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# CONFERENCE NEWS

## Social Knowledge and International Policy Making *Exploring the Linkages*

*Report of the UNRISD Conference  
20–21 April 2004, Geneva*

## Introduction

A question often asked of United Nations (UN) agencies and their research activities is whether the knowledge they generate is useful for international policy making. Implicit in this broad question are others concerning the relevance, quality, dissemination and impact of research.

- Are researchers addressing the sorts of issues and questions of concern to policy makers?
- Do research findings reach policy makers and inform policy making both internationally and at the country level?
- Who conducts UN research, and how does research commissioned by international and bilateral agencies interact with researchers in developing countries and affect their research agenda?
- Is UN research sufficiently independent and critical?
- Can UN research add anything to that being undertaken within the Bretton Woods institutions (BWIs), universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)?

Underlying such questions is *often* the erroneous assumption that knowledge and policy stand in a direct or unproblematic relation to each other. To understand how research may influence policy it is necessary to examine how the relationship is mediated by politics, discourse, subjectivity and learning. It is also important to understand the implications of new institutional developments associated with networking, public-private partnerships, “knowledge agencies” and organizational learning.

To address these questions, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) organized a two-day conference to examine the linkages between research, activism and policy making related to social development issues. The conference, which also commemorated UNRISD’s fortieth anniversary, set out to assess the intellectual contribution of UN research; its impact on policy making; technical aspects related to the relevance, coordination and dissemination of research; the nature of relations between international development research and the academic and activist communities, particularly in developing countries; and the current and future status of independent and critical research within the UN system. This report summarizes some of the main discussions and debates, drawing on both oral presentations and written contributions. The conference agenda, and a list of speakers and chairpersons, appear at the end of this report.



## Renewing Intellectual Pluralism

Emma Rothschild opened the conference by paying tribute to the role of UNRISD in helping to shape thinking on social development within and beyond the UN; and doing this by establishing and nurturing connections between intellectuals from both the North and the South. The work of UNRISD represents an implicit challenge to the unspoken tendency in some quarters for analysis to take place in the global North, while the global South is relegated to fieldwork or case studies. As a contributor to the world of ideas within the UN system, UNRISD has played a significant part in shaping the contemporary understanding of development as being social, in all its dimensions, as well as economic. As the UN's global responsibilities become more burdensome, and its roles more complex, the need for critical thinking assumes even greater importance.

Expanding on these remarks, Thandika Mkandawire stressed the importance to UNRISD that its work not only be academic, but also contribute to shaping policy. The technical means now exist to make research accessible to policymakers. Whether the latter are receptive, however, depends on the wider policy culture and the prevailing institutional arrangements. As an autonomous body within the UN system, UNRISD has considerable freedom to choose research themes and methodologies, and can promote and legitimize independent analysis, without being swayed by partisan or political ideologies. This is not to pretend, however, that research is completely immune to pressures of this kind, as well as to questions of whose voices are heard, and whose are silenced. UNRISD research may, therefore, address controversial or politically charged issues, but always on the basis of a commitment to scientific quality and to intellectual pluralism. UNRISD seeks to mobilize researchers around issues of importance to policy, and can play a part in exposing the work of individual researchers to a wider international audience. There are questions, however, of how UN research more generally serves to shape Southern research agendas and of how such research affects and is, in turn, affected by policies and programmes on the ground.

In his keynote address, José Antonio Ocampo argued that while ideas *do* matter, particularly when they have institutional backing, knowledge is deeply affected by ideology and interests and is therefore influenced by a wide range of competing factors not related to ideas *per se*. In other words, ideas interplay with processes that are governed by a welter of other considerations.

In addition, all knowledge systems have blind spots, or areas in which questions are not admitted or cannot be addressed. Not all schools of thought entertain the pluralist liberal principle that allows the possibility of error or partial vision, and embraces critical debate. This has major implications for the role that research can potentially play in influencing policy, let alone reaching into arenas where only a limited range of ideas enter the domain of public discussion. Furthermore, much of what is assumed to be knowledge or information is essentially opinion, which may or may not be informed by some form of knowledge. Financial markets, for example, depend on expectations or opinions about the future, not on established facts or knowledge.

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Permeated by the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has been open to new thinking in a wide range of areas: gender equality, the environment, the rights of indigenous peoples and so on. In all of these, the UN continues to be a major source of thinking and intellectual debate. In recent decades, however, the intellectual leadership in the field of economic development has moved from the UN to the BWIs, principally the World Bank. This shift reflects an explicit decision by major member states, and has led the BWIs to accumulate a far greater research capacity (human and financial) compared with that of the UN.

Research by the intergovernmental organizations has played a variable role in policy decisions. In the case of state-led industrialization (or the import-substitution model), which was promoted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) from the late 1940s, practice preceded policy and policy preceded theory. In this case, theory served to rationalize practices that were already in place and responded to domestic demands. In contrast, over the last 25 years, theory associated with neoliberalism has preceded policy. In this case, a particular knowledge system was applied to—or even imposed on—diverse realities, often with unfortunate conse-

quences. Evidence suggests that it is better to adapt knowledge to local circumstances by introducing debates at the national level and building on these to generate specific policies and practices.

Such an approach to building a relationship between research and policy making is far less likely in an intellectual world that is characterized by a strong centre-periphery component. In the realm of economic ideas, this is the case today. In the 1950s and 1960s, regional economic research bodies, such as ECLAC, could influence the terms in which policy discussions were couched. Also, in the centre, different schools of thought competed with each other. This allowed for a diversity of views and schools of thought to permeate and enliven international economic debate. Today, the centre-periphery system in the generation of economic ideas is much stronger, and we could say that even European economic thinking has become peripheral. Many economic students, including some of tomorrow's policy makers and policy analysts, are growing up in an intellectual universe dominated almost exclusively by United States (US) academia. Furthermore, policy research networks have become increasingly privatized by virtue of their reliance on revenues generated by consultancy contracts. Such a knowledge structure is highly constrained in its ability to engage in independent critical thinking. So, we have much less pluralism.

The only way to counter this situation is to renew the intellectual pluralism that allows for and encourages different points of view in all institutional settings, and to admit willingly that there may be other ways to examine an issue, or new questions to be asked. This will require the fostering of strong national institutions and truly pluralistic international bodies in all fields of inquiry concerning development policy.

## The Language of Development

Terms such as “poverty reduction”, “participation” and “empowerment” are a universal feature in development policy and project documents emanating from the United Nations, the World Bank, bilateral agencies, NGOs and grassroots organizations. Clearly, the worldviews inspiring these institutions are diverse, and sometimes divergent—hence the adoption of qualifiers such as “people-centred”, “pro-poor” or “rights-based” in order to stake out the differences. The contribution by Andrea Corn-

wall and Karen Brock examined the ways in which these benign-sounding terms have entered mainstream development policy discourse, and in so doing become “buzzwords”, acquiring new connotations or having been emptied of any useful meaning.

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An analysis of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) shows that, despite their distinct provenance, and relative emphasis on the moral and pragmatic imperatives respectively, both emerge from the same basic ideology: that of a collective responsibility for reducing multidimensional poverty.

