
The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Bulletin

UN-Business Partnerships Whose Agenda Counts?

Peter Utting

Partnerships involving the United Nations and transnational corporations (TNCs) are currently in vogue. Their rationale seems clear enough—they can yield various benefits in terms of resource mobilization and the promotion of certain values and forms of governance. Potentially, they provide an important means of tapping the considerable resources, technology, competencies, creativity and global reach of the business community and employing these for developmental and ethical goals. They may also serve to raise the profile of human rights, labour standards and environmental issues, in a world somewhat fixated on market economics and corporate profitability. And they may offer a way to deal with complex global problems by relying not only on state-based institutions, but also the private sector and civil society.

There is also, however, a potential downside to partnerships that is often overlooked. Various UN institutions appear to be paying insufficient attention to certain risks associated with partnerships, including conflicts of interest, self-censorship, the poor choice of partners and the tarnishing of the UN's reputation. As the partnership phenomenon takes off, it is useful to bear in mind the tensions and pitfalls

involved. There are, in fact, a range of interests and agendas underpinning partnerships, some of which can be fairly self-centred and give rise to various questions about the supposed “win-win” status of partnerships and their contribution to social and sustainable development.

One such agenda has to do with the dominance of neoliberal ideology, which emphasizes, among other things, market liberalization and a reduced role for the state in regulatory activities. So-called “voluntary initiatives”, which include partnerships, have become the preferred way of encouraging business to act responsibly.

Relatively few companies, however, have significantly improved their social and environmental record through a voluntary approach. Legislation and intergovernmental agreements remain important components of a strategy to promote corporate responsibility. A key question, then, is whether voluntary initiatives in general and partnerships in particular are part of a broader agenda that aims to further weaken the regulatory role of the state and intergovernmental bodies. Rather than complementing regulation, are voluntary initiatives attempting to replace it?

In this issue's **Essential Matter**, readers will find two articles based on work in the UNRISD research programme on **Technology and Society**. The programme draws on case studies and debates at national and international levels to explore ways of encouraging a more socially responsible use of information technology. It also considers the broader subjects of corporate social and environmental responsibility.

In **Inside Coverage**, articles on recent UNRISD meetings in Tamsvik and Bangkok preview some of the themes that will be covered in greater depth in **UNRISD News No. 24 (Spring/Summer 2001)**, a special issue devoted to **Social Policy**.

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The trend toward partnerships is also encouraged by changes in patterns of corporate governance. Some companies are responding to the competitive pressures associated with globalization by giving more attention not only to investors and customers, but also to a wider group of stakeholders. Such firms often seek to minimize confrontation and engage in dialogue.

UN-business partnerships can be part of these strategies. They may enhance a company's relations and reputation with various stakeholders, and boost its profile and image in localities around the world where it is linked to UN agencies or projects. From the perspective of the corporation, partnerships may have more to do with seeking competitiveness and legitimacy rather than the humanitarian or developmental goals of the UN.

Another force underpinning partnerships is the rapid growth of philanthropy and sponsorship among certain sectors of the business community. Philanthropic activities often increase when a company is facing tighter regulation and/or is being criticized for socially irresponsible behaviour. To what extent, therefore, are partnerships part of the efforts of big corporations to enhance their public image, irrespective of whether the companies in question merit a good reputation?

Partnerships have also been encouraged by the crises affecting both overseas development assistance and UN finances. In the 1990s, restructuring and budget cuts were the order of the day in many UN agencies. In this context, the private sector came to be seen as a potentially important source of alternative funding. When considering the pros and cons of partnerships, it is important to ask whether UN agencies are pursuing a narrow financial agenda. If they are doing so, are they compromising their values, standards and conventional agenda for financial reasons?

What the above analysis suggests is that partnerships should not be seen simply as pragmatic win-win relationships where two or more actors or stakeholders come together to work toward a common goal. Multiple agendas may be involved, and from these agendas various problems may arise. In practice, four types of problems appear particularly worrisome.

First, while many partnerships have lofty goals, it is not at all certain whether such goals will be realized. Much will depend on the balance of

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forces within the partnership and the type of interaction that takes place as the different actors advance their specific agendas.

The Global Compact, for example, is formally a multistakeholder partnership of UN agencies, business entities and civil society organizations, established to encourage business to promote good corporate practices in the fields of environmental protection, human rights and labour standards. But from the statements made by the par-

ticipants at the conference that launched the Global Compact in July 2000, it is clear that the different partners want different things. Business supports a soft approach, with no imposition of standards and minimal scrutiny, and with specific companies allowed to go at their own pace. Some NGOs and trade union organizations were joined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in calling for "a price to be paid", i.e., tougher measures, including independent monitoring, public reporting, a faster response on the part of business, and measures against member companies that do not comply. It remains to be seen which of these very different approaches will prevail.

Second, there is a danger that, through partnerships, private interests will come to exert excessive influence over public-interest organizations. If institutions such as governments or UN agencies are to serve the public interest, they must keep a certain distance from the private sector. This is because an organization like the United Nations is driven, at least to some extent, by a set of ethical principles and aims to promote development for all, while big corporations are largely driven by the profit motive and the interests of shareholders. Tensions and conflicts of interest, therefore, are likely to arise when private interests exert undue influence over the decision-making processes of public-interest organizations.

There are concerns that this is happening in some UN agencies as a result of partnerships, which can provide a company with greater access and influence. A recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO) identifies the various ways tobacco firms have attempted to influence that organization. If pariah firms such as these have gained influence, it is not difficult to imagine how much easier it might be for others in, say, the pharmaceutical or food industries.

Third, there are concerns that the agendas of UN agencies are changing as they get closer to business, and that the doors to certain legitimate fields of inquiry and analysis are gradually being closed. This is apparent, for example, in relation to the issue of regulation of TNCs. Critical analysis of TNCs also seems to be frowned upon in certain agencies.

Self-censorship may be on the increase. Instances have already occurred when consultants, hired by a particular specialized agency, were invited to present their findings at a conference and were informed by agency officials that they were not to refer to specific sections of their reports that criticize TNCs. Once self-censorship occurs, it is likely to undermine the capacity of UN agencies to fulfil their roles as independent

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advocates for human rights and development for all, and as professional bodies that can raise the level of debate on development issues and facilitate the search for alternative approaches.

Fourth, some UN agencies appear to be going into partnerships in a somewhat naïve way, assuming that almost any relationship constitutes a partnership and that any company can be a worthy partner. Genuine partnership involves not only different actors or stakeholders coming together to pursue a common goal, but also mutual respect, transparency, balanced power relations, and the equitable distribution of benefits, responsibilities and risks. Furthermore, in the UN context, the common cause being pursued should have a societal or ethical dimension to it. When we speak of UN-business partnerships, this should presumably refer to a specific type of relationship that aims, among other things, to promote corporate responsibility and accountability.

The criteria used to select corporate partners can be very weak. Furthermore, although various parts of the UN system have recently drawn up, or are in the process of formulating, guidelines on interaction with the business sector, such guidelines rarely spell out the risks associated with such interaction. Neither is there much attention to key questions of evaluation and independent monitoring of partnerships. Given the actual or potential problems and conflicts of interest involved, it is important that UN-business relationships be subjected to closer scrutiny.

The urgency displayed by some agencies and officials in engaging corporations as partners may also lead to guidelines being ignored. In July 2000, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a formal set of guidelines for co-operation with the business community. They state, *inter alia*, that “business entities that are complicit in human rights abuses ... are not eligible for partnership” and that “private enterprises should have demonstrated a commitment to meeting or exceeding the principles of the [Global] Compact by translating them into operational

corporate practice”. Yet some UN institutions appear to be ignoring the letter and spirit of such clauses. The criteria they adopt for selecting partners

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may be quite lax. In certain other areas, these guidelines appear somewhat broad or vague. For example, those relating to the use by business of the United Nations name and emblem have led to confusion in some UN quarters as to when their use should be authorized.

