holistic, human development

Sovereign independence, already largely achieved by most countries by the 1960s, is the one area where rethinking and reinterpretation rather than integration with earlier goals is underway. Genocide and other violent abuses of human rights in the post-Cold-War era have led the UN to embark on a series of debates exploring ‘the responsibility to protect and the right to intervene’. The Secretary-General has incorporated specific proposals for this in his 2005 Report, *In Larger Freedom* (UN, 2005: paras 132, 135–136 and Annex para 7), although the extent to which they will be accepted is not yet clear.

It is interesting to speculate on why this integration of the UN’s fundamental objectives took so long. Why for three or four decades were the four main aims of development pursued in parallel rather than together? And why more recently have they come together?

The Cold War is undoubtedly part of the explanation. Human rights became a divisive topic, more a political and ideological football to be kicked back and forth between East and West than a programme of action. In contrast, development was a programme of action demanded by developing countries, to which both the West and the East could respond competitively. True, there were strong ideological differences in the responses and the UN itself pursued

a development approach that was often balanced somewhere between the extremes of pure market capitalism and the pure planned economy.

But the Cold War was only one factor – and of decreasing importance in the late 1970s and 1980s. With the global conferences on environment and women, social movements and non-government organisations became an ever more important force, in countries and within the UN, as participants in the global conferences. Following Mexico in 1975, the women’s movement became more consciously international with stronger international links. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women became a focus for mobilisation, country by country, linked directly to calls for national development to incorporate women’s concerns much more seriously. Parallel moves for children and children’s rights were underway in the 1980s, culminating in the adoption in 1989 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the holding of the World Summit for Children in 1990. The World Summit for Children was the first of the 1990s summits and involved more than a million people taking part in candlelight vigils round the world.

The leadership and support of the UN organisations and secretariat were a third factor, as these bodies gained vision and momentum in working for the environment, and for women and children, incorporating these groups’ priorities into national and international programmes of action. By the 1990s, these were seen to be part of the broader challenge of moving to ‘a rights-based approach to development’ more generally.

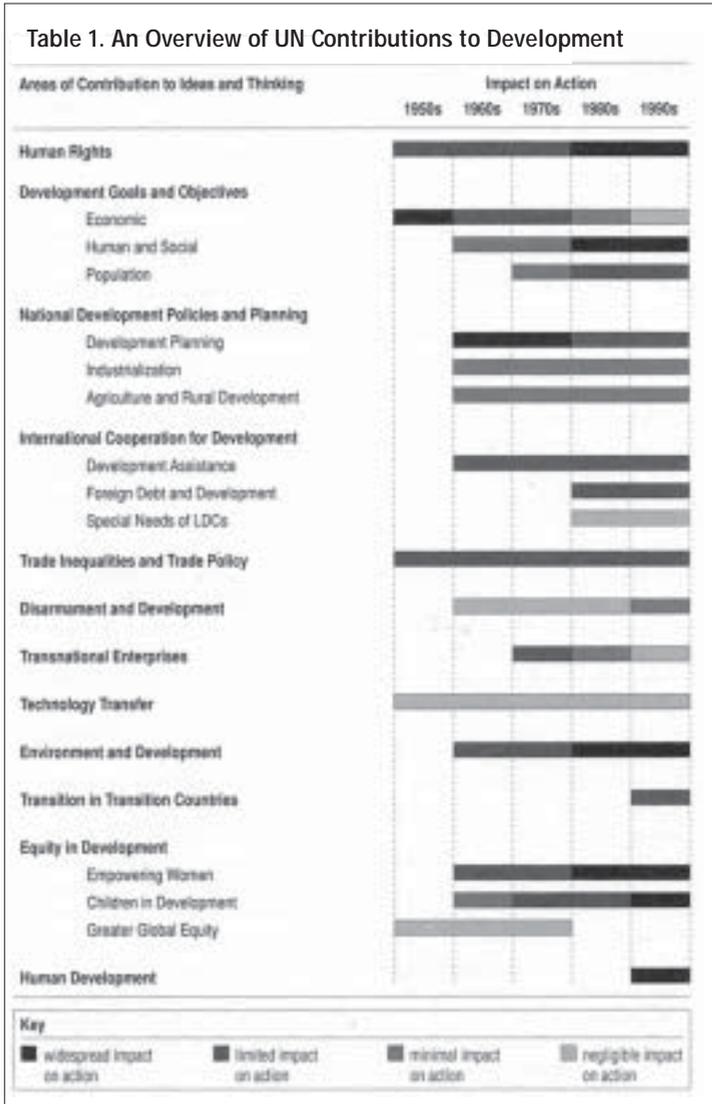
These advances in development perspectives and priorities were impressive – but they were far from complete. In spite of the broadening agenda, several key issues, earlier identified as priorities, faded or were dropped:

