





A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNRISD RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Three core values guide the work of individuals and institutions involved in development research, policy making and projects: each human being has the right to a decent level of living; people should be allowed to participate in decisions that affect their lives; and everyone should live together in peace. More than 50 years after the establishment of the United Nations, however, there is no agreement on how these goals should be achieved. Analytical perspectives and policies frequently change. This is reflected in the litany of development buzzwords that come and go, and sometimes resurface: “self-reliance”, “basic needs”, “sustainable livelihoods”, “structural adjustment”, “good governance”, “poverty reduction strategies” and so forth. A generous interpretation of this history of thought might suggest that the international development community is engaged in a constructive learning process, and that knowledge and policy approaches mature and improve over time. It is clear that learning does take place, and there are some signs that a broader consensus on development strategy is emerging. Yet there is also another reality. Underlying the different concepts and approaches to development are very real conflicts of interest about which groups and individuals should enjoy resources and power, and which institutions should shape patterns of development and determine distribution of the costs and benefits of economic growth, modernization and social change.

UNRISD has been preoccupied with such issues since its creation in 1963. The Institute was established “to conduct research into problems and policies of social development, and relationships between various types of social development and economic development” (United Nations 1963). A central concern at that time was that the benefits of two decades of postwar economic growth had been distributed very unevenly, both geographically and socially, particularly in the “Third World”. Furthermore, development was being interpreted narrowly in terms of economic growth, while social dimensions were often marginalized in mainstream policy making. The Institute constructed its early research agenda around these concerns, carrying out projects that examined the relationship between economic and social development, ways of measuring social development, and the impact of development processes and projects at the local level.

This agenda has evolved significantly over the past four decades. Some elements of continuity remain, notably the importance of the relationship between economic and social policy, and the variable impacts of economic development and government policies on different groups in society. But the specific content of the research agenda has frequently changed with the coming and going of different projects.

This report traces the history of UNRISD research and examines its contribution to social development

"FOR FOUR DECADES, UNRISD HAS BEEN A PIONEER IN CROSSING BOUNDARIES OF GEOGRAPHY, DISCIPLINE, METHODOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE, PROVIDING A MODEL FOR RIGOROUS AND RELEVANT RESEARCH IN AN INCREASINGLY INTEGRATED WORLD."

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thinking and debates. It takes stock of what the research findings have revealed in relation to six main themes, which form the basis of the following chapters:

- social policy and well-being;
- social cohesion and conflict;
- sustainable development;
- democratization, civil society and governance;
- gender and development; and
- markets, business and regulation.

CONTINUITY...

The Institute's mandate provides three guidelines that have oriented its research, while allowing valuable flexibility in determining priorities. First, UNRISD is to examine pressing social problems of relevance to the United Nations system. Second, it is to explore the relationship between economic and social development. This stipulation provides a window through which UNRISD has examined the social impacts of economic development, modernization and (later) globalization, as well as the ways in which social development can enhance not only human welfare but also economic growth. Third, UNRISD is to use the freedom and independence conferred by its status as an "autonomous United Nations activity" to undertake critical research on government and international policies and approaches to development.

Certain analytical perspectives have provided a sense of continuity to the Institute's research. Three in particular stand out. The first involves the questioning of conventional wisdom and dominant approaches to development. Throughout its history, UNRISD has posed probing questions about whether mainstream development processes and policies are achieving their intended outcomes. The conceptual foundations of such policies have also been assessed. This critique has been directed not only at the conservative mainstream, but also at those actors and organizations proposing reformist or radical alternatives (see box 1.1).