Poverty reduction was promoted by the World Bank in the early 1970s as one means of preventing the poor from seeking solutions in communism, while “popular participation” was the cornerstone of the “basic needs” approach being promoted at that time by the UN. “Empowerment” had its roots outside the mainstream development arena, in a transformational project of collective mobilization by oppressed and marginalized groups to claim their rights. Within the neoliberal policy framework that has gained momentum since the 1980s, “community participation” and “ownership” have come to refer to cost sharing by the intended beneficiaries of aid projects, with varying amounts of prior consultation. Such participation essentially serves to cast political problems as technical in nature. In arguing for the now-attenuated state to be brought back into development, and for “good governance”, the World Bank began to invite participation by selected civil society organizations to exert influence over policy makers and hold government “accountable”. Despite this participatory veneer, many observers view the PRSPs as a standardized form of conditionality or “partnership”, albeit described in terms of country ownership of (or sign-up to) the MDGs. Without a structural analysis

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International development agencies have not simply absorbed and rendered anodyne language that was once associated with a radical agenda; multiple usages may co-exist or compete within a single institution. Nevertheless, the evolution of meanings conferred on specific terms by such powerful institutions serves to obfuscate rather than enlighten. In this respect, the UNRISD research programme on popular participation, which was carried out from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, stands out for its clarity in defining this as being fundamentally about the redistribution of power through the agency of organized groups and movements. Political concepts shape the articulation of policy alternatives, and hence the language in which they are expressed matters and should be carefully used.

During the discussions that followed this presentation, Guy Standing deplored the unrigorous use of language in the field of development, suggesting that this both inhibits more serious analysis and serves to deflect criticism of the underlying paradigm by promoting a false consensus. This is not a question of linguistic niceties, but has real policy implications. One such example is the way in which the crisis in education is presented in policy terms as a need to get more children into school in order to increase their chances of good employment.

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Another is the way in which potentially subversive ideas are neutered as they enter the mainstream, for instance the move from the concept of work back to that of labour, and from there to decent employment and finally decent jobs. As the terms have shifted, so the vision becomes more conservative. The language of consensus takes conflict out of the equation, suggest-

ing that development can take place without power struggles. What is required, however, is the political courage and intellectual integrity to take issue with the language of false consensus. Gita Sen observed that it is to be expected that ideas that challenge the status quo will be co-opted; the challenge is how to ensure that such concepts retain their “bite”, and that it is possible to fight the opposition on the ground of one’s choosing. From an activist perspective, this raises the issue of whether the struggle is about concepts as such, or about who adopts them and how one should then respond. Desmond McNeill agreed that the price of obtaining institutional backing for ideas is that they then lose their analytical and political edge. Judith Richter suggested that the UN has adopted aspects of a corporate model that tends to squeeze out any competing discourses and visions.

## The Intellectual Contribution of the United Nations

While several of the UN specialized agencies have or are currently writing their intellectual histories, and the BWIs have long invested significant resources in such endeavours, there exists no comprehensive history of the UN, either institutional or intellectual. Through the United Nations Intellectual History Project (UNIHIP), an attempt is under way to correct this situation. Louis Emmerij summarized the objectives and preliminary findings of UNIHIP, which he and his colleagues, Sir Richard Jolly and Thomas Weiss, have been coordinating since 1999. UNIHIP seeks to analyse the role of the UN as an intellectual actor, explaining the origins of particular ideas, tracing their trajectories, and evaluating their impact on policy and action. Four major questions arise in charting this history. First, do ideas shape policy, or does a policy challenge call existing ideas forward and perhaps generate new ones? Second, do ideas arise and exist in particular historical and social contexts, or do they have a life of their own? Third, because a given idea is seldom totally new, at what point in its varied forms should one begin to study an idea, and how can it then be attributed? And finally, how can one document the influence of ideas as opposed to the individuals or agencies that put them forward? While UNIHIP has sought to understand the past, for example through collecting the oral histories of some 75 individuals with significant experience at different levels in the UN, this is a forward-looking history in that it attempts to draw lessons for the future.

Ideas that have mattered since the UN's foundation range from the specific to the more sweeping, from the normative (such as the call for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women) to the causal (such as the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product to be contributed as official development assistance). The UN has made enormous contributions to development theory and practice in the fields of economic development and global income distribution, employment, the informal economy and basic needs, particularly during the 1970s. The various studies making up UNIHP include the struggle between the Group of 77 and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries over the role of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; the gradualist approach to transition in the economies of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union recommended by the Economic Commission for Europe over the hugely damaging "big bang" approach favoured by the BWIs; and the leadership shown by ECLAC in developing policy ideas such as the centre-periphery framework, import-substitution policies and dependency analysis. In the 1980s, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) took the lead in critiquing the social costs of structural adjustment in its book, *Adjustment with a Human Face*. In the 1990s, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched its annual *Human Development Report*, challenging the intellectual supremacy of the World Bank by developing new statistical measures of human and social well-being, such as the Human Development Index and the Gender-Related Development Index.

Findings and policy recommendations emerging from UNIHP include the following. First, overall, the UN has had a more pioneering record in the economic and social arena than is generally realized, particularly in its early years, which were marked by creativity and enthusiasm. The current imbalance in funding away from the UN and to the BWIs should therefore be corrected. Second, neoliberal economic orthodoxy remains the driving force for the PRSPs and for actions in pursuit of the MDGs. This approach is too narrow to achieve the MDGs and greater attention should be given to the UN's multidisciplinary approaches. Third, the UN's most important intellectual contributions have come from different agencies and institutions characterized by bold vision and leadership, multidisciplinary and pragmatic analysis of the highest calibre, attention to country-level specifics, freedom from tight government or bureaucratic control, and strong commitment to jus-

tice. Finally, autonomous public research institutes within the UN, such as the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) and UNRISD, are particularly valuable not only in terms of the actual work they undertake, but also because their ways of working hold out the hope for reigniting the creative intellectual spark of the UN in the economic and social spheres.

In commenting on the contribution of the UN to ideas and policies, Deepak Nayyar pointed out that for some 25 years, the Cold War constrained its scope for political action, while the North-South divide limited what it could do in terms of reshaping the global economy. Its greatest intellectual influence was exerted from the time of its founding until the 1970s; with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of a unipolar system, the role and relevance of the UN has declined. Marginalized from the main policy making arenas of the BWIs, the UN has responded to the age of markets and globalization with blurred ideas. Its revival has

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been in relatively uncontested areas, while one of its major contributions has been to provide a sounding board in the form of world summits. Retrospectively, it appears that the UN has been most important as an intellectual actor when it has been in harmony with the dominant ideology of the times, but that it has been unable to sustain this leadership in the face of competition. UN research is not, therefore, sufficiently critical and independent; too much of it is subcontracted, and there is little synergy between in-house and external talent. The BWIs have the upper hand, in that they both conduct much of their research in-house and internalize it. The UN must revive the belief in the value



of pluralism in ideas, recognizing that doubt is as important as what is thought to be knowledge, and that asking the right questions is perhaps as important as producing the right answers. Knowledge develops at the intersection of knowledge systems; this implies a commitment to proactive, pluralistic thinking and re-thinking within a multidisciplinary framework. Martin Khor Kok Peng and Enrique Oteiza agreed that the intellectual vacuum left by the UN is being filled by the BWIs, which have the wherewithal to produce research that has the hallmarks of quality, impact, relevance and outreach. The irony is that the UN, along with its specialized agencies, is under-funded while the well-funded World Bank is seeking to present itself as a “knowledge bank” with expertise in every area of development. José Antonio Ocampo underlined that the UN is no longer the major individual actor it was in the 1960s: since then, there has been significant growth in the number and capacity of other institutions. The resources of the Brazilian government’s institute for applied economics research, for example, outstrip those of ECLAC. The challenge is to reposition the regional commissions as key vehicles in developing a manageable world that is based on diversity. In the process, however, it is important not to lose coherence by being drawn into agendas set by various donors. Louis Emmerij argued that the UN had not been most influential when in harmony with the dominant ideology. Its major early contributions were both immensely varied, rather than corresponding to a single overarching paradigm, and were very often against the tide. That they have succeeded in entering the mainstream does not mean that this is where they began. In future, however, the UN should perhaps seek to be more of a catalyst than a leader.