Although an agency might have a policy stating that only companies with a good environmental, social and human rights record will be considered as partners, often this record is not examined in any depth. This has led to situations in which specific partnerships incur the wrath of NGOs aware of abuses that have been committed by the companies involved. The demise of the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Global Sustainable Development Facility followed in the wake of NGO opposition to the inclusion of

companies such as Rio Tinto and Dow Chemical Corporation.

Both the Global Compact, and involvement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Business Humanitarian Forum, have come in for similar criticism, partly for the inclusion of companies such as Shell and Nike, and Nestlé and Unocal, respectively. WHO's involvement in the World Alliance for Community Health, which includes mining companies like BHP, Placer Dome, Rio Tinto and WMC, may run a similar course. All of the above companies are the targets of NGO campaigns.

A more serious evaluation of the track record of each particular company involved in a partnership would seem

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to be in order. There are various ways in which this could be done. Individual agencies could follow the example of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and establish an office to

screen companies and periodically review corporate performance. UN organizations could also undertake a broad-based consultation with NGOs, trade unions, ethical investment firms and research organizations with knowledge of the company in question. Another possibility—which might avoid duplication—would be to establish a UN entity that could gather the information required, perhaps something akin to the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations, which existed prior to 1992.

If UN agencies are to pursue the route of partnerships with TNCs, they face a number of hard choices. Do they choose, for example, to work with “the good guys”, or do they collaborate with companies with tarnished reputations who now say they want to change? A key question is whether the latter firms can be trusted. Unfortunately, the history of corporate social responsibility is littered with cases of companies making exaggerated claims and engaging in window dressing.

It can be argued, therefore, that trust should not be taken for granted—it needs to be earned. UN agencies may also have to decide whether they want to be a party to corporate strategies of “reputation management” or an ally of the global corporate accountability movement that is demanding more fundamental improvements in corporate social and environmental performance. The path of “civil regulation”—where pressures from civil society organizations serve to reform business practices—may be one of the most effective routes to promoting corporate social and environmental responsibility. Various features of the UN-business partnership approach, however, seem to be undermining the possibility of such an alliance, for they are straining relations between the UN and an important sector of the NGO community that is part of this movement.

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This is an abridged version of a paper presented at the seminar on Partnerships for Development or Privatization of the Multilateral System?, organized by the North-South Coalition and held in Oslo, Norway on 8 December 2000.

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Information Technologies and Social Development in Senegal

Olivier Sagna

Senegal has one of the most highly developed telecommunications and information technology infrastructures in sub-Saharan Africa. Its modern history goes back almost 150 years, to 1859, when construction began on the first telegraph line linking the capital to nearby trading centres. A few years later, the expanding Senegalese telegraph network was linked to Europe through an ocean cable that stretched from Saint-Louis (in northwest Senegal) to Spain. Telegraphy became an essential element in colonial administration, facilitating trade and ensuring firm control over the territory. The military role of communications was reinforced with the introduction of radio, which evolved into a mass medium in the years following the founding of Radio Dakar in 1939.

Before independence in 1960, radio played a role somewhat similar to that of the Internet in today's world. The overwhelming majority of programmes were produced outside Africa, and their content was primarily oriented toward Europeans and the urban elite in Dakar. Then, shortly following independence, efforts were made to reorient radio toward more broad-based development goals. Just as current experiments with telecentres attempt to bring the benefits of the Internet to less-advantaged groups, the 145 collective listening posts established throughout the country from the early 1960s onward—and staffed by teams of volunteers including teachers and nurses, rural development specialists and war veterans—were regarded as “tools for the stimulation and education of the population”.

As the radio was slowly becoming a common consumer item, a new technological leap brought television onto the scene in 1973. For a long time, there was only

one television channel, run by the Office of Radio and Television Broadcasting of Senegal. Both television and radio were carefully controlled by the government, which refused to authorize reception of international channels or the establishment of private national alternatives to the official system.

All of this started to change at the end of the 1980s. Faced with growing criticism from the political opposition, the

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government began to consider measures that would guarantee greater freedom of expression on the airwaves. This process has moved slowly. By the end of the 1990s, there were six private FM radio stations; and satellite television provided new alternatives for viewers with the ability to gain access to it. Community radio stations, which could play a significant role in development,

are still weak—in large part because their legal status has never been fully clarified and they must apply for authorization to broadcast on a case-by-case basis.

In contrast, progress in the field of fixed and mobile telephony has been remarkable. In the wake of an emergency plan implemented by the government in 1985, a poor-quality analogue system, reaching few areas outside the principal cities and towns of Senegal, was transformed into an entirely digital system in which all principal rural communities have public access. In fact, Senegal has the largest number of public telephone lines in Africa. Twenty-two of the 30 departments of the country also enjoy fibre optic connections.

Over the past decade, “phone shops” have played an extremely important role in extending the reach of telephone service within Senegal. This experiment—by all accounts, extremely successful—began in 1992, when the national telephone company (SONATEL) authorized private individuals to create small businesses selling access to telephones. Pent-up demand was so great, and competition among private telephone shops so strong, that SONATEL's revenue from this source grew exponentially, while the cost of a unit of telephone use for consumers dropped by as much as 30 per cent. By 1998, there were almost 6,800 private telephone shops; and by late 2000 the figure had risen to more than 10,000. Approximately 1,000 of these are equipped with computers, and some also have modems that allow access to the Internet.

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(ORSTOM), and through a separate initiative of the Senegalese NGO Enda Tiers-Monde. At that time, the Internet was the concern of no more than a few dozen people. As in many other parts of the world, the real breakthrough in Internet use came in 1996, when SONATEL and the American company MCI signed an agreement allowing technical updates that signalled the beginning of the commercial Internet era. By 2000, there were 13 Internet service providers in Senegal, and approximately 8,500 registered subscribers. In addition, a dozen or more cybercafes were scattered around Dakar, and more were being set up in most large provincial towns. The fact that SONATEL offers a single Internet access rate throughout the country is greatly facilitating the growth of Internet use outside the capital.

The past few years have also seen an explosion of the mobile phone market. Initiated in 1994 by SONATEL, cellular telephone service had 1,492 subscribers in 1996, approximately 7,000 subscribers at the end of 1997 and almost 100,000 by the end of 1999. It is not clear why there has been such a phenomenal jump in mobile telephone use, especially since mobile communications cost as much as 20 times more than communication over fixed lines. Who make up the clientele for this service? How likely are mobile phones to replace fixed lines, thus obviating the need for further investment in the latter? Both the economics and the social profile of this startling shift deserve attention.

Development issues

Understanding the new uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is essential for answering a broader and more significant question: What are the development implications of the expanding role of telecommunications, the Internet and non-official media in Senegalese society? Senegal is a low-income country, struggling to

emerge from deep economic crisis. Open urban unemployment stands at approximately 29 per cent. One third of the population is poor or very poor. What role can the new ICTs play—or are they playing—in providing new opportunities for people to lead a better life?

Certainly, the new ICTs meet some very basic needs of migrants, who have been forced to leave rural areas—and often to leave the country—in search of work. Many are illiterate, and they have been quick to make creative use of technologies that eliminate the need for writing and reading messages. Some years ago, tape recorders and video cassettes became important tools for maintaining close contact with

also play a fundamental role in the management of household finances and facilitate the transfer of funds through informal financial systems.