Box 1.1—Questioning conventional wisdom

- Work on **measurement** in the 1960s and 1970s involved a critique of the ways in which social scientists and UN agencies applied conventional data-gathering methods and social indicators to development analysis and planning.
- Research on **participation** from the late 1970s was partly prompted by the concern that many development agencies were hailing the virtues of participation but reducing the concept to passive participation, as opposed to active or empowering participation.
- The 1970s inquiry into the so-called **Green Revolution** challenged the assumption that major technological breakthroughs would necessarily improve the livelihoods of rural producers; rather they produced winners and losers.
- Attention to issues of **livelihood** in the 1980s was partially linked to concerns with the then current orthodoxy that emphasized the satisfaction of basic needs, rather than the ability to make a living.
- Research on the social effects of **structural adjustment** in the late 1980s and early 1990s questioned neoliberal policies and the assumptions that deregulation, export-orientation and privatization would stimulate growth and development in poor indebted countries.
- Work on **gender** in the 1990s involved a critique of the “women in development” (WID) approach, which tended to focus narrowly on women’s access to development projects and institutions as opposed to issues of gender rights and power.
- Over several decades, various studies on **civil society** have challenged romanticized perspectives that have exaggerated the potential of NGOs, social movements and participation.
- Research on **environmental issues** in the 1990s questioned the assumption that environmental protection was necessarily good for people and development by analysing the tensions between certain mainstream approaches to environmental protection and human welfare.
- Work on **information and communication technologies (ICTs)** has challenged the notion that ICTs provide developing countries a means of “leap-frogging” stages of development.
- More recently, UNRISD has also turned its attention to other terms and concepts such as **decentralization, good governance** and **corporate social responsibility**, undertaking research that reveals the problematic way in which they have been applied in practice.
- Past work on a **unified approach** to development and current research on **social policy** have been concerned with the way policy makers have often treated social policy as an add-on to economic policy, rather than an integral aspect of development strategy.

Much of this critique has centred on the dual concern that not only are processes of economic growth, modernization and globalization producing very uneven effects, but they are also disrupting livelihood systems and institutional arrangements that, historically, have provided some degree of social protection. UNRISD work on the Green Revolution in the 1970s, and food security and popular participation in the 1980s, was partly motivated by the concern that one of the dominant processes of social change of the 1970s—the accelerating incorporation of largely self-provisioning communities into urban-based national and international networks of production and trade—was uprooting people before new livelihood systems had been generated. Similarly in the 1990s, the Institute’s work on the social effects of globalization concluded that the world was in the midst of an institutional shake-up that saw the decline of some traditional institutions of social protection, such as the welfare state, redistributive policies, trade unions and certain community structures, and that the institutions that were emerging or being promoted, such as NGOs, corporate social responsibility and international human rights or labour law, remained relatively weak. Furthermore, macroeconomic policies associated with economic liberalization often created a “disabling environment” for social development (see box 1.2).

A second feature of UNRISD research has been the adoption of holistic and systemic perspectives,

which have been particularly important for understanding the interrelationships between different dimensions of development. The Institute’s work on a Unified Approach to Development Analysis and Planning in the 1970s, Food Systems and Society in the 1980s, Sustainable Development in the 1990s and, currently, Social Policy in a Development Context has sought to overcome the fragmentation of development policy and analysis by emphasizing multidisciplinary and integrative approaches. These and other projects have examined not only economic, social, environmental, political and historical aspects, but also the linkages between local, national and international levels. This complex way of viewing and understanding the world does not lend itself to simple universal remedies or “sound bites”. Indeed, UNRISD research has often challenged standardized prescriptions, universal formulas and the “one-size-fits-all” approach that frequently characterizes international policy making and analysis, insisting instead that policies must be adapted to local and national circumstances.

A third element of continuity in the Institute’s approach has been its political economy analysis, involving questions of distribution of resources and power among different social groups, and conflicts of interest. When seen from this perspective, the social outcomes of economic growth and technological development are mediated by social and power relations and other institutions; development processes, policies and projects

Box 1.2—UNRISD flagship reports

UNRISD prepared two major reports to contribute to the global deliberations associated with the World Summit for Social Development and its follow-up.

States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization (UNRISD 1995)

This report examines globalization's contradictory social effects. The title, *States of Disarray*, is indicative of its findings: globalization and some of the policies that support it have been associated with a range of social problems and institutional changes that increase people's vulnerability. Furthermore, the costs and benefits of globalization have been spread very unevenly among different countries and social groups. The report thus argues for confronting head-on one of the most complex challenges of our times: the provision of a modicum of universal social and economic security in an era of open markets, fierce competition and rapid technological change.

The polarizing and disintegrating effects of globalization need to be minimized through new approaches that reaffirm the rights of all people. National citizenship should be reinforced by international co-operation, solidarity and rights, or what the report calls "global citizenship". Certain institutional arrangements that have emerged during the past 50 years—associated with United Nations organizations, international law, development assistance and civil society activism and participation—need to be strengthened, and others reformed.