## The Potential and Limits of Knowledge Agencies

Kenneth King’s presentation examined the relationship between knowledge and policy by focusing on the example of education. In recent years, the international aid community, led by the UN and the World Bank, has whittled down the Education for All agenda of the 1990 conference in Jomtien, Thailand, into the MDG of universal primary education (UPE), with an emphasis on girls. The role that research played in this process is especially telling, given the self-definition of bilateral and multilateral donors as knowledge agen-

cies, and the World Bank as a knowledge bank. This discourse might suggest a linear course from country-specific research into educational needs feeding into general policy guidelines and context-related goals, all drawn up jointly by donor and recipient country governments. The actual process, however, owed as much to convictions and the appeal of tangible targets as to detailed research; and there is scant evidence of research from the South having played any part.

World Bank research long prior to Jomtien had focused on the economic benefits of UPE, and many NGOs then lined up behind what was to become a global agenda. Other educational needs—such as technical, higher or even non-formal education and adult literacy—became sidelined in the process. The policy recommendations to emerge from the series of world conferences in the 1990s were then further distilled by organizations such as the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) into quantifiable targets (although the DAC also stressed the need for a highly context-dependent approach).

The commitment to UPE was couched in terms of local ownership of a process that would be underwritten by external aid. This illustrates a major tension between the supposed self-reliance of countries and their obligations to meet the policies, strategies and targets set and paid for by donors. But what does it mean politically and in terms of sustainability for a country to reach an MDG target if this achievement is 60 per cent dependent on aid? Similarly, the “consensus” across the UN system, the BWIs and the OECD concerning such targets did not emerge from the South, nor do the targets themselves give any place to Southern knowledge economies or knowledge societies: the emphasis is entirely on reducing Southern knowledge deficits.

The new orthodoxy is that aid should adopt a sector-wide approach in order to overcome the evident disadvantages associated with multiple projects. However, in countries whose national policy terrain has been eroded by a combination of low salaries, brain drain and decades of orientation to donor policies, the sector-wide approach may displace national planning activity, and so be still more invasive than earlier modalities. It may be tentatively concluded that the conjunction of a global aid agenda with new ways to deliver aid has actually increased dependency. Further, some of the 71 countries judged to be at risk of missing one or more of the MDGs may be inclined to ac-

cept greater dependency or indebtedness in order to reap the supposed benefits of being “on target”.

The location of these new modalities within donor agencies that claim to be undergoing a knowledge revolution is curious. Much of their thinking on knowledge management was imported from the corporate sector, whose interest in tapping employees’ expertise forms part of an individual company’s comparative international advantage. In reality, knowledge management within organizations such as the World Bank and the United Kingdom Department for International Development has been more concerned with sharing knowledge internally (through the better use of information and communication technologies, for instance) and disseminating this rather than generating new knowledge. The danger is that donor agencies become even more certain about what they think they already know, rather than open to learning from new ideas or different sources. Their focus on validating and disseminating their own knowledge may render such agencies still less receptive to knowledge from the South. The inattention to higher education and to the maintenance of national research capacity in the South, both in the MDGs and in the recent revival of the concept of capacity building, suggests that increased support to knowledge development in the South is not part of the global development agenda.

While focusing on the World Bank, John Tøye emphasized that the production of social knowledge in all international institutions is problematic, because of their nature as a form of public bureaucracy. The quality of research cannot be inferred simply on the basis of the positive or negative impacts that an institution’s policies are thought to have. Increasingly, the production of social knowledge, rather than collection and dissemination, or support for other bodies to produce it, has become the preserve of the state at the national level, and of intergovernmental organizations in the international arena. In this sense, public institutions such as the World Bank aspire to be intellectual actors rather than merely investors in the production of knowledge. The World Bank’s stated reasons are both to ensure control over the research in question, and to guarantee in-house ownership of the resulting work. There are drawbacks, however. A modified Weberian theory of bureaucracy asserts that, inside all public organizations, there is a tension between authority and power. Within intergovernmental organizations, the multitude of competing country interests—including the requirements of

geographical balance in recruitment—tend to weaken the congruence of power with authority and to deplete the armoury of sanctions that high-level officials can deploy in the event of insubordinate or dysfunctional behaviour. In-house researchers run a high risk of becoming “defiant” bureaucrats in that their methods and findings may not accord with the institution’s persuasive purposes. More subtly, the organization may defend its core doctrines by designing a research agenda that is likely to do this, and marginalizing or ignoring topics that may be antagonistic to the appearance of consensus. The intellectual integrity of in-house researchers may, therefore, be compromised by the need to conform to organizational expectations.

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Egregious cases of the World Bank’s stifling unwelcome research recommendations range from Jan Tinbergen’s support for a mixed private and public economy in 1955, to Joseph Stiglitz’s arguments for moving away from the narrowest version of neoliberalism in the late 1990s. The ability of the World Bank to be a creative intellectual actor, in the sense of encouraging and promoting new ideas, is therefore far less than its power to propagate its own views. By contrast, in its earlier years, the UN allowed its economic researchers considerable freedom. Some of the liveliest thinking to emerge ran counter to the organization’s bureaucratic objectives. In this sense, the World Bank can be said to be a more functional bureaucracy, but relatively sterile in the field of political economy, while the creative energy emanating from the UN was in some measure due to its relative dysfunctionality in the Weberian sense.

The World Bank has made a prodigious investment in intellectual infrastructure following its renewed focus

since the late 1980s on poverty reduction alongside structural adjustment as a precondition for economic growth. Its research and published outputs are, perhaps, the most influential worldwide, though hardly the most innovative. They have helped to reinforce the intellectual rationale for economic policy reforms promoted by the bank itself and bilateral donors.

Since the 1990s, the World Bank's lending portfolio has expanded to include a wider development agenda, in particular the promotion of gender equality, popular participation, good governance, a strong civil society and environmental conservation. Loans have continued to be premised upon limiting the role of the state, but process conditionality (for example, through PRSPs) has to some extent replaced its policy-based predecessor. The World Bank's greater direct involvement in development issues exposes it to NGO criticism that it is in breach of its own guidelines, for instance in relation to environmental damage, or that its consultation processes are inadequate. Better accountability mechanisms have, however, had the perverse effect of making the World Bank more answerable to US politicians than to their counterparts in borrowing countries. Under the presidency of James Wolfensohn, the bank has sought to accommodate and pre-empt NGO critiques on issues such as debt relief and is currently researching how and under what conditions pro-poor growth can translate into access to well-functioning social services. This responds to both the pro-poor agenda promoted by NGOs and in-house research calling for more selective conditionality. It remains to be seen how far the results of this research will influence policy should they run counter to the assumptions underpinning the bank's wider agenda. Paradoxically, the risk is that the World Bank's greater responsiveness to sections of civil society may have worsened rather than improved the intellectual quality of the debate on poverty-reduction policies.