There can be no doubt as well that ICTs have a role to play in improving the quality of education. But here a number of difficulties arise. Since 1997–1998, for example, the World Links for Development programme of the World Bank has provided equipment and software for computer programmes in 40 Senegalese middle schools. It has also provided training for instructors, while the government has agreed to cover the cost of subscribing to Internet services, as well as telecommunications charges, computer maintenance and salaries for personnel involved in co-ordinating the project.

Though this project is interesting and important, it has been criticized on several grounds. The first is simply the limited size of the programme, when compared to existing needs. Second, it has proved difficult for the public educational system—whose budget is too restricted even to cover the normal expenses of schooling—to meet the relatively high cost of Internet connectivity and equipment maintenance. The expense is to some extent passed on to students' families, through increased school fees. Negotiations are under way with SONATEL to subsidize a part of the telecommunications cost. But no solution has been found to the problem of repairing and replacing equipment that is rapidly becoming unusable or obsolete.

The problem of cost is also central to plans to expand distance education programmes in Senegal. Distance education is expensive. Not only does it require access to imported equipment, telecommunications connections and technical services, but it also assumes that students are sufficiently computer literate to participate in on-line learning. There is thus a real danger that these systems will exclude the relatively more disadvantaged segments of the national population.

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family and friends. Today, as telephone rates drop, it has become easier for Senegalese abroad to talk directly with people at home; and some migrant communities have even begun to take advantage of Internet telephony. Less high-tech applications, such as faxes,

The same could be said of the integration of ICTs into small business strategies. The country's business sector is increasingly aware of the importance of the new technologies. Large companies are generally computerized, and small and medium-sized businesses are attempting to equip themselves as well. But the vast majority are still without Internet access; and many enterprises that have invested in computers do not have access to the technical assistance that is required to maintain them. Furthermore, lack of training creates serious bottlenecks. This is the case not only in the private sector, but also in government ministries where a part of the staff now have access to computers.

ICTs and democratization

ICTs have played a pivotal role in the process of democratization that marked the 1990s in Senegal. Although government-run radio and television were slow in providing time for opposition parties to air their views, the growth of private FM radio stations contributed to redressing this imbalance. In fact, during the presidential election of February 2000, won by the opposition for the first time in 40 years, the main private radio stations deployed hundreds of correspondents, armed with cell phones, who reported from across the country. Senegalese abroad, not to be outdone, organized "chat" sites on the Internet where major issues were debated. The Ministry of the Interior made electoral registers available on its Web site. And on election day, the near-instantaneous dissemination of the vote count from polling locations meant that two hours after the close of the voting booths, the Senegalese people knew the unofficial results.

Broader governance issues

If Senegal is to continue to expand access to ICTs, on terms that are advantageous for an ever-growing segment of the population, it is necessary to deal with basic issues of public regulation and corporate governance. The most important of these grows out of the recent pri-

vatzation of SONATEL. For many years, SONATEL was that rare exception in much of Africa—a well-managed public telephone system, providing quality infrastructure and service with high profits and low levels of debt. Following several years of debate on the merits of

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privatization and liberalization (confined largely to political decision-making circles, technical personnel, private sector managers and funders), 42 per cent of SONATEL was sold in 1997 to France Telecom, while the remaining shares are held by the government of Senegal (approximately 24 per cent), small investors (approximately 23 per cent) and employees (approximately 10 per cent).

The most obvious result of this "privatization" has been to replace a national monopoly with a monopoly held primarily by France Telecom. The arrangement does not, in any real sense, constitute liberalization of the telecommunications market. It has deprived the Senegalese government of an important source of revenue: France Telecom paid 90 billion CFA francs (\$129.1 million at the current rate) for a company that pro-

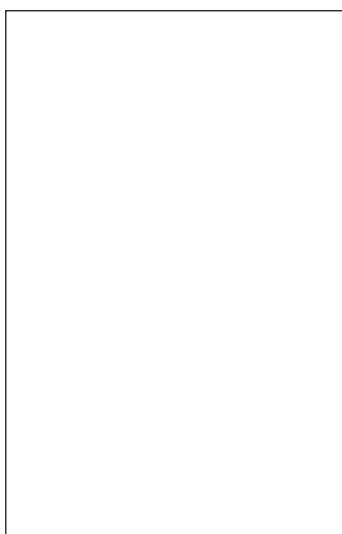
duced over 31 billion CFA francs (\$44.5 million) in dividends for its new owner during just the first two years (1997–1998) following privatization. And the shareholders retain a monopoly on the most lucrative segments of the telecommunications business—international mobile telephone calls—until 2006.

Strong and effective public regulation of the telecommunications sector becomes extremely important under these circumstances. Yet plans to establish a national regulatory commission have not materialized. There is an unfortunate tendency today to concentrate more heavily on individual "consumers" and their buying power than on Senegalese citizens and their rights.

In fact, the absence of genuine national debate when SONATEL was privatized illustrates the way in which the intellectual community, organized labour and the public tend to be excluded from the process of designing and implementing ICT policy. When people are not well informed about different policy options, they are likely to defer to the opinion of technocrats and specialists. But the development implications of ICTs are too important to be left in the hands of technical experts alone. Here it seems obvious that social science research has a critical role to play in improving the environment for informed policy choices.

This article is an extract from an overview paper prepared for the UNRISD research project on **Information Technologies and Social Development in Senegal**. The paper has been published in French as Technology and Society Programme Paper No. 1. UNRISD ON-LINE offers an English translation of the paper for download at <http://www.unrisd.org/infotech/index.htm>.

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Agricultural Expansion and Tropical Deforestation: Poverty, International Trade and Land Use

*Solon L. Barracrough
and Krishna B. Ghimire*

Contents: Introduction: Social Determinants of Deforestation: *A complex issue; Principal questions guiding the research; The case study countries* • The Extent of Tropical Deforestation and Agricultural Expansion in Developing Countries: *Recent land use changes* • Tropical Deforestation and Agricultural Expansion in the Case Study Countries: *Public policy-induced deforestation in Brazil; Deforestation and agricultural expansion in Guatemala; China; Cameroon; Malaysia* • Linkages with International Trade: *Brazil; Guatemala; China; Malaysia; Cameroon; Diverse and changing linkages* • Toward More Sustainable Use of Tropical Agricultural and Forest Resources: *Causes and impacts of tropical deforestation in the case study countries; Local-level constraints and opportunities; The crucial role of national policies and institutions; International reforms*

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Forest Policy and Politics in the Philippines: The Dynamics of Participatory Conservation

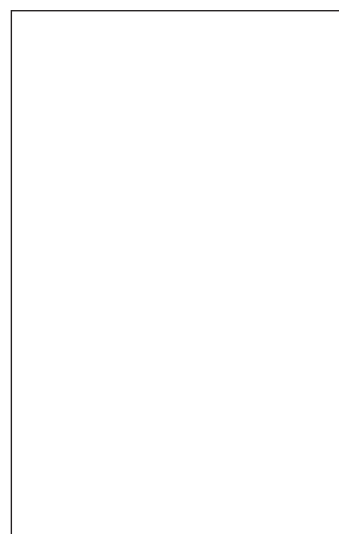
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Forest Policy and Politics in the Philippines is co-published with Ateneo de Manila University Press. Paperback, ISBN 971-550-348-9, 237 pages, 2000, contact publisher for price.

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Visible Hands: Taking Responsibility for Social Development

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Editorial Team: This UNRISD report was prepared by Peter Utting (project co-ordinator); Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, Yusuf Bangura, Thandika Mkandawire, Shahra Razavi, Peter Utting and David Westendorff (chapter co-ordinators); and Peter Stalker and Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara (principal editors).

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French and Spanish editions of this book will be published in spring 2001.