Visible Hands: Taking Responsibility for Social Development (UNRISD 2000e)

At the end of the 1990s, UNRISD assessed progress toward the achievement of a key commitment of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development—the creation of "an enabling environment" for social development. Five years after the Social Summit, political opposition to the social blindness of structural adjustment was growing, and academic inquiry was eroding the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of neoliberal policies. Human rights were moving up the agenda. There were signs of a reassessment of the role of the state, as well as some recognition of the limits of private capital flows as a panacea.

Yet what emerges from the analysis in this report is a fairly disturbing picture of policies and programmes that remained more at the level of agency rhetoric than effective implementation; and patterns of economic growth, liberalization and inequality that tended to obstruct rather than facilitate social development. The role of social policy was largely restricted to targeting specific social groups, or safety-net-type provisioning. While the necessity for social protection had increased, resources allocated for this purpose were actually shrinking. The report calls for development strategies that reassert human values, human priorities and human agency. The "invisible hand" of the market may be able to keep the global economy turning. But it takes the human hand—of public-spirited people and their governments—to guide it in the most productive direction and to fashion a world that is socially inclusive, transparent and democratically anchored.

produce winners and losers; and social change and policies that deal effectively with poverty, inequality and injustice require shifts in the balance of social forces and constituencies of social and political actors that can challenge the status quo. Adopting this approach has allowed UNRISD to disaggregate the effects of development processes and policy on different social groups, and to stress the importance of participation, empowerment, and regulatory and redistributive institutions in its policy recommendations.

...AND CHANGE

The content of the UNRISD research agenda regularly changes and, occasionally, more fundamental shifts in focus occur. A variety of factors account for this: changes in social science and development thinking; global development trends; heightened international concern with specific global issues or problems; donor requests for research on particular topics; and the internal dynamics of the Institute itself, including the turnover of directors, Board members and research staff.

To understand how and why the Institute's agenda has evolved, it is important to recall the rich learning process in which UNRISD has been engaged. This has involved keeping abreast of world developments and, on occasion, anticipating global or regional trends. This was evident, for example, with work that commenced in the late 1980s on ethnic conflict, social dimensions of environmental changes, and transition in European communist countries.

Changes in the research agenda have also arisen as a result of "learning by doing" and, sometimes, recognizing the limitations of past work. Some issues that have formed the basis of new UNRISD projects evolved from prior research that exposed gaps in knowledge and approach. Research that commenced in the late 1970s on popular participation, for example, sought to bridge the gap between research concerned with struggles for



livelihood, which had been the main focus of UNRISD work on the Green Revolution and food security, and integrated development policy, which had been the focus of earlier work. Cultivating a more supportive policy framework via participation was seen as a way of enabling disadvantaged groups in society to improve their livelihoods.

In the 1990s, research on the social and institutional effects of structural adjustment programmes revealed serious problems linked to the weakening of certain state institutions. This led to new projects looking at how state capacity might be strengthened, and the role of democratic institutions in policy making.

In the environment field, early work on the social effects of environmental degradation revealed that certain environmental protection schemes were not the win-win arrangements many assumed; rather they could have negative implications for human welfare and livelihoods. This led to two projects that examined the social impacts of protected areas and other environmental protection initiatives.

Similarly, whereas UNRISD had focused considerable attention on the role of civil society organizations and the state in social development and environmental protection, it had largely ignored the role of the private sector. To redress this situation, a project on corporate social and environmental responsibility commenced in the mid-1990s.

New research is also undertaken to broaden what may be a somewhat narrow focus. This was apparent, for example, in relation to work on democratization. In the 1980s, research centred largely on people's participation and collective action—or popular democracy. Less attention was focused on the role of democratic state institutions—or representative democracy. This focus derived from a number of sources. In part, it was due to analytical and ideological perspectives that identified the social and political organization of the “excluded” as a key to social change. There was also scepticism that liberal democratic institutions could deliver pro-poor policies in the absence of effective popular participation. A certain distrust of the state, political parties and planning—which had emerged from previous UNRISD work on state planning, the reality of military regimes in Latin America (experienced firsthand by several senior UNRISD staff) and centralized “vanguard” parties in socialist countries—also played a role.