- ▼ moderating the factors of instability in poorer countries, especially fluctuations in commodity prices which lead to extreme fluctuations and instabilities;
- ▼ disarmament and development;
- ▼ narrowing extreme gaps between the richest and poorest countries;
- ▼ cultural diversity.

These four – and no doubt others – now need to be rediscovered as core components of development.

2. Leading the Way

The volumes of the UN history identify many issues where the UN has led the way. They comprise more successful initiatives and innovative proposals than we first expected. Table 1 sets out schematically the main areas where the UN has made important intellectual contributions – with a rough indication of the extent of their impact over the decades.⁶



⁶ Table 1 is Table 11.1 in Chapter 11 of *UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice* (Jolly et al., 2004).

Population and the environment

Although the UN may have led the way, at least in the international community, it may still with hindsight be judged to have been slow in certain areas of activity. One such area is that of population. In 1945, when the UN was founded, world population numbered just under 2.5 billion. Today it is over 6 billion, by far the largest and most rapid expansion in human history (World Bank, 2000: 33). Although this is now widely realised, the fact is that for the first two decades of the UN's life, population growth was not treated, or accepted, as a major policy issue. It is true that the UN issued a large, comprehensive and pioneering volume in 1953, *The Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends* (UN, 1953). This contained data and analysis far ahead of the time – perhaps not surprising, since many countries then lacked even a basic census. Notwithstanding the lack of data, this volume included projections that world population would reach between 3.3 and 3.8 billion by the year 2000. For the time, these projections represented very large increases, though with hindsight they are well under two-thirds of the 6 billion actually reached by that year. Even so, policy discussion on matters of population was played down as highly sensitive, for instance in the WHO, and essentially kept off the international agenda for another two decades.

A slow awakening occurred in the 1960s. In 1966 the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organised a meeting on the management of family planning. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) devoted two sessions in the late 1960s to debate the issues. Then in 1974 the first World Conference on Population took place in Bucharest. After this, action took off. Within less than 10 years, by 1983, about 70 per cent of the participating countries had established high-level units to deal with population issues in their governments. A decade after that, by 1994, fertility rates were falling in most countries outside of the poorest and the UN organised a further conference – the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. This shifted the emphasis from family planning to the much broader agenda of women's empowerment, gender equality and the right to choose, as well as to improvements in maternal and reproductive health. Although population is still projected to grow to about 8.5 billion by 2050, it is noteworthy that fertility rates in countries with almost half the world's population have now fallen to below replacement levels.

Much more serious in terms of the capacity of the world to

achieve sustainable patterns of development have been issues related to the environment. In 1969, the Secretary-General issued a report to the General Assembly, *Problems of the Human Environment*. Its opening sentence set the tone: 'For the first time in the history of mankind, there is arising a crisis of world-wide proportion involving developed and developing countries – the crisis of the human environment' (UN, 1969: 4). Following this, the UN organised two world conferences on environment and development, both path-breakers, politically and conceptually. In spite of growing concern about pollution in the industrial countries and fears that scarcities of raw materials would set 'limits to growth', plans for the UN's first mega-conference, to be held in 1972, were initially met with 'massive criticism' from several industrialised countries and strong scepticism among many developing countries.