In the discussions that followed these presentations, Amina Mama underscored the power of the BWIs and bilateral agencies to define what constitutes knowledge in addition to setting the development policy agenda, and then replicate this knowledge in an incestuous manner. These knowledge systems create an intellectual edifice that cannot be critiqued from within, while at the same time the managerialization of universities has undermined their capacity to undertake such a critique; in many cases universities are effectively colluding with an agenda that promotes mainstream views

and silences or elides others in the interest of creating the appearance of consensus. Alternatives will be found in the intersections between, for instance, intellectuals and popular movements, rather than within formal institutional settings. Rehman Sobhan noted that when intellectuals become "colonized", their research becomes an instrument with which to validate the views of the commissioning body. Shalmali Guttal echoed this comment, referring to a "revolving door" whereby some large NGOs as well as academics move with relative ease into the World Bank through secondments or consultancies. Adrian Atkinson argued that to focus on BWIs is to obscure the decisive role of the corporate sector in shaping contemporary institutions and in defining development. It is therefore not enough to undertake good-quality research; what is needed is to study the issues that most matter at a juncture in which capitalism needs markets more than it needs labour.

Jomo K.S. agreed that international public institutions such as the World Bank enjoy a degree of autonomy from their principles, not least because of the multiplicity of principles involved. However, this alone cannot explain the differences among the BWIs and the World Trade Organization, particularly given the ostensibly more democratic governance arrangements of the latter compared with the "one dollar one vote" principle governing the BWIs. Despite the appearance of research-based policy recommendations emanating from the BWIs, the role of ideas as such has been rather modest. This might best be explained by the Gramscian notion of hegemony or the uncritical acceptance of certain seemingly legitimate, dominant ideas, in contrast to the Bank's advocacy of competition in economic matters — presumably including ideas. It would be useful to examine the changing financing of economic development research and its dissemination by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UN, respectively. Similarly, the educational profiles and subsequent influence of the development policy professionals in each organization, as well as a review of the nature and content of the leading economics journals, might give some insight into the nature of how this hegemony has been nurtured over time. One significant trend has been the abandonment of development economics in favour of "open economy" macroeconomics, international trade and rational expectations, approaches later mimicked in the other social sciences. Despite recent nuancing of earlier neoliberal fundamentalism, this should be seen more as an updated version of the Washington consensus, rather than as signalling a post-consensus era.



## What do Policy Makers Want?

A panel discussion considered the question of what policy makers want from research commissioned by multilateral and bilateral agencies. Mervat Tallawy suggested that a considerable amount of research is commissioned in order to confirm existing views or decisions already taken; or even for personal advancement. The challenge is therefore to maintain an independent research agenda whose findings will enable policy makers to do a better job in an environment in which conservatism is gaining ground. The capacity of government ministers to ignore or deny the findings of their own research institutes should not be underestimated. In this regard, the MDGs have served to lend credibility to research findings, for instance in relation to the extent of poverty and unemployment. Gus Edgren was in broad agreement with this analysis. Policy makers do not necessarily welcome new thinking and, even if they do, there are often “blind spots” and other obstacles that hinder their absorption of new knowledge, particularly if they feel under attack. One tactic to defuse this “siege mentality” is for researchers to present findings as being applicable in the future rather than for immediate adoption. Another is to involve policy makers in the formulation of the research questions, steering them if necessary from a focus on the symptoms toward a focus on the causes of particular

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problems. The question of who vouches for the soundness of the advice being given, including which sources are quoted, may also influence the acceptability of the findings. Finally, presentation matters: ultimately, policy makers are better served by good analysis than by detailed prescriptions for action. Simon Maxwell agreed that, if research is intended to effect policy change, then this goal must inform the entire strategy, from the way in which the research questions are framed through to delivery of the findings. Policy is not developed in a linear fashion, whereby a problem is defined

and then the various possibilities are analysed; rather, policy emerges through what has been called a chaos of purposes and accidents. Research therefore needs to capture the political imagination, and researchers need to be entrepreneurial as well as academically sound. It is important to build networks that cross disciplinary, professional and geographical boundaries. The ideal networking model is neither hegemonic (“the Microsoft model”) nor based on franchise (“the McDonald’s model”), but developed through alliances (“the airline code-sharing model”), whereby quality is assured irrespective of the carrier or vehicle being used.

Commenting on the challenge of influencing the policy process, Gabriele Köhler noted the difficulties and confusion that can arise when UN agencies speak with many voices. She referred to the dilemmas that confront researchers and scholars who want not only to understand complexity, but also to influence policy makers. There is a tension between researchers’ interest in promoting intellectual pluralism, multiple and nuanced understandings, and critical thinking, on one hand, and the need to “package” findings and recommendations in a simplified form that is amenable to policy makers, on the other hand. In this respect, she had mixed feelings about the MDGs. As a researcher one may question their implicit analysis of the nature of poverty and underdevelopment, and what to do about these challenges; yet the MDGs are useful in that they present a unified perspective, raise awareness among senior government officials and parliamentarians on social development issues, and convince policy makers of the need to take action. Another participant underlined that research will only influence policy makers if the latter have a “felt need” for policy advice. One way to generate this felt need is to work with the opposition, and hence raise the political costs of ignoring advice and recommendations that are based on sound research. Concerns were raised, however, about the Anglo-Saxon domination of the international research agenda, whereby issues and approaches from other intellectual and cultural traditions are relegated to the sidelines. A further critical observation was that it is wrong to assume that the only way for research to influence policy is by encouraging policy makers to take notice of it. This elitist approach leaves out the role of popular opinion, social movement networks and alternative forms of research that can be just as, if not more, effective in influencing policy makers—as, for instance, in the case of Jubilee 2000 or the role of the feminist movement in getting reproductive rights onto the international agenda. Finally, it was

pointed out that high-quality research is not necessarily what policy makers value in the immediate term, though it may well provide the grounding for policy options in the future. Who is to judge how best to manage the potential trade-offs between quality and short-term versus long-term impact?