Against a very different backdrop in the 1990s, the Institute broadened its approach by examining the role of civil society and social movements, as well as that of state institutions, in social development. This period saw a revival of democratic processes centred on multi-party systems and electoral politics. As the attention of the international development community shifted to issues of macroeconomic policy and structural reform, it became necessary for development activists and

researchers to engage not only with issues of participation at the grassroots or micro level, but also in relation to macro policy processes. Inevitably, this meant re-engaging with the state.

The Institute's perspectives on economic growth have also changed. For many years, analysis of the relationship between economic growth and social development generally either took growth for granted, or viewed it from a critical perspective. When UNRISD was established, the world was experiencing a prolonged phase of fairly robust growth. Achieving relatively high growth rates, therefore, was not seen as a fundamental problem in the field of social development research. What many observers did regard as a problem was uneven or unbalanced growth. Thus much of the Institute's early work focused on the negative or unintended impacts of economic growth and modernization on certain social groups. This perspective was reinforced through subsequent work that established a close link between environmental decline and processes of growth and modernization. More recent trends in the world economy, associated with financial crises and declining or prolonged low growth rates, have prompted UNRISD to re-examine the relationship between economic growth and social development. Current work on social policy is studying not only the ways in which—and the institutions through which—growth can serve poorer social groups, but also how social policy can stimulate growth.

Occasionally, the turnover of the Institute's projects is part and parcel of a more fundamental shift in approach. In the late 1970s, for example, the focus on development policy, planning and measurement was broadened considerably as attention turned to the twin themes of participation and the struggle for livelihood (UNRISD 1979). This shift in emphasis partly reflected the radical turn in development thinking and policy that occurred in the 1970s, when the goals and possibilities of self-reliance and alternative development received attention in many academic, activist and United Nations circles. Work on popular participation sought to apply action-research methodologies to both examine and strengthen the capacity of disadvantaged and disempowered groups to take action and gain influence. The policy recommendations that derived from research on livelihood and food security centred on the need for popularly based national food and development strategies. Unlike certain modernization strategies that aimed to benefit the poor through so-called "trickle-down" effects or the hope of employment in expanding urban industrial centres, this research presented the case for government policies directed at improving the opportunities and livelihoods of low-income and other disadvantaged groups, in both urban and rural areas.

During the late 1980s, the Institute's research agenda was again revamped to take on board various issues typically associated with globalization, as well as new development priorities related

to sustainable development and the situation of women. Projects were initiated on topics related to identity, conflict, illicit drugs, structural adjustment and environmental protection. In the decade that followed, attention focused on issues of human welfare, social cohesion and the role of different actors and institutions—women, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business and governments, among others—in supporting, shaping or undermining social and sustainable development. Much of the research involved a strong critique of neoliberalism, as applied to

developing countries, with its emphasis on “free” markets, the downsizing of the state and export-orientation (UNRISD 1995; 2000e).

The current five-year programme, initiated in 2000, has continued to explore these issues while placing special emphasis on the role of social policy and democratic state institutions in development (see box 1.3). New issues of global concern—HIV/AIDS, the digital divide and corporate social responsibility—have also been taken on board.

Box 1.3—Current areas of research

Since 2000, UNRISD research projects have been organized under five broad thematic areas.

Social Policy and Development—examines the role of social policy and institutions in development, notably the ways in which social policy can promote social protection and social justice while contributing to economic development and democratic politics.

Democracy, Governance and Human Rights—explores some of the political and institutional factors affecting the creation of an enabling environment for democracy and human rights in different country settings, and assesses the policies and approaches of international agencies and donor governments that are urging developing countries to reform their public institutions.

Civil Society and Social Movements—focuses on the role of civil society organizations, networks and movements in development and policy making, relationships between different civil society actors and the nature of their relations with government, international organizations and the private sector.

Technology, Business and Society—examines the impacts of rapid advances in technology, foreign direct investment and corporate management systems on sustainable human development.

Identity, Conflict and Cohesion—considers the ways in which different and shifting identities, which give structure and meaning to people's lives, affect patterns of conflict, exclusion and solidarity in a globalizing world.

Source: www.unrisd.org

“UNRISD IS MY FAVORITE AMONG THE SMALLER UNSUNG HEROES IN THE UN SYSTEM, FOR FORTY YEARS NAVIGATING UNCHARTED WATERS UNDER SUCCESSIVE VISIONARY CAPTAINS, PUTTING HUMAN-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT IN A HOLISTIC WAY AT THE CORE OF ITS BUSINESS, DECADES BEFORE THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS WERE FORMULATED.”