To explore the issues, Maurice Strong, the conference's Secretary-General gathered a panel of experts at Founex in 1971 to explore the issues and seek common ground. This group noted big differences between the environmental priorities of developed countries and those of developing countries, the former worried about industrial pollutants, overuse of fertilisers and pesticides, and depletion of energy and resources, and the latter concerned with the environmental basics of unsafe drinking water, inadequate shelter, illness and natural disasters. Even more contentious were the fears of developing countries that the North's concerns about global resource exhaustion would be used as an argument against further development in the South. As one participant put it, the North, having already consumed large quantities of the world's natural resources and added greatly to the world's pollution as a bi-product of consumption to sustain lifestyles of affluence, will then argue that there are neither resources nor space left for development by the poorer countries.

This clash was headed off when the need for a new strategy, which would incorporate the concerns of both groups, was recognised. Thus the 1972 conference adopted a declaration combining the two elements – the elimination of mass poverty and the creation of a decent human environment. Some environmental problems would inevitably arise as a consequence of industrialisation, but they should and could be minimised through policies and planning. All this was a major advance in thinking and political agreement – and to carry the ideas forward, the UN established UNEP, the UN Environment Programme, with a voluntary fund to finance programmes of environmental protection. The idea of inner and outer limits was

born soon after, the inner limits defined as the resources needed to satisfy the basic human needs of all on the planet without transgressing the outer limits of the earth's biosphere.

In the 1980s, the idea of sustainable development was developed in UNEP, a concept elaborated further in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987). These were carried through to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. By this time, the essential nature of environmental problems had been clarified. Understanding had shifted away from absolute scarcity of non-renewable resources to the pollution or destruction of renewable resources, especially of water and air, soil and forests.

Moreover, after the Kyoto conference on climate change in the late 1990s, global warming had emerged as one of the world's most serious problems. Until then, environmental problems had tended to be seen as those of living in a global fish bowl. Kyoto introduced the problem of what to do when the whole goldfish bowl was put in a microwave.

Over the years, many practical initiatives have followed and considerable progress has been made, including the adoption of UN conventions on the Law of the Sea and the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping (both in 1972), the control of trans-boundary movements of hazardous waste and the protection of the ozone layer. The Rio conference led to further conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification, along with the creation of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), to provide funding and technical assistance for projects to preserve biodiversity, protect forests and improve soils.

Women and gender

Perhaps no aspects of economic and social development have seen such change as those concerning women and issues of gender. From an almost total absence of any mention in the first two decades of development, concern for gender equality and the impact of all aspects of development on women and girls has become a central priority. Although the UN is only one of the locations in which debate on such changes has taken place, it has played a major role in formulating new approaches, defining their details and, perhaps above all, mobilising support globally, regionally and in most countries.

The fact that the UN Charter refers to women as well as men is the direct result of the skilful lobbying of the only four women – out of 160 people in all – to sign the Charter in 1945 in San Francisco. Soon after, it was Bodil Begtrup, the Danish delegate, who in ECOSOC argued for the commission on the status of women to be separate from the commission on human rights. As the volume on gender by Devaki Jain in the UN Intellectual History Project explains (Jain, 2005, forthcoming), within a year the UN secretariat included a section on the status of women. In contrast to many governments at the time, which argued that the status of women was part of national culture and traditions – and that the UN should not intrude on matters of national sovereignty – Begtrup argued that women’s equality with men was a universal. Soon after, Eleanor Roosevelt played a leading role in mobilising support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By 1950 the UN had undertaken surveys in 74 countries in order to document the situation of women.

Notwithstanding, specific concern for women and for issues of gender remained absent from the debate and almost all documentation on economic and social development. The secretariat document on the First Development Decade makes no specific mention of women. It was only in 1970, after Esther Boserup had published her path-breaking book, *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (Boserup, 1970), that specific concern for women became part of the development debate. Boserup, as a member of the UN Committee for Development Planning, emphasised these issues; and the Economic Commission for Africa was already holding meetings on women’s roles.