*** Programme Papers**

UNRISD working papers were published as Discussion Papers between December 1987 and April 2000. In early 2000, Discussion Papers—those well-known green publications!—were replaced by five new series of Programme Papers, reflecting the reorganization of the Institute's research into five programme areas. A sixth series contains papers that address UNRISD's overarching concerns. The new publications are expected to support more effective dissemination to specific audiences and strengthen ties with UNRISD's traditional academic readership. **UNRISD 2000+ A Vision for the Future of the Institute**, which outlines the new programme areas from the perspectives of both past UNRISD work and future usefulness to the United Nations and global research communities, has been published and is available from UNRISD free of charge.

*** Programme Papers on Civil Society and Social Movements**

- PP CSSM 2 **Civil Society Organizations and Service Provision**, *Andrew Clayton, Peter Oakley and Jon Taylor*, October 2000
- PP CSSM 3 **Social Movements, Activism and Social Development in the Middle East**, *Asef Bayat*, November 2000

*** Programme Paper on Social Policy and Development**

- PP SPD 4 **AIDS in the Context of Development**, *Joseph Collins and Bill Rau*, December 2000

*** Programme Paper on Technology and Society**

- PP TS 1 **Les technologies de l'information et de la communication et le développement social au Sénégal: Un état des lieux**, *Olivier Sagna*, forthcoming January 2001

*** Gender Occasional Paper**

- OPB 13 **Leaving the Rice Fields, But Not the Countryside: Gender, Livelihood Diversification and Pro-Poor Growth in Rural Viet Nam**, *Naila Kabeer and Tran Thi Van Anh*, September 2000

■ Conference News

- **What Choices Do Democracies Have in Globalizing Economies? Technocratic Policy Making and Democratization**, Report of the UNRISD International Conference, Geneva, 27–28 April 2000

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Social Policy in a Development Context

23–24 September 2000, Tammsvik, Sweden

This two-day conference was concerned with the meaning and role of social policy in current development processes. Organized by UNRISD in collaboration with the Olof Palme International Centre (OPIC), it was the first activity in the Institute's project on **Social Policy in a Development Context**. It gathered over 40 participants, representing academic and research institutions, as well as national and international agencies.

Integrating "the economic" and "the social"

One of the most fascinating discussions at the conference centred on the meaning of social policy and the implications of attempting to separate it from economic policy. Several speakers challenged the view that there is an objectively definable "economic sphere" separate from other spheres of life. In fact, the market can be delineated only with reference to the rights and obligations of those who participate in it. These are in turn products of various (explicit or implicit) political decisions, and not of some "scientific" law of economics. In addition, they noted, the term "economic policy" is very often used as shorthand for a policy whose underlying structure of rights and obligations is relatively uncontested—or, in the opinion of some, should not be contested. Thus, accepting the dichotomy amounts to endorsing the maintenance of the *status quo*.

These issues have long been debated. The present interest owes a great deal to recent questioning of the neoliberal consensus, coinciding with an apparent rediscovery of "the social" by international financial institutions (IFIs). But some participants argued that this revalidation of the social has many problematic features. It is happening mainly at the micro level, and on terms

that are compatible with neoclassical microeconomic thinking. At the macro level, attention to social questions is still very much an afterthought—"sound" macroeconomic policies are designed, and then social "band-aids" are applied in order to achieve acceptable outcomes.

Given this situation, perhaps (as one speaker put it) "the best way to pursue social policy is to correct the biases of economic policies". For the past 20 years, macroeconomic policy has been focused on cutting back aggregate public expenditure and the money supply in order to reduce deficits and curb inflation. The policies promoted by the IFIs to accomplish this in most developing and transitional economies have depressed growth, led to massive inequality and social polarization within and between countries, and reduced the role and capacity of the state.

In light of this failure, some fundamental questions about macroeconomic policy need to be raised, and some of the key components of orthodox stabilization policy need to be questioned. For example, what constitutes a "sound" macroeconomic policy? What is a sustainable budgetary deficit? Even International Monetary Fund evaluations indicate that the criteria adopted for reducing budgetary deficits have been far too restrictive. Above what rates does inflation become costly for an economy? Again, there is an on-going debate on this, but research is showing that inflation rates of less than 40 per cent are not costly for an economy in terms of output. Under what conditions can external liberalization work? And, more importantly, what needs to be done when those conditions do not prevail? If problems of poverty and increasing inequality are to be ad-

dressed, the distributional implications of such key macroeconomic decisions must be clarified.

Employment and social policy

The experience of late industrializing countries is particularly pertinent here because it provides a powerful argument for rethinking social policy. The state was bound to play a much more active role in these countries than in the early industrializers, and to give greater attention to the promotion of full employment and the security of labour. This meant that some of the latecomers were pioneers of the modern European welfare state. Others—particularly in Asia—derived comprehensive labour policies from state-led promotion of the industrial sector. Conference presentations on European and Asian late industrializers explored such employment and social policy themes.

Presentations on East Asia questioned the idea that the region has been a "social policy-free zone". Such an argument is based on the misconception that these countries did not have many social policies because they did not have many social problems. In fact, social peace in East Asia is relatively recent, and has been achieved through the use of a range of implicit and explicit social policies. The East Asian welfare model depended on high growth rates and full employment. In times of crisis, such as in 1997–1998, the system was not able to provide adequate protection. Yet in countries like South Korea, the policy response to the crisis has on the whole been positive. Political democratization has prompted the search for more universal social provisions, such as the Employment Insurance Programme and the extension of the National Pension Programme.

The implicit premise of current policies of the international financial institutions is that public sector promotion of industrialization and full employment is an “old fashioned” policy objective. But participants stressed that this premise must be strongly resisted. While these concerns previously formed an integral part of thinking about economic development itself, they have now been relegated to the periphery. Employment generation and social protection are demoted to the realm of safety nets and of small-enterprise and informal sector-specific programs. The focus on small firms and the informal sector in turn leads to blanket exemptions from paying taxes, and from observing environmental and labour regulations. This largely undermines the social policy agenda. Furthermore, the approach is devoid of the kind of strategic vision that can assist firms to become more productive and to promote broader employment objectives.

Globalization and the privatization of welfare

Along with important changes in macroeconomic trends, there has been a global shift toward selectivity in social policy and multitierism in modes of provision of social protection. While selectivity means narrowing the targets for support, multitierism means reducing the state component and partially privatizing social protection. There is thus increasing reliance on private provision and community support, or indeed an increased need for these sources to fill the gaps left open by diminishing public provision.

One of the most controversial and significant areas of social policy reform, both in fiscal terms and as far as the welfare of citizens is concerned, is pension reform. In Latin America alone, 10 countries have enacted structural reform of pensions during the past decade. The neoliberal reformers in many of these countries opted for privatization of pensions even though

many other options were available. Supporters of privatization argued that it would be superior to all other options on several accounts: expansion of coverage; competition; administrative cost of the system; and its impact on capital markets, national savings and investment. Yet this has not been the case. The presentation on Latin America provided a poignant account of the discrepancies between neoliberal claims and the continent’s realities—an astounding case of misguided perceptions shaping major policy decisions.

Privatizing basic social services and social insurance is antithetical to redistribution and equity. Yet, as presentations on health care reform showed, redistributive action has been central to the project of nation building in a wide range of countries. In the early years of independence from colonial rule, for example, state provision of health care in sub-Saharan Africa was an important part of the construction of “the nation” and played a key role in deepening notions of citizenship.

The lesson from both European and non-European contexts is that effective redistribution involves gaining the support of the middle class: social equity, with high levels of social welfare provision accessible to all, has been secured and retained when those services have been available to, paid for and used by all citizens—not only the poor. The current emphasis on targeting and privatization goes in exactly the opposite direction. It makes solidarity more difficult.