EVELINE HERFKENS,
EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR,
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT
GOALS CAMPAIGN,
UNITED NATIONS

WHY DO PROGRAMMES END?

Major areas of work periodically draw to a close, albeit sometimes for just a few years. Work on **measurement and social indicators**, on which UNRISD had built its early reputation, ceased for several years from the mid-1980s. This was primarily due to the departure of key research staff, the cost of the complex statistical work that was carried out, and a shift in the Institute’s research priorities toward more “political economy” issues. The departure from indicators also coincided with an internal methodological shift that emphasized the role of in-depth case studies of local contexts in developing countries as a potentially cost-effective means of data gathering.

Another of the Institute’s prominent research programmes, the inquiry into **popular participation**, also ended inconclusively in the late 1980s, due in part to a shortage of funds, but also to institutional uneasiness about the future direction of this research area. Various UNRISD projects continued, however, to examine the implications of participation in relation to concrete development issues such as gender and environmental protection. In the mid-1990s, the theme was taken up again in projects looking at the potential and limitations of civil society and social movements in development and policy making.

Work on **rebuilding war-torn societies**, carried out under the War-torn Societies Project (WSP), constituted the Institute’s largest programme in the mid-1990s. This programme was terminated in 1998 largely in response to the fact that it became heavily geared toward operational activities rather than research. These had involved bringing key actors together in a dialogue on development and reconstruction problems and policies in selected countries. Since the Institute’s mandate is to conduct research, it was decided that WSP would continue in another institutional setting.

From the mid-1980s until the late 1990s, UNRISD implemented 13 projects in the field of **environment and sustainable development**. Following 15 years of research on these issues, however, there were concerns that this area of work had expanded excessively, creating an imbalance in the Institute’s agenda. In 2000, with the restructuring that took place under a new Director, several projects on environment and sustainable development were wrapped up, and attention was refocused on issues of social policy, poverty, equity and democratization.

Box 1.4—UNRISD and the United Nations summits

During the past 10 years, UNRISD research findings have formed the basis for its substantive contributions to the major global summits held under the aegis of the United Nations.

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992)

To provide inputs to the Earth Summit process, the Institute drew on research that had been ongoing since the late 1980s and initiated new work. It also organized an international meeting several months prior to the Rio conference to raise the profile of the social dimensions of environmental issues, which had thus far been relatively neglected in the run-up to the summit (UNRISD 1992).

World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995)

UNRISD work for the Social Summit converged around three themes—rethinking social development in the 1990s; economic restructuring and new social policies; and ethnic diversity and public policies. The Institute's contributions involved two seminars coinciding with summit preparatory work, workshops and conferences at the official venue and NGO forum, and a range of publications, including 10 Occasional Papers, four Briefing Papers and the report, *States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization* (see box 1.2). Papers by a group of eminent writers and social analysts, reflecting on the processes and trajectories of social change at the end of the millennium, were also published in the volume *Social Futures, Global Visions* (Hewitt de Alcántara 1996).

Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)

The Institute's contributions to this summit drew on gender research initiated in 1992. At the NGO forum, UNRISD held a round-table on Gendering Macroeconomic Policies: Concepts and Institutions; and at the official conference, a panel on Gender Mainstreaming: Obstacles and Opportunities was organized. A series of 13 Occasional Papers was also produced jointly with UNDP.

Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, 1996)

UNRISD work on urban governance, which sought to identify processes for incorporating the voices of the excluded in decision making at the local level, formed the basis for the Institute's contributions to Habitat II. The Institute participated in the drafting process of the Habitat Agenda, and held events at the NGO forum and at Habitat University.

Five-Year Review of the World Summit for Social Development (Geneva, 2000)

In contribution to this event, UNRISD assessed progress in achieving the objectives established at the Social Summit in 1995. To do so, 50 researchers from 35 countries participated in a wide-ranging inquiry that produced 10 Occasional Papers and the report, *Visible Hands: Taking Responsibility for Social Development* (see box 1.2), which was launched at a conference during Geneva 2000. UNRISD also hosted a Web-based Virtual Forum to share information on initiatives to implement the Social Summit Declaration and Programme of Action.