## Engaging Southern Perspectives

The panel discussion on UN interaction with the Southern research community was opened by Rehman Sobhan, who argued that UN research networks tend to be built around individuals rather than institutions. This results in a lack of institutional memory within the UN system, and tends to preclude the possibility of synergy in the relationship. It also leads to weak linkages between the global level at which the researchers are operating, and the national or local level where the political impact of their work might be felt. In addition, the incentive is for individual researchers to reach into the UN system through the global consultancy market. This is an artificial market in that it lacks sanctions to penalize bad work: a consultant can easily move from one UN agency to another because there are no UN-wide research standards, effective interagency linkages or shared knowledge. In research-rich national environments, such as Brazil or India, competitive pressures help to maintain high standards. In many countries in the South, however, the best intellectual talent is being sucked into the international (consultancy) market, a process that leads to the progressive impoverishment of the domestic system and to the colonization of research. For individual researchers, this can create unwelcome tensions. Some resolve these tensions by adopting different stances depending on circumstance and commissioning agency, on the assumption that their audiences are discrete. A further negative consequence of colonized research is that the vast majority of consultancy documents are unpublished and hence not available for public or scholarly scrutiny in the domestic arena. This may suit those researchers whose work is of mediocre academic quality, or who are perhaps recycling the same work for multiple clients. Paradoxically, however, it also means that such researchers may have a high international profile, but be virtually unknown in their own national setting. Academic research is no longer perceived as a vocation, but as a source of consultancy income; the consultancy fees paid in the global market far outstrip the

remuneration that national universities and research institutes in much of the South can offer. This progressive invisibility of domestic research capacity is reinforced when governments turn to the World Bank for policy advice rather than to the national intellectual community. One possible way to break this self-perpetuating cycle is the establishment of major endowments to allow national research institutions to establish their own priorities and enhance their capacity to retain their most able students and staff.

Marcia Rivera portrayed a rather different picture in Latin America, where social research capacity has diversified and increased in the last 40 years. This expansion has, however, been highly unequal; Brazil is by far the largest producer of top-quality scientific research in the region. It is important to explain that the impact of decades of military governments throughout Latin America (1960s–1980s) was to move social and economic research out of the universities, which were often the target of repression, and into a host of non-profit research centres. These centres were characteristically linked to social movements and their work was multidisciplinary and oriented toward problem solving. Their independence of government was, however, made possible by virtue of total financial dependence on external donors, particularly the International Development Research Centre and the Scandinavians. Within what became a somewhat comfortable environment, research standards tended to lapse. With the advent of formal democracies throughout Latin America,

*Social research bodies in Latin America have maintained a sense of responsibility for linking their research to action, for instance through social movements which, in turn, undertake lobbying.*

these sources of funding gradually dried up. Researchers are now compelled to define their agendas and methodologies in more marketable ways, in order to attract financial support. Some of the existing research centres started to receive invitations from the World Bank, the IMF, the Inter-American Development Bank and so on, to take on time-bound and discrete pieces of work. In this way, these non-governmental research centres have become part of the international subcontracting and outsourcing system. This generates income but does not necessarily generate institutional or re-

search capacity. That said, the UN has continued to provide opportunities for the Latin American research community to participate in global forums. There are also examples of long-term partnerships both in the fields of tropical health and poverty, where the World Health Organization and UNICEF have collaborated since 1975 in applied, social, and hard science research undertaken in the region, and in the area of gender issues. The future for public universities is bleak, given that higher education is increasingly a market commodity with Northern universities effectively operating franchises in the South. Despite the wider changes in the political context, social research bodies in Latin America have maintained a sense of responsibility for linking their research to action, for instance through social movements which, in turn, undertake lobbying. Unlike the approaches described by Simon Maxwell, it is uncommon for Latin American researchers to seek to influence policy makers directly; and, in relation to networking, it has proved equally uncommon for donors to fund the kinds of networks that bring the global research community together.

Adebayo Olukoshi described the period from the 1960s to the 1980s as one of extraordinary growth and vitality in African scholarship, as national universities and research centres, and regional research networks, sprang up in the wake of independence. The pan-African research community was ready to engage in UN-sponsored initiatives over this period. However, the economic crisis that began in the early 1980s seriously affected higher education, in response to which the World Bank questioned the very existence of African universities. Some of the gaps in knowledge about Africa have been, in different ways, partially filled since then by various UN agencies; the UN has also set up several research centres, some based within universities and some outside; some fully integrated into their local environment, others functioning as enclaves on the grounds that they are part of an international and not a local system. In general, however, the UN's engagement has tended to reproduce the asymmetrical structure of scientific power, which is tilted in favour of the North. For instance, although Africa has always been central to the work of the UN, the organization has tended to serve as a conveyor belt for ideas and perspectives from outside. There has also been serious underrepresentation and sometimes even the complete absence of African researchers in the knowledge-generating networks set up by the UN system. Only very limited use is made of African research, as illustrated

in the UN flagship publications, in which an average of only 2 per cent of citations are to such literature. Most are to the UN's own literature, an incestuous dependence that gives only the illusion of debate. African scholars who are involved in the formulation of policy proposals are generally relegated to gathering

*African scholars who are involved in the formulation of policy proposals are generally relegated to gathering data and producing case studies, while the theoretical frameworks and analysis come from institutions in the North. This amounts to making policy for Africa without engaging the perspectives of its intellectuals.*

data and producing case studies; within the division of intellectual labour, their work features in the textboxes while the theoretical frameworks and analysis come from institutions in the North. This amounts to making policy for Africa without engaging the perspectives of its intellectuals. Furthermore, most input by African scholars is limited to matters concerning Africa, thus consigning their work to a ghetto while also failing to capitalize on the potential for comparative insights. The UN and other donors seem to be more concerned to "build" capacity than to give true recognition to existing capacity: UN funding through core grants or multi-annual partnership contracts are the exception that proves the rule.

A number of reasons have been given for the problematic way the UN has engaged the African research community, most of which are untenable. There is, and has always been, a lively research community in Africa, despite periods of crisis in the higher education system. Gaining access to high-quality research may not always be straightforward, but not to the extent of justifying its exclusion. And the link between donor funding and provision of donors' own "experts" clearly disfavours scholars from the South and so reinforces existing asymmetries of academic and policy influence. Finally, the international organizations have effectively displaced local policy making, while dissonant views from Africa are dismissed. For instance, Joseph Stiglitz is now voicing criticisms that some African scholars were making 15 years before, the difference being that

his voice is listened to while theirs were not, and still are not. The UN could have done more to enable these voices to be heard had it developed a stronger and more organic link with the African research community. The issue is not one of blaming the UN or denying its good intentions, but one of power.

## Objectivity and Hidden Agendas

Shalmali Guttal's presentation emphasized that the production of knowledge, like the definition of what constitutes respectable research, is fundamentally political in nature. Mainstream development discourse, for instance, focuses on the myriad transformations that have translated into improved standards of living and well-being for many people in the world. However, that same process has also concentrated wealth and assets, and been associated with many forms of hardship for the majority, particularly in the South. At least 54 countries are poorer now than in the 1980s, with all that this implies for human development. Declining aid flows have not, however, seen a decline in the development knowledge industry, which serves to legitimize the existence of a particular approach to development and justify its expansion. Yet development theory is not disinterested; it speaks to and from specific positions of class and power. Material interests are served by knowledge and vice versa. The capacity to generate information and enshrine it as "knowledge" is dominated by a small set of academic, donor and UN agencies (including the BWIs), as well as private interests; the World Bank has invested huge resources in producing information, much of it gained through the privileged access afforded by its role as primary creditor to many countries of the South. Its Web site is an essential source for supporters and detractors alike. However, this knowledge has a practical application since it is what underpins its lending practices, project designs and policy prescriptions. Supposedly objective scientific research is used to justify its projects technically, morally, ethically and politically. Following criticisms about the social and environmental impacts of some of its major projects, for instance, the World Bank drew on "green experts" and social scientists to repackage potentially unpopular infrastructure projects as "sustainable development". The response to a new problem is to depoliticize it by creating a new subdiscipline or area of expert knowledge in a self-perpetuating cycle, and then converting this knowledge

into projects. Failures in practice are absorbed into the body of theory and then reproduced as modified versions of the original product. In other contexts, this conflation of roles would be viewed as constituting "moral hazard".