The first World Conference on Women, which took place in Mexico in 1975, began a process of major change. Although it was insisted that this conference had to be chaired by a man, the conference mobilised awareness and specific action worldwide. The delegates returned to their home countries with a new vision of possibilities, new determination to act and new awareness of allies, as well as actions under way worldwide. Within four years, CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, had been accepted. The process of mobilisation continued and was furthered by three subsequent conferences – in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

Under this stimulus and pressure, thinking about women and gender in development evolved considerably. In the 1970s the focus was on the roles of women in development. This led the ILO

and others to focus on women's work, including their greatly neglected unpaid work at home, in the field and in the informal sector. By the 1980s, the focus was shifting from women in development to women and development, the implication being that the very concept of development needed to be broadened. By the 1990s the focus was shifting again to gender, with the emphasis on the need for gender equality and on the changes this implied for men as well as women.

Disarmament, development and human security

Possibilities for creatively linking development and disarmament have been recognised and recommended during every decade of the UN's existence. In 1955 France made the first proposal – that participating states should reduce their military spending each year by a certain agreed percentage, the resources released being paid into an international fund, a quarter of which would be allocated to development and the remainder left at the disposal of the government concerned. Variants of this proposal emerged from different governments in subsequent decades. In the Development Decade of the 1960s it was argued that

the acceleration of growth of aggregate incomes in underdeveloped countries from perhaps 3½ % now to 5% would require no more than the diversion of about 10% of the savings resulting from a reduction in armament expenditures by one half (UN, 1962a: 12–13).⁷

The most thorough and innovative report on disarmament and development came later – that of the Thorsson Commission set up by the UN in 1982. The Thorsson Report reviewed a great deal of evidence and analysed the issues with great care. Its authors concluded that

the world can continue to pursue the arms race with characteristic vigour or move consciously and with deliberate speed towards a more stable and balanced economic and social development. It cannot do both (UN, 1982: 235).

This long and outspoken concern of the UN for disarmament and development is in sharp contrast to years of silence from the World

⁷ This drew on UN, 1962b.

Bank and the IMF. As the World Bank historians have commented, ‘Arms reduction...is sensitive as well as political and was typically avoided by the Bank until...the aftermath of the Cold War’ (Kapur *et al.*, 1997: 533).

It was in the 1990s that the most innovative thinking emerged. The *Human Development Report 1994* formulated the concept of human security as a fundamental challenge to conventional thinking:

For too long, the concept of security has been shaped by the potential for conflict between states. For too long, security has been equated with the threats to a country’s borders. For too long, nations have sought arms to protect their security (UNDP, 1994: i).

The report went on to summarise the key elements of the new approach. Human security would be:

- ▼ people-centred, not nation-centred;
- ▼ focused on a broader range of threats to people, varied but interdependent;
- ▼ a universal concern, although the intensity of the various threats vary from one part of the world to another;
- ▼ generally easier and cheaper to ensure through prevention than cure.

The emphasis on human security did not mean abandoning the concern with disarmament but setting it in a broader context. The *Human Development Report 1994* recognised the widespread need to reduce military spending. To this end, it included a range of specific proposals, notably for a Global Demilitarisation Fund,⁸ to ease the transition to lower military spending as part of shifting military spending to more productive uses, including support for a range of measures to prevent or control various causes of human insecurity.

The concept of human security has met with doubts and scepticism from some academic quarters (MacFarlane and Foong-Khong, 2005, forthcoming.). One argument is that it is little more than ‘renaming as security’ many problems that already have per-

⁸ The proposals for a Global Demilitarisation Fund came from Oscar Arias, former President of Costa Rica and winner of the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize (UNDP, 1994: 59).

fectly good names. There is also a fear that it might tend to encourage military solutions to human security problems, which are at present treated in other ways. To my mind, these reactions are heavily influenced by traditional thinking within the discipline of international relations. In contrast, economists may like the concept precisely because it raises questions about the present allocation of resources, with the implication that many countries are overspending on military approaches to human security and underspending on non-military approaches. Human security raises awareness of many other needs – for instance to tackle causes of human insecurity such as urban crime, infectious diseases, environmental degradation and gender violence.