**Five-Year Review
of the Fourth World Conference
on Women** (New York, 2000)

UNRISD contributed to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session for the Beijing+5 Review by commissioning papers and holding a public workshop on Gender Justice, Development and Rights, which examined the relationship between needs and rights; whether democracy has empowered women; and women's rights and multiculturalism (UNRISD 2000a).

**Third World Conference against Racism,
Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and
Related Intolerance** (Durban, 2001)

UNRISD commissioned 30 papers and organized a three-day parallel event, during which the opportunities, problems and challenges of public policies devised for overcoming racist and xenophobic practices in different settings were examined. The papers focused on four broad themes: the social construction of race and citizenship; the social dynamics of racism and inequalities; organized responses to cultural diversity, and the impact of public policies on race relations (UNRISD 2002b).

Second World Assembly on Ageing
(Madrid, 2002)

UNRISD commissioned 15 papers that examined the dynamics and challenges of population ageing in countries experiencing different development trajectories; formal social protection, including pension programmes, health care and social services; and the range of informal mechanisms related to the care economy. These papers were presented at a two-day parallel conference (UNRISD 2003a).

World Summit on Sustainable Development
(Johannesburg, 2002)

UNRISD used the occasion of Rio+10 to raise political economy questions regarding the analysis and proposals associated with Agenda 21 and other mainstream policy documents, which often fail to examine the difficulties and obstacles blocking effective policy change, participation and social mobilization. Commissioned papers were presented at a parallel event co-hosted with the University of the Witwatersrand. The Institute also published a report, *People, Power and the Environment*, that summarized 15 years of UNRISD research on the environment and sustainable development (UNRISD 2002a).

INTERACTING WITH THE UNITED NATIONS AND DONORS

Over the years, UNRISD has positioned itself at the intersection between the international community of academic institutions and civil society organizations concerned with development issues, and the development agencies of the multilateral and bilateral systems. It acts as a conduit for thinking and analysis emanating from the social science research and activist communities, and also assesses the relevance of such perspectives for international policy making. This role has been particularly important in relation to the United Nations summits (see box 1.4). Through the organization of conferences, workshops and informal dialogues, UNRISD has also sought to improve the flow of information among United Nations officials by bringing them together to engage in substantive discussion on key development issues (UNRISD 2001, 2003b).

Given the Institute's mandate to conduct research on issues considered "urgent and important" by the United Nations system and national development agencies, and its total dependence on voluntary contributions from donors (see box 1.5), UNRISD is open to requests from outside agencies to undertake research on particular issues. In fact, some of the Institute's major areas of work, including those concerned with gender and environmental issues, have commenced with projects

specifically requested by donors. Both programmes subsequently developed their own dynamics, and their substantive content came to be shaped by UNRISD and its global research network.

The Institute's "service delivery" role has the advantage of ensuring that its research is policy relevant, but it also implies relationships and influences that need to be managed with care. Three tensions, in particular, can arise. First, there is the risk that bilateral and multilateral organizations become too heavily involved in setting the research agenda. Second, too close a relationship with donors may marginalize more conceptual, cutting-edge and critical research. Third, responding to wide-ranging requests may result in a dispersed research agenda that lacks focus.

In practice, UNRISD has rarely faced the first two risks. This is partly because its main traditional donors—Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and Finland—have respected the Institute's autonomy and have adopted a hands-off approach to agenda setting. It is also because certain safeguards exist to manage the tensions. In defining research priorities, the Institute has always drawn heavily on the judgement of a Board of independent scholars, policy makers and activists, as well as its own intellectual resources. At the request of donors, external development specialists also periodically carry out evaluations of the Institute's work to assess progress and

Box 1.5—Who funds UNRISD?

The Institute relies on voluntary contributions from governments, development agencies and foundations. Governments of the following countries have contributed to UNRISD over the past 40 years: Australia, Austria, Canada, Cuba, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and former Yugoslavia.

The current research programme receives support from the following governments and agencies.

- > **Governments:** Denmark, Finland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
- > **NGOs and foundations:** Ford Foundation (United States), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ; Germany), MacArthur Foundation (United States), Réseau universitaire international de Genève (RUIG; Switzerland), Rockefeller Foundation (United States).