Globalization and social policy

Neoliberal globalization generates a number of well-known problems. It leaves behind poor economies and weaker strata in strong economies. With few exceptions, this has fuelled a rise in income *inequality* both across and within countries, thus making the reduction of poverty difficult to

achieve. It increases the *volatility* of most economies (due to the surge in banking, financial and currency crises), their *vulnerability* to external shocks (due to the spread of “contagion” among closely integrated economies) and the risk of *recurrent global recessions*. In consequence, increasing exposure to global economic forces requires the development of adequate social insurance mechanisms. But competition triggered by globalization makes this task extremely difficult.

Some participants argued that solutions are not easily available at the national level. International agreements are therefore needed to establish minimum global social standards. Others, however, emphasized that there is more room for policy manoeuvre at the national level than is frequently admitted. While globalization constrains choices, it does not foreclose them altogether. Moreover, international agreements, though clearly needed, are also fraught with difficulties. There is neither an international consensus on what is to be done to fashion a socially responsible and equitable globalization, nor are the institutions in place to oversee it.

This conference was funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

Further information will be available in an issue of **UNRISD Conference News**, to be published in early 2001.

The Land Question in Zimbabwe

5 October 2000, Geneva

Sam Moyo, Director of the Southern Africa Regional Institute for Policy Studies in Harare, spoke at UNRISD on the land reform process in Zimbabwe. The presentation was attended by UNRISD staff and other researchers, as well as representatives of the Zimbabwean and South African permanent missions to the United Nations in Geneva.

Moyo began by outlining the unequal structure of land ownership during the colonial period: 5,000–6,000 large-scale commercial farms, owned mostly by the white minority, occupied prime agricultural land (46 per cent of the total), while 700,000 smallholders had land in the less arable zones (49 per cent of the total). According to Moyo, periods of political and economic conflict in Zimbabwe during the two decades since independence can often be traced to these historic, racially based inequalities in land ownership and access to related resources.

Post-independence land reform in Zimbabwe was not based on the legal restitution of private or community land rights that had been expropriated during colonial rule. Indeed, to protect the country's cash crop exports and maintain international investments in the commercial farming sector, the 1980 Lancaster House Agreement (between Britain and the new government of independent Zimbabwe) guaranteed the existing landholding pattern. Although state acquisition of land for redistribution was agreed in principle, this had to be done at market prices, in foreign currency and on a willing buyer/willing seller basis. Under the market-based approach, landholders retained crucial power to determine the amount, quality, location and cost of land for sale. Land acquired in this way was often of poor quality and scattered, and infrastructure and other extension services for newly settled farmers were expensive and thus rarely provided by the govern-

ment. With minimal British funding, only 3.5 million hectares of land were acquired on the market and redistributed.

In addition to the market-based approach, which predominated between 1980 and 1990, the government of Zimbabwe has also attempted compulsory acquisition of land. When the Lancaster House Agreement expired in 1990, President Robert Mugabe launched a campaign for more radical land reform. By 1992, the government had passed the Land Acquisition Act, under which land could be expropriated by the state and compensation no longer needed to be made in foreign currency. The Land Acquisition Act aimed to transfer a further 5.0 million hectares to smallholder black farmers, and to de-racialize ownership of the remaining large-scale commercial farm sector by encouraging black entry. However, legal, administrative and financial obstacles, as well as political resistance, throttled the government's feeble attempts to compulsorily acquire land. By the beginning of 2000, only 40 per cent of the total targeted 8.3 million hectares had been transferred to 75,000 black families, while about 400 blacks were leasing 400,000 hectares of state land, and 350 more had bought their farms—far from the original target.

As a result of the slow pace of land acquisition for resettlement through market-based and compulsory processes, as well as growing unemployment and poverty, demands for land redistribution have increased among the poor. Land occupation, a phenomenon which began in the 1980s, intensified from 1997 onward and has taken on the explicit aim of redistributing land from white farmers to landless rural peasants and war veterans. Recent land occupations have targeted parts of farms, or entire farms, that are underutilized—and in a few cases farms owned by black politicians or

other prominent individuals have been occupied. According to Moyo, at some stage the occupations became uncontrollable, but the violence that flared up around the time of Zimbabwe's recent elections was not part of the occupiers' original strategy.

Moyo qualified as "cynical" reports that have both underplayed the historical importance of land occupations in the politics of land reform, and minimized the leadership roles of war veterans and rural peasants in the occupations. Such reports have overemphasized the role of the army and the government in the land occupations, and have characterized the occupations as contrived simply for electioneering purposes.

In fact, it is precisely because there is rural support for redressing past land injustices through land expropriation that some war veterans and some elements of the ruling party have effectively encouraged the strategy of land occupations. Farm workers and others in local communities—including people on resettlement waiting lists and even members of the urban working and middle-class who voted for the opposition—have joined the occupations to enhance their chances for resettlement. Deep-seated local pressure for land reform—and anger about past injustices and deprivation—have been underestimated.

Moyo suggested that possibilities for developing new rules of land acquisition have been enhanced by land occupations, which have focused the attention of the state, landowners and external donors on the necessity of taking concrete action to deliver more land for redistribution.

Hella Dietz and Minna Major

Wright, former research assistants at UNRISD, contributed to this article.

Promoting Socially Responsible Business in Developing Countries

23–24 October 2000, Geneva

Many large corporations now claim to be taking steps to improve their environmental and social performance through the use of voluntary initiatives such as codes of conduct, environmental certification and reporting, social audits, fair trading schemes and social investment programmes. There is much debate about the potential and limits of voluntary initiatives for improving the social and environmental record of big business, as well as their role in developing countries, where companies may not be subjected to the same types of pressures and market opportunities that encourage responsible business in the richer industrialized countries. Under its project on **Business Responsibility for Sustainable Development**, UNRISD organized a two-day workshop to consider these issues. The meeting was attended by 30 representatives of business and employer associations, trade unions, NGOs, United Nations organizations, and the academic and research community.

International regulation of transnational corporations

One of the most controversial topics in the field of economic development—the regulation of international firms—was examined in the first session of the meeting. In his presentation, E.V.K. FitzGerald argued that the process of developing a multilateral framework for regulation has been slow and lopsided. While some steps taken in areas of investment, taxation and competition strengthen the rights of transnational corporations (TNCs), there has been no attempt to develop a regime that balances property rights with obligations linked to labour and environmental issues. There must be a more balanced “global social contract”, FitzGerald suggested, particularly in view of the limits of both voluntary approaches and regulatory regimes based exclusively on domestic legislation.

While participants agreed that progress has been slow, they identified some positive steps in relation to international regulation. TNCs, for example, are already recognized to some extent by international law. This is apparent in the area of corruption, where international treaties define certain obligations of corporations. There are also norms of customary international law—related, for example, to human rights—as well as intergovernmental codes of conduct related to specific products.

Codes of conduct and certification

The effectiveness of codes of conduct and certification schemes in promoting socially responsible business was examined in the next two sessions of the workshop. Rhys Jenkins identified the major stakeholders and forces promoting codes of conduct, highlighting, in particular, the role of shareholders, NGOs and trade unions. He also noted attempts by large corporations to control global supply (or “value”) chains, as well as the social and environmental practices of their affiliates and suppliers.

Leah Margulies assessed the effectiveness of both *intergovernmental codes* and *certification schemes developed by civil society groups*. She made the point that such initiatives have often been more effective than company or industry-led initiatives because they are not purely voluntary. Intergovernmental codes, such as those related to the marketing of infant formula and pesticides, are in fact part of a regulatory process, because national governments are expected to incorporate some or all of their contents in national legislation.