Within a self-referential system of assumptions and models, there is no room for external knowledge, for example the knowledge that is informed by the realities and truths of people's lives. Within the contested field of development, the ideas that gain dominance are those with political and financial backing, regardless of their quality. This matters because such ideas translate into the policies that affect people's lives. There is no point in identifying well-meaning individuals within such a huge and complex system; this is to confuse personal qualities with institutional mandates. Adjusting a flawed system to make it, for instance, more "pro-poor" sidesteps the structural issues. Alternative solutions will not be found within a development paradigm that perpetually reproduces itself, but in the discontinuous and dispersed knowledge, aspirations and priorities of peoples, which are systematically suppressed and marginalized from dominant discourse.

## Universalism versus Regionalism

Norman Girvan examined issues of conditionality and the search for policy autonomy in the South, particularly in relation to the diagnosis of its own problems and the determination of appropriate policy prescriptions. An important role of the subdiscipline of development economics that emerged in the 1950s was to permit a variety of different understandings, from neo-Keynesianism to the centre-periphery analysis and dependency theory emerging from ECLAC and elsewhere. Politically, the role of development economics was to provide a non-communist recipe for poor countries to "catch up" with rich ones. However, it also legitimized the principle that economies should be understood on their own terms, and gave some collective leverage to the South. This period of intellectual fervour and confidence coincided with the proliferation of national universities and academic centres in the South. In the economic sphere, the Third World debt crisis and the rise of neoliberal thinking in the 1980s created the conditions in which the BWIs could impose conditionality lending on much of the developing world. UNCTAD was marginalized, the North-South dialogue collapsed,



and the fall of the Soviet bloc and Eastern European socialism removed one of the last sources of Southern leverage. Developmentalist theories and policies were discredited and dismissed, and market-oriented governments were returned to power. Much of the South suffered a reversal of previous gains in establishing a tradition of its own theorizing and policy making. As neoliberal globalization was touted as being the “only way”, so a transnational counterforce began to emerge both in the form of social mobilization and in the intellectual field. The financial crisis of 1997–1998 also helped to embolden internal critics of capital account liberalism, while certain UN agencies, notably UNDP and UNICEF, provided well-documented accounts of the human and social costs of this ideology. There are signs of a renewed spirit of experimentation and exploration on both the intellectual and policy fronts.

Western economics has always tended toward universalism—the establishment of laws that are independent of the specific context of time and space. This has allowed it to cloak ideological assumptions about the way the real world operates in scientific garb. Historically, the universalizing tendency went hand in hand with Eurocentric assumptions, neatly summed up in Glenn Sankatsing’s phrase that “what was good for the West is best for the rest”. In this worldview, diversity is regarded as a shortfall, a deviation from the norm, to be “corrected” and ultimately eliminated. By contrast,

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development economics stresses that economic processes are embedded in their social, institutional and historical context. There can be no universally applicable prescriptive principle about what ought to be the role of the market and the state. Reforms need to be internally driven and carefully managed with regard to content, scope, timing and pace. Respect for diversity may not allow for neat formalization, and the place for

universalism may therefore be in terms of agreeing common rules of procedure and method (though these will themselves be subject to change over time). Social knowledge that inheres within, not about, the society has a crucial role to play in developing appropriate policies. To take full advantage of it requires the establishment of open information flows and a culture of consultation and cooperation. This approach might provide for healthier North-South partnerships, the goal of which would be to support and facilitate social learning for the attainment of mutually agreed development objectives. It might also form the basis for intra-regional functional cooperation to stimulate the pooling of resources in order to better respond to the challenges of the global economy.

Various participants agreed with the characterization of the problems created by the consultancy culture, and with the frustrations posed by short-term, project-based funding as opposed to long-term partnerships. The phenomenon of peripheralized, as opposed to colonized, research was also mentioned. Referring to the “floating intelligentsia”, Guy Standing suggested that national elites have more in common with the international elite than with their own societies. Some participants questioned the reasons for the marginalization of African research in particular, in response to which Adebayo Olukoshi suggested that to cite certain authorities rather than others is ultimately a question of political choice and not merely of “objective” scholarship. Dharam Ghai observed that the collapse of the salary structure in many universities in the South effectively means that academics are increasingly forced down the international consultancy route, with all the problems that can entail. However, it is important to pay tribute to long-standing efforts by UNRISD among others to provide opportunities for Third World scholars to engage with their counterparts from elsewhere, offering them greater publishing possibilities. Expressing agreement with Norman Girvan, Charles Gore argued that a primary reason to reject universalism is that it is disabling rather than enabling, and that national autonomy has been further constrained by the move from international to cosmopolitan views. There is little policy space for alternatives to neoliberalism, a situation that reduces the development agenda to attempts to synthesize basic needs with the market. For Gita Sen, a true partnership strengthens everyone’s capacity. The major research foundations have changed their mindsets and behaviour in recent years, and are now far more respectful and supportive of local research

capacity and insights rather than imposing their own. This has been mutually beneficial. Greater honesty about what donors gain from supporting Southern research would make for more candid dialogue and more balanced relationships.

## Linking Research and Activism for Gender Equality

The field of gender and development is often regarded as an exemplar of collaboration between scholars and activists in the pursuit of policy change. Gita Sen focused on what made this collaboration possible; and whether social activism is a necessary component for translating research-based knowledge into policy shifts.

From the 1970s feminist scholars began bringing a gender lens to previous understandings of history, and identifying new issues and areas for analysis. This period was one of developing tools, gathering experience and sharpening understanding. The 1985 Nairobi conference that ended the UN Decade for Women saw researchers and activists jointly forging a powerful critique of the growth-focused development paradigm. This was followed by major work on the feminization of poverty, the gender division of global labour, the impact of macroeconomic policies on the social sector and on the environment; and violence against women.

Also emerging from the 1970s was activism centred on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Feminist research, however, lagged behind. Demography was viewed as a technical discipline, while neo-Malthusian population policies focused on controlling the growth of populations in the South and among marginalized groups in the North. The UN conferences of the 1990s galvanized research and activism. Activists and scholars together spearheaded the exposure of unethical population control practices, challenged the conservative religious movement, expanded and deepened public understanding of the health and rights dimensions of sexuality and reproduction, and established alliances with critical actors including family planning lobbies. The activist-researcher consensus had to contend with North-South divisions as well as cultural and political differences. However, the resulting new framework for population policy affirmed women's rights in the area of reproduction and sexuality, as well as the centrality of women's empowerment and gender equality. It also

shifted the emphasis from the control of numbers to a human rights-based approach. As a result, there was a major paradigm change in global thinking about population policy.

A third illustration relates to human rights and violence against women. The preparation for the 1993 International Conference on Human Rights brought together feminist lawyers and activists who could identify and document experiences of violence (including systematic rape and war crimes, genital cutting, domestic violence and dowry deaths), and helped to broaden the recognition of women's rights as human rights. This collaboration gave the women's movement the analytical and negotiating skills needed to become effective lobbyists, and was possible largely due to the ability to put aside differences and learn from mistakes.