- > **United Nations and other multilateral agencies:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNRISD CORE BUDGET, 2002

Donor	US dollars
Denmark	185,625
Finland	165,063
Mexico	2,427
Netherlands	496,545
Norway	404,083
Sweden	803,417
Switzerland	56,163
United Kingdom	320,320
Total	2,433,643

identify shortcomings (see box 1.6). Furthermore, UNRISD thinking is constantly informed by the opinions and analysis of those who make up the extensive network of national researchers participating in its projects (see box 1.7). The Institute also organizes encounters with scholars, researchers, policy makers and activists from around the world to gauge their views on contemporary development issues and debates, and reflect on what a research organization like UNRISD should be doing. This can result in new projects or in a comprehensive restructuring of research programmes and priorities—as occurred, for example, in 2000 following an international conference in Thailand held to discuss the Institute’s present and future research agenda (UNRISD 2000b, 2000d).



Box 1.6—Evaluating UNRISD

1982: SAREC (Sweden) and DANIDA (Denmark)

"UNRISD was among the first to give special attention to data improvements and it appears that UNRISD is at present one of the few institutions (if not the only one) where a continuing and systematic search is going on."

"Pearse's overview of the Green Revolution strategies stands among the best works done on the Green Revolution. Barraclough's many papers are, without doubt, among the most notable contributions to the study of Latin American agrarian systems."

"It is important that the research does not remain at the level of the study of effects and their statistical interrelations, but should seek the knowledge of the structures that make possible these effects."

1995: UNDP

"UNRISD distilled decades of research on social problems into a provocative, readable report, *States of Disarray*, that will be hard to ignore by anyone seeking to address the Summit issues."

"UNRISD has proved its capacity to address social development issues through a broad-based networking approach, bringing together an optimal mix of Northern and Southern (as well as transition) expertise in the examination of issues."

"All the projects involved researchers from the South, but, with the exception of a few activities, not through an institution in the South. To the extent therefore that capacities

were strengthened, or networking took place, it was individual researchers who were involved. Any possible effects on the institutions would not be readily apparent."

1997: Nordic Countries

"UNRISD has been good at anticipating emerging issues and starting research programmes [on issues that] have moved up...the international agenda. This foresight is a distinguishing mark of UNRISD and means that the Institute's profile is kept relevant."

"Co-publishing with Third World publishers should be extended with a view to establishing a two-tiered pricing structure to make books affordable in poor countries."

"It is recommended that UNRISD consider anew embarking judiciously on more consultancy work in order to get more direct access to decision making, to acquire relevant data and to generate revenue."

2002: DFID (United Kingdom)

"...UNRISD has been a pioneer in developing social indicators and broadening the developmental debate while emphasizing two core values: a right of human beings to a decent livelihood, and equal access of people to participation in decision making that affects their lives."

"UNRISD [should] build up knowledge and a research base in specialized areas [and] not spread its research interests too thin."

"Further collaboration with other UN agencies and UN regional commissions would be very useful."

Box 1.7—Organizing, publishing and disseminating UNRISD research

UNRISD projects typically involve cross-country comparative research, as well as the preparation of papers on a range of thematic issues. Under any one project, three to 10 countries are usually selected for case studies, which are generally carried out by researchers from academic institutions or NGOs in the countries concerned. Nearly 220 researchers from 80 countries are participating in the current programme, which began in 2000. Over 60 per cent of these collaborating researchers are from developing countries.

Projects are generally co-ordinated by specialists based either at UNRISD or in universities. Research methods vary considerably. They sometimes involve survey methods, but more frequently entail case studies of specific social groups or localities and interviews with key informants. Action-research methods are used when the research process is intended not only for data gathering and analysis, but also as a tool for transforming people's lives or the nature of decision-making processes.

To ensure that its work reaches a diverse audience, the Institute implements an active and varied publication and dissemination programme. Subject to peer review, research findings are published in papers and books, both in-house and through co-publishing arrangements with reputed commercial and university presses on five continents. Over the past 10 years, UNRISD projects have produced over 50 books and 200 published papers, with contributions from approximately 450 researchers. The Institute also maintains a fully free-access Web site (www.unrisd.org), holds international conferences and national workshops, and provides over 200 depository libraries across the world with free copies of many of its publications. UNRISD endeavours to make its research findings accessible to a wide readership through translation: *UNRISD News*, *Conference News* and Programme Paper summaries are available in English, French and Spanish; and selected books are published in these and other languages.