This session also exposed the inherent weakness of various *company and industry-led codes*, in terms of both content and implementation. Various participants noted the shortcomings of some types of certification schemes,

such as ISO 14001. There is little guarantee that the changes in corporate environmental policy and management systems promoted by such schemes actually reduce negative environmental impacts. Other schemes involving independent monitoring, such as forest certification associated with the Forest Stewardship Council, have proved more effective.

The discussions also emphasized the important role of civil society organizations and movements in the process of developing and implementing codes and certification schemes. Some participants argued that it was important to make a distinction between the goals and agendas of the “corporate accountability” movement, and the “corporate responsibility” movement driven largely by corporate interests.

Developing country experiences

Subsequent sessions examined the promotion of corporate environmental and social responsibility in specific developing countries. Referring to Indonesia, Melody Kemp pointed out that while concepts like corporate social responsibility have become more fashionable there, they have essentially been introduced from abroad. Lack of interest within Indonesia is not surprising considering the current context of economic crisis, political turmoil and social deprivation, which generates other priorities. In fact, efforts to promote corporate social and environmental responsibility have remained restricted to a few corporations targeted by Northern consumers. Some of the worst corporate offenders of human rights, labour standards and the environment, such as hotel chains and tobacco companies, have not been targeted by the corporate accountability movement.

This presentation and the discussions that followed stressed the importance

of independent monitoring of codes of conduct, but pointed out that the monitors engaged by some companies to assess occupational health and safety standards had only limited capacity.

Martin Perry examined efforts to promote corporate environmental responsibility in two other Asian countries. In Singapore, he explained, some degree of environmental responsibility has been achieved, due as much to the relatively strong capacity of the government to enforce legislation as to purely voluntary initiatives. Nevertheless, low levels of community awareness of environmental issues and a weak environmental movement have mitigated the pressures on corporations to adopt voluntary initiatives. Although he found such pressures more apparent in Malaysia, corporate environmental responsibility there has been limited by weak enforcement of legislation.

In both countries, environmental certification under the ISO 14001 series has become an important indicator of voluntary business commitment to environmental improvement, but its impact has varied. In Singapore, where compliance with environmental legislation is already relatively high, ISO 14001 has not encouraged much additional activity. In Malaysia, however, the adoption of environmental management systems has stimulated improvements, in the absence of resources to ensure regulatory compliance.

The case of the Philippines, presented by Francisco Magno, illustrates the fact that corporate social responsibility is not always externally driven or dependent on the enactment of laws. A movement for corporate responsibility, led by an alliance of business interests and the Catholic church, emerged in the 1970s as an attempt on the part of the business community to encourage a model of development that was neither socially polarizing nor socialist. This movement gathered momentum in the 1990s and

diversified to embrace issues of environmental responsibility, largely in response to international pressures and ongoing civil society activism in the Philippines. Despite these developments, corporate social and environmental responsibility has remained weak due to the limited commitment of many firms, the poor regulatory environment in the country, and lack of attention to auditing and monitoring.

The case of South Africa, presented by David Fig, explored the relationship between corporate social responsibility, and social and political change. Under international pressure to distance themselves from the apartheid regime, some firms in South Africa attempted to improve their social performance in the 1970s. More recently, there has been some corporate attention to environmental issues both on the part of individual companies and business and industry associations. Commitment, however, has been fairly limited. Furthermore, it has been undermined by weak government enforcement capacity and impending economic recession, which reduces the resources that companies have available for environmental management. The types of international pressures encouraging corporate social and environmental responsibility in some developing countries appear weaker in South Africa due to the limited extent of production for the global market.

Such pressures are more apparent in Mexico, as a result of the regulatory framework associated with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Mexico's membership in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). David Barkin explained how an institutional framework supportive of corporate environmental responsibility has emerged in recent years. Corporate policies to promote responsible environmental behaviour have been increasingly important among foreign-based TNCs.

But any advances made by individual firms appear to be outweighed by processes of environmental degradation associated with the expansion of certain economic sectors and the relocation of industrial production to semi-arid regions of the country. Developments in the field of corporate *social* responsibility have been much less apparent. In fact, the decline of both the union movement and the government's regulatory role has contributed to a worsening of social conditions in many sectors.

The country presentations and workshop discussions suggested that different patterns of industrial development, social change and globalization have produced very different outcomes in terms of corporate social and environmental responsibility. The forces and actors promoting corporate responsibility vary in different national contexts; and it is important to conduct research to clarify the roles of different stakeholders, as well as the types of pressures and opportunities that might promote corporate social and environmental responsibility. It is also necessary to avoid broad generalizations about the positive or negative effects of voluntary initiatives. Their effectiveness has varied considerably depending on the regulatory context in which they have arisen, the types of stakeholders involved and the motivations of business.

This workshop was funded by the MacArthur Foundation. Further information on the discussions and debates will be available in an issue of *UNRISD Conference News*, to be published in early 2001.

Globalization, Export-Oriented Employment for Women and Social Policy

27–28 October 2000, Bangkok, Thailand

An important aspect of trends in the global economy has been women's massive incorporation into the wage labour force of modern export-oriented manufacturing in the South. The feminization of the labour force in manufacturing has been an important strategy for reducing labour costs. It has often taken the particularly regressive form of outsourcing, in which women do piece-rate work at the lowest-paid end of the production chain and are deprived of all labour rights.

The UNRISD workshop on Globalization, Export-Oriented Employment for Women and Social Policy focused on this situation. Discussions centred around several country case studies—China, Hungary, India, Mauritius, Mexico, the Republic of Korea and South Africa—as well as papers on wider related themes. The authors of the commissioned papers, joined by experts from the Asian region, discussed their research and suggested future directions for work within UNRISD.

Most economies seemed to be increasingly vulnerable to external shocks during the 1990s. This has often been associated with what 'globalization' is understood to be about: trade and financial liberalization, and increasing economic integration.

Some crucial dimensions of the macro-economic policy context were reviewed in the opening session. First, most

economies seemed to be increasingly vulnerable to external shocks during the 1990s. This has often been associated with what "globalization" is understood to be about: trade and financial liberalization, and increasing economic integration. In their more bullish days, when advocating that developing countries liberalize trade, the international financial institutions portrayed the export sector as the engine of growth that would increase employment, lead to real wage increases and reduce poverty. The experience of East Asian economies was held up to illustrate this point. But in fact, while there was tremendous emphasis on export-oriented production in East Asia, the region's economies (until very recently) could not be described as "open". "Successful" export-oriented strategies in the region took place in the context of strict import controls, strategic industrial policies and state-directed finance that nurtured national firms.

Trade liberalization and heightened export competition are flooding many markets with cheap manufactured products, and this is having increasingly negative effects on manufacturing employment. In the constant search for cheaper labour, garment manufacturers are currently shifting from East Asia to southern China, from Mauritius to Madagascar, from South Africa to Zimbabwe, and within national boundaries from more "developed" regions to rural hinterlands. There has also been displacement of women workers by "cheaper" migrant labourers in many countries. The presentation on Mauritius, for example, described how female labour from China is now replacing the local female labour force in export processing zones, and female unemployment is growing.

The worrying phenomenon of "jobless growth"—brought out by participants writing on Hungary and Mauritius—

There has been displacement of women workers by 'cheaper' migrant labourers in many countries. In Mauritius, for example, female labour from China is now replacing the local female labour force in export processing zones, and female unemployment is growing.

raises questions about whether the demand for manufactured products on the global market is going to keep up with supply. Indeed, it is no longer only the "traditional" agricultural commodity exports of developing countries that are facing deteriorating terms of trade, but also manufactured products into which many Southern countries were advised to diversify. Important points concerning the limits to growth through export trade, and problems of market saturation if all countries pursue export-oriented strategies simultaneously, are being increasingly corroborated.