While activists and researchers have developed a more symbiotic relationship over time, three sets of recurring tensions affect their relations: different perceptions and understandings of problems; power relations and control over resources; and control of and credit for knowledge.

As terms and concepts promoted by gender activists and researchers enter mainstream discourse, they risk being co-opted, diluted or subverted. Their adoption, however, should be seen as the first step in the struggle for change. Given the ongoing opposition or resistance to policy change from religious conservatives and the BWIs, it is not a time to be backtracking on hard-won concepts and frameworks on the grounds that they have been co-opted. Difficult questions and challenges remain, however, concerning how to engage policy makers and power brokers.

The women's movement contains unique and special elements deriving from the nature of gender power in society, but the lessons it offers for changing dominant social paradigms are that a combination of research, analysis and activism is essential for the protagonists of change; but that this requires careful negotiation, patience and stamina.

Commenting on Gita Sen's paper, Yakin Ertürk posed the question of what interest decision makers have in changing policy, particularly when, as in the case of the paradigm shift from "women in development" to "gender and development", this implies a real shift in power. The current global situation is unfavourable to the linking of theory and activism, one tactical response

to which is to use language that appears less threatening in order to avoid a still more conservative backlash. Participants from Latin America commented that one reason feminist researchers have been able to engage with activists in the region is that they have valued other forms of knowledge, and not been hidebound in this

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regard. An emerging role for researchers in the region is to monitor the implementation of commitments made at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, something that puts them into a different relationship with women's and other social movements. The need for researchers to make greater efforts to read the literature produced by social movements was underlined, as was the importance of feeding back research findings to the grassroots. In relation to funding, it was pointed out that while resources for most areas of Southern research are lacking, the same is not true for gender studies; but that at the same time, the "mainstreaming" of gender may well result in a serious budget reduction for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) at a time when there is well-orchestrated resistance to women's rights.

## The Politics of Global Social Policy Reform

Bob Deacon underlined the argument that ideas *can* make a difference when backed by institutional power, and that the role for "organic intellectuals" in relation to global social policy is to bridge disparate struggles of particular interests and shape a vision that might facilitate a more inclusive form of globalization. National social policy encompasses the "three Rs" of social redistribution, social regulation and the promulgation of social rights. Global social policy refers to the provision by inter-governmental and international organizations of national

social policy guidance and supranational arrangements for global redistribution, regulation and rights. Without the three Rs, there is no alternative to the contemporary model of neoliberal globalization.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of universal entitlement to social provision and welfare was replaced by that of selective allocations for the poor with private provision for the better-off. This was fostered by four tendencies: the World Bank's belief that governments should provide only basic levels of social provision and social protection; the concern of the OECD-DAC, underscored in the MDGs, to focus only on basic education and health care as international development targets; the interest of international NGOs in winning service-provision contracts in place of government services; and, under the General Agreement on Trade in Services, moves to speed the global market in private health care, social care, education and insurance policies. However, since the middle classes will not readily fund services from which they do not benefit, the consequence of their opting into global private provision is that the poor will get poor public services.

Signs of a shift toward the reassertion of social solidarity and universal welfare provision at the national level can be seen in research programmes being sponsored by UNRISD; in policy work taking place within the International Labour Organization (ILO) on category-based benefits (such as old-age pensions) to complement work-based social security schemes; efforts by the UN Commission for Social Development to enhance social protection, reduce vulnerability and improve public sector effectiveness; and the policy impact of pressures to meet the MDGs. Recently, the *Human Development Report* suggested a global contract between richer and poorer countries to ensure a greater degree of global equity, as well as policies that would encourage medical personnel, for example, to undertake a period of public service.

A global social policy of redistribution, regulation and rights is less developed due to several obstacles. These include US unilateralism, European Union social protectionism, and Southern opposition to what is perceived as a Northern-driven agenda. This Southern opposition is based both on concerns that cultural differences would be ignored, and on the absence of funds for global redistribution. One idea is that of a global tax authority. Another is a global social trust network, building on voluntary contributions from individuals

in OECD countries to be distributed through social organizations such as trade unions or national social security funds in poor countries. Such funds could be allocated to some form of universal provision, such as old-age pensions or child benefits, or linked to the MDGs, focusing on some public good unlikely to interest private entrepreneurs.

The diverse agencies and actors involved in global social policy issues suggest a shift in the locus and content of debate and activity from the formal policy-making arenas to a range of networks, partnerships and projects which present new possibilities for effecting change in specific areas of social policy. One such example is the UN Secretary General's Millennium Project, in which a shifting constellation of stakeholders might be involved. Initiatives such as the Helsinki Process for a North-South dialogue, or public calls by the United Kingdom finance minister to double overseas aid, may also indicate an emerging anti-neoliberal global political alliance. The challenge is for UNRISD, WIDER and similar research bodies to shift their focus from the national to the international and global in order to outline a social policy framework to achieve a fair and inclusive globalization.

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Commenting on Bob Deacon's paper, Martín Hopenhayn argued that, for analytical purposes, it is necessary to distinguish between political intervention (social politics) and social intervention (social policies, projects and actions). Social politics requires the mobilization of critical knowledge in order to support an appropriate global regulatory framework and to counter a neoliberal hegemony that suggests the impossibility of ideological or practical alternatives. The desired outcome would involve a multiplicity of transnational arrangements, national policies and local practices. Social policies relate to the concrete mediation between knowledge and action, for instance the reallocation of resources from private to public education, or to reduce attainment gaps based on gen-

der, social class or ethnic background. Finally, the counter-hegemonic project draws its legitimacy from the strength of its arguments and from the way in which knowledge has become a social product. In relation to the emergence of a coherent alternative to neoliberal globalization, participants expressed sympathetic scepticism. Guy Standing and others argued that the regulatory systems of welfare states in Western Europe have changed significantly since the early 1990s, accompanied by an erosion of rights and a shift toward means-testing and other ways of determining eligibility for conditional benefits, particularly in countries such as Sweden, Germany and France. He added that in the *World Development Report 2003* the World Bank's main point is to support the liberalization of social services, arguing that governments cannot be both provider and regulator. Regarding the challenge of global social reform, both Jomo K.S. and Thandika Mkandawire reiterated the need for diversity and plurality in thinking and policy approaches, and cautioned against universal prescriptions or a single counter-hegemonic alternative.

In response, Bob Deacon stressed that the Nordic welfare states demonstrate that it is possible to sustain a regime of equity and justice within the context of economic globalization if a political choice is made to do so. However, the de facto global social policy is that corporations can avoid paying taxes and the existing machinery will not regulate them. What needs to be changed is the existing set of taxation and regulation arrangements governing the behaviour of global corporations. By calling for regional policies of redistribution, regulation and rights, he pointed out that his paper was actually supportive of the notion of global pluralism.

## Critical Thinking

The closing panel discussion focused on what constitutes critical thinking within a neoliberal environment that promotes the idea of there being "one right way". Elizabeth Jelin stressed that pluralism implies dialogue, debate and conflict; the outcomes are not predetermined and may be surprising. A commitment to pluralism cannot be separated from the question of who sets the research agenda and how the research questions are framed. There are many ways of conducting research: it may be consultancy or contract based, participatory, activist or



politically “committed” in terms of providing the kind of knowledge that will help social organizations to mobilize. It is important to be clear about who the resulting knowledge is for, who is going to generate it and how, and for what purpose. At present, the voice of the economists dominates. A deeper analysis may be possible if issues of exclusion—relating to ethnic conflict, for instance—take centre stage.