Since the *Human Development Report 1994*, the idea of human security has attracted increasing interest. The Japanese, Norwegian and Canadian governments have provided support, an International Commission has explored the issues in a report, *Human Security Now* (UN, 2003), and human security has been used as the integrating concept for the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenge and Change. The Secretary-General, as already mentioned, has embodied the ideas in his own report, *In Larger Freedom*, prepared for the UN Summit in September 2005.

Least developed countries and the debt burden

As early as 1964, UNCTAD, at its founding conference, identified the need for special attention to 'the less developed among the developing countries'. Four years later a resolution was passed on the needs of the least developed countries (LDCs). The special features of these economies were made a focus of work by two expert groups. In 1971, 24 countries were identified and placed on the original list of what became 'least developed countries'. By 1998, the least developed countries consisted of 49 countries with a population of over 600 million, accounting for some 10 per cent of the world's population.

By the late 1970s, it was becoming clear that many of these countries were lagging seriously behind in development. UNCTAD organised a major conference on the least developed countries in 1981 – and, as these countries continued to fall behind, subsequent conferences were held in 1990 and 2001. Although the UN has led the way in identifying many specific actions that could be taken to accelerate growth and development in these countries, international support has failed to fulfil the goals set for international support,

even by the weak standards of the performance of donors in relation to the general target that official development assistance (ODA) should reach 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP). Nor has the World Bank or the IMF formally yet recognised the 'least developed' category of countries. The failure of the world community to respond to the clearly identified needs of these countries must be judged, 40 years later, to be one of the most serious omissions of action for development.

Over the years, the UN has undertaken many analyses on the external debt of developing countries and formulated many proposals for action. In the 1987 *Trade and Development Report*, for example, UNCTAD analysed the weaknesses of the international debt strategy pursued in the 1980s, emphasising 'the failure to conceive it within a broader strategy for accelerating growth in the world economy'. The report added: '...rapidly expanding export earnings are fundamental to any successful debt strategy and, without them, the objectives of accelerating growth in debtor countries and achieving financial viability cannot be reconciled' (UNCTAD, 1987: 59).

Notwithstanding this analysis and many proposals for action, it took another 10 years for the international community to develop the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt initiative and several more years to agree the HIPC programme as first proposed was inadequate and then to introduce further proposals to improve it. One must conclude that HIPC, even in its latest version, is grossly inadequate: too little, too late, and succeeding in only a handful of countries.

3. Opposing Orthodoxy and Exploring Alternatives

Even in the earliest years, the UN's contributions were often in contrast to the orthodoxy of the World Bank and the IMF. Partly this reflected the different political base of the two institutions, the UN having equal representation of all countries and the Bretton Woods institutions a voting system weighted in relation to the financial contributions and, behind this, the GNP of the countries concerned. The result has been that the Bretton Woods institutions have tended to produce analysis and policy recommendations constrained by the interests of developed countries while, in contrast, the UN has produced analysis and recommendations in favour of developing countries.

Sharp differences became visible even in the 1950s. Major battles over SUNFED, the Special UN fund for Economic Develop-

ment, emerged when the fund was first proposed in 1949. The battles continued during most of the 1950s. The UN produced for ECOSOC a succession of reports, arguing the case for concessional funding for developing countries. The World Bank, notably its then-president Eugene Black, dismissed the case, arguing that concessional funding would be anti-market, dependent on subsidies from the industrial countries and altogether against the interests of developing countries.

Only in 1957, after nine years of highly contentious and often tortuous debate, was the matter brought to a resolution, with a historic compromise. The UN would be allowed to have an expanded programme of technical assistance funded by a separate special fund in the UN, although on a much smaller scale from the original SUNFED proposal. The provision of concessional funding would become a programme of the World Bank, notwithstanding their nine years of steady opposition. Thus the International Development Association (IDA) was born, which of course continues to this day as the major international instrument for providing concessional assistance to the poorest countries.