Yet participants warned against seeing global economic forces as unrelenting and beyond conscious policy choices. An approach that focuses on "the impact of globalization on women" falls into that trap and can be severely limited. They felt that the UNRISD project should study *how* social relations of gender (as well as race and class), shape

national and local patterns of interaction with the global economy. The picture that would emerge would not only be more varied, but also more suggestive of the possibilities for social change.

Crucially, the project must also explore the extent to which the provision of a range of social services has changed in response to women's increased labour force participation. The main objective will be to rethink the relationship between employment and social policy (or between "the economic" and "the social") from a gender perspective.

Participants debated whether it is possible to distinguish between *economic* and *social* policy (see also pages 10–11). Some rejected the dichotomy, arguing that any state measure that causes the welfare of a sizeable proportion of the population to rise—or fall—substantially is, *de facto*, social policy. Others felt that this conception of social policy was too broad, but agreed that a more inclusive approach would draw attention to the social biases of macroeconomic policy.

One of these—the "deflationary bias"—was brought out by several authors. Liberalized financial markets induce governments to adopt policies primarily aimed at maintaining their credibility

Participants felt that the UNRISD project should study how social relations of gender (as well as race and class), shape national and local patterns of interaction with the global economy:

in financial markets (through fiscal restraint, high interest rates and so on). Expansionist policies are resisted, even though they may be the best "social

policy", for fear of inflation, capital flight and reduced flows of foreign direct investment (FDI). Thus governments are effectively prevented from dealing with unemployment and underemployment. And state-based social services and welfare entitlements are cut back or replaced by market-based provisions available only to those who can afford to pay.

Approaching the issue of social policy from a somewhat different angle, one participant suggested focusing on the "social wage"—defined as the non-monetary portion of the wage, which might come from the employer and/or

While the concept of the "social wage" is useful because it draws attention to the non-wage benefits and citizenship entitlements that contribute to welfare, it should be the basis for a fuller debate on social policy; rather than a substitute for such policy:

from the state. This definition includes a much wider range of social rights accessible by virtue of citizenship (rather than through labour market participation alone). Some participants, however, felt that while the concept of "social wage" was useful because it draws attention to the non-wage benefits and citizenship entitlements that contribute to welfare, it should be the basis for a fuller debate on social policy, rather than a substitute for such policy.

Feminist analysis has drawn attention to the "male breadwinner bias" that underpins macroeconomic policy: the assumption that the unpaid "care

economy" (in which women predominate) is connected to the market economy through a wage paid to a male breadwinner, which largely provides for the cash needs of his dependents. This

To support development, 'citizenship entitlements' must include, at minimum, basic food security; land rights and public health programmes.

bias associates the right to claim social benefits (access to services, transfer payments and so on) from the state with full-time, working-age participation in the market-based labour force. Participants argued that this is deeply problematic and exclusionary, especially for women (and, increasingly, men) whose labour market participation does not fit this norm.

Furthermore, even when women are incorporated into the labour market (as they have been in the context of export-oriented manufacturing), this has often not led to any meaningful social entitlements. It was evident from the case studies presented at the workshop that, first, women do not work alongside men in export-oriented industries; they tend to work with other women in quite segregated labour forces. Second, women's experience of the labour market is different: they receive lower wages, lower entitlements and they work in poorer conditions than men. Third, women are less likely to unionize, and to insist on collective bargaining and on job security, in part because of the care responsibilities they assume over their lifecycle. Fourth, when production processes are upgraded and a "core" labour force is retained on more advantageous terms, it is often women who are displaced.

Workshop participants also discussed how to ensure provision of basic rights and privileges to women workers, and to improve their conditions of work, without simultaneously eroding their attractiveness—i.e., low cost—to employers and reducing the extent of female wage employment. How can such rights and basic labour standards be assured in the current phase of globalization, in which heightened export competition is actually combined with contraction of aggregate manufacturing employment?

There was considerable agreement that public delivery of a wide range of wel-

fare services is probably the most important determinant of the conditions of the citizenry and of women in particular, and is much more significant than traditional redistributive transfers. To support development, such “citizenship entitlements” must include, at minimum, basic food security, land rights (emphasized by the case studies on India and South Africa) and public health programmes.

The “Washington consensus” promotes the targeting of welfare entitlements and eschews industrial policies. Yet the discussions at the workshop pointed to the developmental necessity of the op-

posite: strategic industrial policies that target and promote certain industries with employment objectives in mind, combined with universal entitlements to social welfare.

The workshop was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation agency (Sida), the Rockefeller Foundation and the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP). An issue of **UNRISD**

Conference News reporting on this workshop will be published in early 2001.

Improving Knowledge for Social Development in International Organizations

7–8 November 2000, Bellagio, Italy

In the future, the comparative advantage of international organizations will rest far more on their capacity to generate ideas and to shape the normative framework for development than on their ability to transfer resources. Yet existing arrangements for improving the knowledge base of the United Nations system are clearly inadequate. There is presently far too little exchange of information among international organizations, despite the fact that almost all of them have significant research budgets and generate important new insights on problems within their sphere of competence. Moreover, communication between most multilateral institutions and the academic community is weak. And although high-level officials are bombarded with information from many quarters, they rarely have an opportunity to discuss central concerns about the direction or pace of change with colleagues in other agencies.

One way to improve the flow of information among United Nations officials with an interest in social development

research is to bring them together from time to time in an informal setting, where substantive questions of world development can be discussed outside the context of formal inter-agency meetings. UNRISD took a first step in this direction in early November when it sponsored a two-day retreat at the Bellagio Centre in northern Italy.

Sixteen high-level officials took this opportunity to exchange views on issues they considered central to social development in the coming decade. Participants came from the ILO, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCHR, UNIFEM, WHO and the United Nations Secretariat, as well as from the Economic Commissions for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Middle East. Each prepared a short note about major lines of work in his or her institution, which was circulated to colleagues before the meeting. UNRISD used these notes to prepare a document pointing out common areas of concern and asking questions about underlying assumptions and methodologies.

Using this common framework, participants exchanged views on the enabling environment for development, paying considerable attention to issues of debt, taxation, development assistance and social spending. They discussed the implications of global liberalism for poverty, equity and growth, and analysed some of the key political underpinnings of the current global order. Consensus emerged that annual, joint seminars would be a valuable tool for improving knowledge for social development in international organizations. It was agreed that each seminar would focus on a single theme, for which a small number of papers by eminent scholars would be commissioned. The first seminar, on Equity in the Global Economy, will take place in 2001.

This meeting was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. A report is being prepared and will be available as an issue of **UNRISD Conference News** in early 2001.

UNRISD and Training

From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse, by Shahra Razavi and Carol Miller (UNRISD Beijing Occasional Paper No. 1) is currently being used in an M.A. course on gender and development at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

The Scandinavian Welfare States: Achievements, Crisis and Prospects, by John D. Stephens (UNRISD Discussion Paper No. 67) is included in a course pack at the University of Oslo, Norway, for use during the autumn 2000 semester.

Visible Hands: Taking Responsibility for Social Development (an UNRISD report for Geneva 2000) is being used in a graduate class on rural development in the Department of Sociology at Iowa State University, United States.

Others' News and Views

A Civil Economy: Transforming the Marketplace in the Twenty-First Century, by Severyn T. Bruyn, University of Michigan Press, hardback, ISBN 0-472-09706-7, 328 pages, 2000, \$65; paperback, ISBN 0-472-06706-0, 328 pages, 2000, \$21.95. The idea of the civil economy—encompassing a democratic government and a market economy—presumes that people can solve social problems within the market itself. This book explores this relationship, and describes how people in

government, business and the non-profit sector can develop an accountable, self-regulating, profitable, humane and competitive system of markets that could be described as a civil economy. It examines how government officials can organize markets to reduce government costs; how local leaders can deal with global corporations that would unfairly exploit their community resources; and how employees can participate in the development of human values in markets.