*It is possible to produce good research that has no impact because it fails to reach those who can use it. It is equally possible to produce bad research that has considerable impact. The challenge is to combine relevance and delivery, recognizing that dissemination needs to be multifaceted if it is to achieve optimum impact.*

The links between culture and language were emphasized by Christian Comelau, who posed the question of how the UN might foster a culturally inclusive political dialogue. The Anglo-Saxon focus on solutions rather than problems tends to suppress political dialogue and thus runs the risk of falling into technocracy. Development choices are invariably political in nature, but such choices cannot be made properly without the power to analyse problems and consider alternative courses of action. Rather than following a fixed plan, or making a once-and-for-all decision, the planning process evolves as specific political choices are made within an ongoing dialogue. Critical thinking means re-examining conceptual frameworks, recognizing for instance that the economy is not only about markets; analysing the consequences of present choices against a range of disciplinary and political measuring rods; and exploring the alternatives.

Martin Khor Kok Peng also underlined the plurilateral nature of critical thinking, arguing that linear thinking, universal prescriptions and tunnel vision, particularly on the part of the BWIs, have been responsible for many of the economic and debt-related problems now facing the South. The world architecture for trade and finance needs to be changed in order to increase the policy space available to developing economies. Without such changes, or unless they can in some way combine engagement and selective disengagement, there is little that individual countries can do to make use of relevant research find-

ings. Research therefore needs to be tested against the measuring rod of Southern needs. It is possible to produce good research that has no impact because it fails to reach those who can use it. It is equally possible to produce bad research that has considerable impact. The challenge is to combine relevance and delivery, recognizing that dissemination needs to be multifaceted if it is to achieve optimum impact.

Participants commented that the Washington consensus has not achieved what it set out to, so the need for alternatives is urgent. It is regrettable that the UN system has to date been so timid about critiquing the “consensus” and lacked the ability or the imagination to set out a comprehensive alternative. Even if national governments were able to design alternatives, these would be unable to flourish without international support.

In his closing remarks, Thandika Mkandawire noted that it was clear that ideas do matter and hence are contested; while the instruments of policy can be captured by brute force, however, ideas are less easily dominated. The conference attested to the myriad everyday forms of struggle and resistance, both intellectual and political. Notwithstanding the material limitations, some constraints nevertheless appear to be self-imposed given the density of the research community in the South. The dominant paradigm, as represented by the Washington consensus, seems to have reached the limits of coherence in terms of absorbing or co-opting ideas. It is, therefore, apposite to stress that nothing that is social is inevitable.

## Agenda

### Tuesday, 20 April 2004

#### OPENING SESSION

- 0900 – 0915 Opening statement — *Emma Rothschild*  
0915 – 0930 Welcome — *Thandika Mkandawire*  
0930 – 1000 Keynote address: **Social and Economic Development: The Implications of Knowledge for Policy** — *José Antonio Ocampo*

#### SESSION 2

##### The Intellectual Contribution of the United Nations

- Chair — *Dharam Ghai*  
1000 – 1100 **Taking on Board New Concepts and Buzzwords** — *Andrea Cornwall*  
Discussant — *Guy Standing*  
General discussion  
1100 – 1130 BREAK  
1130 – 1230 **UN Economic and Social Ideas in Historical Perspective** — *Louis Emmerij*  
Discussant — *Deepak Nayyar*  
General discussion  
1230 – 1400 LUNCH

#### SESSION 3

##### The Relationship between Knowledge and Policy

- Chair — *Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara*  
1400 – 1500 **The Role of Knowledge in Policy Making** — *Kenneth King*  
Discussant — *Amina Mama*  
General discussion  
1500 – 1600 **Knowledge and Policy Change in the Bretton Woods Institutions** — *John Tøye*  
Discussant — *Jomo K.S.*  
General discussion  
1600 – 1630 BREAK  
1630 – 1800 **What Do Policy Makers Want?**  
Panellists — *Mervat Tallawy, Gus Edgren* and *Simon Maxwell*  
General discussion

### Wednesday, 21 April 2004

#### SESSION 4

##### Engaging Southern Perspectives

- Chair — *Enrique Oteiza*  
0900 – 1030 **UN Interaction with the Southern Research Community**  
Panellists — *Rehman Sobhan, Marcia Rivera* and *Adebayo Olukoshi*  
General discussion  
1030 – 1100 BREAK  
1100 – 1130 **Integrating Knowledge, Politics and Policy for Social Change** — *Shalmali Guttal*  
1130 – 1245 **Universalism versus Regionalism** — *Norman Girvan*  
Discussant — *Charles Gore*  
General discussion  
1245 – 1400 LUNCH

#### SESSION 5

##### The Search for Alternatives

- Chair — *Thandika Mkandawire*  
1400 – 1500 **The Relationship of Research to Activism in the Making of Policy: Lessons from Gender and Development** — *Gita Sen*  
Discussant — *Yakin Ertürk*  
General discussion  
1500 – 1600 **The Politics of Social Policy Change** — *Bob Deacon*  
Discussant — *Martín Hopenhayn*  
General discussion  
1600 – 1630 BREAK  
1630 – 1800 **Critical Thinking or One Right Way?**  
Panellists — *Elizabeth Jelin, Christian Comelíau* and *Martin Khor Kok Peng*  
General discussion

## Speakers and Chairpersons

Mr. Christian **COMELIAU**, Honorary Professor, Institut universitaire d'études du développement, Switzerland

Ms. Andrea **CORNWALL**, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, United Kingdom

Mr. Bob **DEACON**, Director, Globalism and Social Policy Programme, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

Mr. Gus **EDGREN**, Consultant / former Ambassador, Sweden

Mr. Louis **EMMERIJ**, Co-Director, United Nations Intellectual History Project, and Senior Research Fellow, City University of New York, United States

Ms. Yakin **ERTÜRK**, Professor, Department of Sociology, Middle East Technical University, Turkey

Mr. Dharam **GHAI**, former Director, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Switzerland

Mr. Norman **GIRVAN**, Professorial Research Fellow, Institute of International Relations, University of the West Indies, and former Secretary General, Association of Caribbean States, Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Charles **GORE**, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, Special Programme for Least Developed, Land-Locked and Island Developing Countries, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Switzerland

Ms. Shalmali **GUTTAL**, Senior Associate, Focus on the Global South and Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, Thailand

Ms. Cynthia **HEWITT DE ALCÁNTARA**, former Deputy Director, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Switzerland

Mr. Martín **HOPENHAYN**, Officer-in-Charge, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Chile

Ms. Elizabeth **JELIN**, Senior Researcher, Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Argentina

Mr. Martin **KHOR KOK PENG**, Director, Third World Network, Malaysia

Mr. Kenneth **KING**, Director, Centre for African Studies, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

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## Acronyms

<b>BWI</b>	Bretton Woods institution
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee
<b>ECLAC</b>	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNIHP</b>	United Nations Intellectual History Project
<b>UNRISD</b>	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
<b>UPE</b>	universal primary education
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WIDER</b>	World Institute for Development Economics Research

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