In the 1980s alternative approaches to adjustment became a focus of UN analysis and debate. UNICEF came up with adjustment with a human face (AWHF). The Economic Commission for Africa came up with the African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment Programmes (AAF-SAP). Both institutions recognised the need for adjustment but both argued that the criteria used by the World Bank were both too narrow and were leading to programmes that were ineffective. Evaluations by the Bank and the IMF consistently showed that only one or two goals were being achieved – in virtually all cases, those of reducing inflation, and sometimes, but by no means always, of closing budgetary gaps. In only a few cases was economic growth accelerating.

Equally serious, the neglect of health education, nutrition and other human needs in the framing of adjustment was leading to serious human consequences. As UNICEF argued, if child malnutrition rose as a consequence of adjustment, there was generally no second chance. The ILO also took up the cudgels – and the late 1980s planned a major international conference to debate alternatives to adjustment. The United States was not pleased. Indeed, it threatened to leave the organisation if this conference proceeded. In its place, a smaller and more technical conference was organised, with only limited trade union participation.

Although greeted initially with scepticism, the proposals for al-

ternatives to adjustment have over the years been increasingly accepted by the World Bank and the IMF, at least in principle and in the rhetoric. By the late 1990s, the World Bank had broadened its approaches to development and it is now fully committed to the pursuit of poverty reduction, the Millennium Development Goals and broader development. Although the IMF claims to be equally committed, in practice it largely pursues its traditional agenda of adjustment, arguing that this creates the conditions for long-term stability, which is needed to underpin programmes of growth and poverty reduction.

A third major area where the UN became the major dissident international voice was in the pursuit of more institutional approaches to transition. These were first proposed by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in 1989 and 1990, in strong contrast to the pursuit of a 'Big Bang' approach, which was the conventional wisdom of the time. The ECE argued that the process of transition could not be rushed, that institutional change must be planned and supported and be an early part of reform. If institutional reform were neglected, any sudden installation of market capitalism would be bound to fail. It took most of a decade for this to be generally accepted.

It is wrong to suggest that the UN has always been a dissenting voice to Washington orthodoxy – or that the World Bank has never supported issues on which the UN has led. During the years of his presidency of the World Bank (1968–81), Robert McNamara was a pioneering and outspoken advocate of many issues that the UN had itself only been promoting more publicly – such as population – or was beginning to explore – such as environment and development. Throughout his tenure McNamara made poverty reduction both an explicit and a 'direct' goal for the Bank (Kapur *et al.*, 1997: Vol. 1, 217). McNamara was also an advocate of equitable growth, a theme explored by Hollis Chenery, who was chief economist and vice-president for research over most of the McNamara years. In 1974 Hollis Chenery co-authored a study with colleagues from the Bank and the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, on *Redistribution with Growth* (Chenery *et al.*, 1974). Four years later Mahbub ul Haq and Paul Streeten produced a succession of studies on basic needs (Streeten *et al.*, 1981). In these cases the mutual reinforcement of the UN and Bretton Woods reflected strong leadership by the World Bank president and strong professional support from key economists within the World Bank, several there on short-term assignments.

Even so, the history of the World Bank makes clear that advocacy and policy leadership often failed to connect with the Bank's own action and lending programmes. Population control was a major theme of McNamara during his first two or three years but it met with opposition, fell off rapidly after 1970 and 'had a short life' (Kapur *et al.*, 1997: Vol. 1, 236). Heavily influenced by Barbara Ward and Maurice Strong, environment became a major theme of McNamara's advocacy, but only two or three specialist environmental staff members were employed over the whole of his tenure and it took until the decade 1985–95 before the number substantially increased, from five to 300 (Wade, 1997: 612). Similarly, McNamara became a strong promoter of health and nutrition but only in 1979 was the Bank's Population, Health and Nutrition Department established. Even on poverty reduction, which McNamara saw as the Bank's central goal, the staff resisted. 'The staff did not really believe in the poverty thesis' which they saw as McNamara's and Mahbub's 'favourite toy'. The World Bank history is full of revealing quotes from senior staff and others. 'We economists did not take McNamara's poverty message seriously... We were very stubborn' (Kapur *et al.*, 1997: 240).