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Future Positive: International Co-operation in the 21st Century, by Michael Edwards, Earthscan Publications Ltd., hardback, ISBN 1-85383-631-1, 302 pages, 1999, £20; paperback, ISBN 1-85383-740-7, 292 pages, 2000, £12.99. In a world of globalizing markets, eroding state sovereignty, expanding citizen action and uncertainty about fundamental truths, what is the best way to tackle problems of global poverty and violence? This book charts a “third way” between heavy-handed intervention and complete *laissez-faire*. It explains how the international system operates, the pressures it faces and the changes it must undergo, offering concrete new ideas to re-frame international relations and foreign aid. Part I: Looking Back analyses the evolution of the current international system. Part II: Looking Forward examines the opportunities for change in the century ahead.

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The Creative Society of the 21st Century, compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), paperback, ISBN 92-64-17196-7, 200 pages, 2000, \$21. Does growing diversity mean we are headed for more inequality across the world's populations? Will access to and use of new knowledge and advanced technologies alleviate or aggravate differences? What steps can policy makers take to ensure that growing differentiation within and among societies gives rise to increased creativity instead of mounting tensions? This book poses such questions about our changing world, and examines the policy opportunities for fostering sustainable social foundations in the twenty-first century. It brings together papers presented and discussed at an OECD-organized conference that aimed to assess trends, challenges and policies likely to shape the foundations of future social dynamism.

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Gender and Lifecycles, edited by Caroline Sweetman, Oxfam Focus on Gender Series, ISBN 0-85598-450-3, 96 pages, 2000, £7.95/\$12.95. Mainstream develop-

ment policies tend to focus on young and middle-aged adults. This may be understandable, to the extent that it is at these stages of life that both women and men are physically and mentally mature, become parents, and are most capable of work. However, as the articles in this collection show, important contributions—both paid and unpaid—are made to all societies by the young and the old. If these groups were better represented in civil service, government and development funding agencies, development policies might reflect reality more accurately. The collection includes case studies and firsthand accounts from Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Jordan, Mexico, Nepal and South Africa.

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From Conflict to Dialogue: The WSP Guatemala Way, edited by Edelberto Torres-Rivas and Bernardo Arévalo de León, WSP/UNRISD and FLACSO Guatemala, paperback, ISBN 84-89876-11-8, 288 pages, 1999, free of charge. This is a compilation of documents from the War-torn Societies Project (WSP) in Guatemala, an experimental action-research project that brought together representatives of government, international agencies, research centres and civil society organizations. The book presents the reports of five cross-sectoral working groups that carried out

research and debate on state building, social and economic development, justice and security, multiculturalism and international co-operation. The WSP in Guatemala took place between 1996 and 1998 under the auspices of UNRISD and the Programme for Strategic and International Studies of the Geneva-based Graduate Institute for International Studies.

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NGOs Engaging with Business:

A World of Difference and a Difference to the World, by Simon Heap, International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), ISBN 1-897748-53-1, 309 pages, 2000, £15.95. This book examines the changing nature of relationships between NGOs and the private sector. It considers the lessons of past and present engagements, and seeks to evaluate the potential for the two sectors to work together for sustainable global development. Conceptual chapters address a range of issues inherent in NGO-corporate relations, such as what development NGOs might learn from the experiences of environmental NGOs, and how NGOs should relate to corporate codes of conduct. Several progressive collaborative NGO-business partnerships are also documented in detail, and country-specific factors that determine different levels of NGO-business relations are examined.

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Who Has the Right to Know?

Cees J. Hamelink

“Knowledge” has become a favourite buzzword in debates on globalization and the proliferation of information and communications technologies. Many United Nations and European Union documents emphasize the increasing importance of knowledge and refer to “knowledge societies”. UNDP’s **Human Development Report 1999** presents knowledge as the new asset and states that more than half of the gross domestic product in the major Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries is knowledge based. There is also frequent expression of concern in the literature about the global distribution of knowledge. And, indeed, using a variety of indicators (such as enrolment in educational institutions, ownership of patents), it can be documented that the current distribution is skewed. Research and development (R&D) is shifting further away from the developing countries. In the 1980s, they accounted for 6 per cent of R&D investments, and in the 1990s, 4 per cent. Industrial countries hold 97 per cent of all patents worldwide. In 1995, more than half of all global royalties and licensing fees were paid to the United States, mostly from Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the Netherlands. More than 80 per cent of patents granted in developing countries belong to residents of industrial countries.

However, it can also be argued that this unequal distribution holds true only when reference is made to a specific type of knowledge (such as the technical knowledge that is essential to industrial and post-industrial societies). There is a hierarchy in types of knowledge, and in the present order of R&D investments, knowledge about slow-ripening tomatoes is more important than knowledge about new vaccines against malaria. This leads to the question: what knowledge are we talking about? In some way, human societies have always been knowledge societies. Even so-called primitive traditional societies always had access to a large volume of detailed and pertinent local knowledge about their environment and its resources. Knowledge about specific properties of plants and animals and the functioning of ecosystems was and still is crucial to their survival. This knowledge is under threat across the globe as a result of developments in advanced biotechnology and as a consequence of legal systems for the protection of proprietary knowledge.

The emerging global—World Trade Organization (WTO)—regime for the protection of intellectual property rights has crucial bearing on the accessibility, distribution and innovation of knowledge. The relationship between this regime and the development of knowledge societies requires analysis and debate. There is growing evidence that the legal provisions of the 1995 Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement hamper the independent generation of knowledge in developing societies and facilitate the plunder of knowledge resources (e.g., biogenetic materials) from these societies.

The new regime gives little attention to the knowledge of indigenous peoples, making it vulnerable to claims by outsiders. As a result, in many poor countries local knowledge is used for the manufacture of very profitable drugs without the informed consent of the local people.

At the heart of knowledge generation lies innovation. The WTO/ intellectual property rights regime creates serious obstacles to the process of innovation. It fences off new ideas, merely protecting the stacking of patents. Moreover, in recent years there has been no documentary evidence of increased trade in knowledge-goods or expanded foreign direct investment in high-tech areas as a result of the protection of intellectual property rights. On the contrary, it can be argued that this impedes the access of poor countries to knowledge, as it renders technology transfer more expensive.

Whereas international law has not codified a basic human right to knowledge per se, the right to the protection of private knowledge is enforced by a robust and expanding set of rules. Although there are several references in human rights instruments to the right to education and the right to share in scientific advancement, such provisions are not supported by an effective enforcement mechanism. The new global regime for intellectual property rights, however, has at its disposal such enforcement procedures as cross-retaliatory trade measures.

If the international community were to formulate an international human right to knowledge, the following dimensions would have to be part of it.

- Everyone has the right to knowledge. This right includes entitlement to access to knowledge.
- No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of sources of knowledge.
- The right to knowledge shall imply due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others.
- All peoples and all nations have the duty to share their knowledge with one another.

Knowledge is an essential human resource. For its development and application, it is vital that a proper balance be established between the ownership interests of knowledge producers and the public-good interests of knowledge users.

The international community should come to the realization that the right to knowledge is far too important to be left to commercial forces only. The much-heralded knowledge societies will amount to little more than paper tigers if their governance is delegated to the marketplace. The market will produce and distribute knowledge according to people’s purchasing capacities. A human rights-inspired system of governance will favour the availability of knowledge according to people’s needs and aspirations.

Cees J. Hamelink is a Professor of International Communication at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the international journal of communication studies, *Gazette*, and Honorary President of the International Association for Media and Communication research.