Through such outreach efforts, UNRISD research furthers analysis and awareness of social development issues in a variety of contexts and by a range of users: scholars, activists, government officials, agency personnel, the specialized and mass media, and the general public.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The UNRISD research agenda continues to evolve in both predictable and unforeseeable ways. The current programme, under way since 2000, has already revealed gaps in knowledge and other concerns to which UNRISD will turn its attention in the coming years.

Somewhat disparate research on poverty-related issues under several UNRISD projects is to be brought together in a more coherent focus on **poverty**. This will involve an examination of the recent shift in development policy that is seeing international development and financial institutions adopt “poverty reduction strategies”, the implementation of which is raising as many questions as it is providing answers. It will also involve work on social indicators and measurement of both poverty and equity.

Work on **gender**, which has been largely confined to specific projects, needs to be integrated into other areas of the UNRISD research programme. In preparing its contributions to the tenth anniversaries of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo) and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing), it will take stock of what UNRISD and other research on gender issues has yielded in terms of analytical findings and tools for social change.

The research agenda will also respond to the shifting international contexts related to social science thinking, development processes, policy and activism. Recent changes associated with globalization and governance have major implications for the roles of different development actors and institutions in development policy.

After years of relative neglect, **the role of the state** as a key actor in development strategies is once again firmly on the international agenda. This role is conditioned, however, on both efficiency and good governance. The way in which mainstream development institutions and the so-called post-Washington Consensus are interpreting and applying such concepts may run at least two risks: encouraging technocratic forms of governance and fragmented approaches to social welfare provisioning; and diverting attention from certain macroeconomic policies that are themselves implicated in contemporary social problems.

These issues are now being explored under a major project on social policy. This research is examining ways of better integrating social and economic policy, appropriate institutional arrangements for public service provisioning, and the types of political arrangements and balance of social forces that underpin an effective social policy. Other work on governance is examining the effectiveness of democratic institutions and reform initiatives that affect the composition and management of **the public sector in multiethnic**

societies characterized by diversity, inequality and social tensions.

The governance arrangements of the early twenty-first century also involve a new role for the **private sector**. The Institute will examine the experience of recent attempts to privatize the delivery of basic public services, the sustainability of such experiences, and the regulatory institutions that need to be present in a well-functioning system that involves private providers. These and other

developments
associated with
corporate

social responsibility and public-private partnerships suggest that large corporations will be shaping social development trends and strategies not only through employment, taxation and investment, but also through the direct provision of basic social services, a more proactive approach to social and environmental issues, and participation in the public policy process. Given the social impacts of privatization and the ad hoc nature of many corporate responsibility initiatives, there is a need to consider how they might be integrated with national development policies and priorities, and made more accountable to civil society, consumer and government interests.



Another significant change in recent years relates to the nature and content of **global civil society activism**, which has not only developed new ways of organizing but also focused more attention on constructing alternatives rather than simply critiquing the status quo. The implications of these trends for international policy making and social development will be examined, and particularly the question of how contemporary forms of activism are connecting with national and international policy making.

New research is also set to address specific development issues that have come to the forefront of international attention in recent years. UNRISD is currently developing projects in three areas related to conflict and culture, HIV/AIDS and the information society.

The future agenda, like that of the past, will be characterized by continuity and change. It will have to adapt to emerging global issues and analytical perspectives. But the Institute's concern with the impact of development processes on people's well-being, and the roles of regulatory institutions and different actors in development and social change, will remain central. So too will the long tradition of asking the difficult questions about mainstream development policy and the social and power relations that underpin poverty, inequality and policy making.

One of the Institute's greatest assets is its autonomous status in the United Nations system. This has allowed the Institute to tackle sensitive topics and to propose solutions that sometimes challenge the views of governments and international organizations. Safeguarding this role is essential, not only at a time when free-market doctrine and technocratic policy making remain potent forces, but also in view of more recent trends in global governance. Signs of a broader consensus on development policy among some international financial institutions, United Nations organizations, aid agencies, transnational

corporations and NGOs may yield certain benefits in terms of institutional reform, but they also run the risk of sidelining critical research within the multilateral and bilateral systems, and the analysis of alternatives.