4. Setting Goals and Mobilising Commitment

The UN has long adopted and promoted goals for economic and social development. In 1960 and 1961, UNESCO organised a series of regional conferences directly concerned with the goals of achieving universal primary education by 1980. As explained earlier, the development decade of the 1960s set the goal of developing countries increasing their growth rates to a minimum of 5 per cent by the end of the 1960s, with each country setting its own target. The WHO in 1966 agreed the goal of eradicating smallpox within a decade. Over the 1980s, UNICEF promoted 'a child's survival and development revolution', directed to the goal of reducing child mortality by means of a core set of priority child health actions including achieving universal immunisation of children under five by 1990 and extending the use of oral re-hydration salts.⁹

For the most part, such goals were ignored or opposed by the World Bank and the IMF, and certainly not adopted by them. The

9 UNICEF used its annual *State of the World's Children* reports to mobilise awareness and action, and in the 1991 report provided an overview of results until 1990. Ten years later, UNICEF published *Progress since the World Summit: a statistical review* (UNICEF, 2001), summarising results from 1990 to 2000.

big exception came only in the late 1990s after OECD-DAC had formulated a core set of quantitative time-dated goals as part of ‘shaping the 21st century – the contribution of development co-operation’. Later these goals were elaborated to become the Millennium Development Goals of the Millennium Summit.

This is not to say that the World Bank and the IMF were opposed to all quantitative targets. Structural adjustment programmes, as explained earlier, focused sharply on a core of three short-term targets – reducing inflation, reducing domestic and foreign exchange deficits and accelerating economic growth, albeit without setting any quantitative target for the latter. The irony is that these targets were *input* targets related to economic performance, as opposed to *outcome* targets related to health, nutrition, education and living standards.

Although the UN’s work in setting goals has often been criticised for lacking realism and follow-up, the record shows a totally different picture. Chapter 10 of *UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice* undertakes a careful assessment of the 50 or so economic and social goals set by the UN over 1960–2000 (Jolly *et al.*, 2004). These goals and objectives cover economic growth, increases in life expectancy, reductions in child and maternal mortality, improvements in health and extensions of access to safe water and sanitation, access to education and reductions in illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition.

The assessment of performance shows that most of the goals have been partially or considerably achieved. A few, such as the reduction in child mortality and the eradication of smallpox have been fully or nearly fully achieved. And a few, the quantitative goals relating to development assistance and to increases in development assistance to least developed countries have been, with four or five exceptions, considerable failures. But between these extremes has been a performance that is quite respectable, and certainly very much better than is often realised.

5. Conclusions

In the light of the UN’s important contributions over the years, a number of conclusions begin to emerge for the future.

First is the need to maintain the UN’s creativity and indeed strengthen it. This requires building on key areas of the UN’s comparative advantage – the human development approach, drawing together its professional and multi-disciplinary perspectives while

protecting the diversity of its specialised agencies, strengthening the links between pioneering thinking and its direct operational involvements in regions and countries. The UN's direct involvements in international peacekeeping, peace-building and humanitarian relief define another area where it has comparative advantage, which could be set within the new perspectives of human security.

Second is to build on best UN practice in disseminating and promoting the UN's knowledge and research, nationally and internationally.

Third is to develop stronger and better-balanced relationships with other international institutions. Some of this has already been happening under the present Secretary-General, notably with the Bretton Woods institutions. But the examples given in this article show that a much less unbalanced relationship is needed, with two-way interaction and more recognition and support for the UN side of the relationship from the developed countries. This article has amply demonstrated the gains for development that might have been achieved in the past if there had been more effective two-way interaction.

Fourth is to maintain and strengthen capacity for implementation at country level. Some of the UN's best thinking and analysis have grown out of country experience. One of the costs of shifting so many multilateral resources away from the UN is that the capacity for such country-level involvements has been enormously weakened. It needs to be recognised that the trends of the last two decades have gone too far – far too far. They now need to be reversed.

Fifth and finally, some of the neglected issues of the last two or three decades need to be rediscovered and resurrected, in research as well as in action. These include more focus on the causes of global inequality and more action to offset the extremes, to ensure and support a stronger voice for the poorest and weakest countries and more mechanisms to prevent marginalisation of people and countries.

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