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# SOCIAL COHESION AND CONFLICT

3

## INTRODUCTION

Social policy is concerned not only with human welfare, but also with social cohesion. While certain government policies may divide societies and fuel conflict, there is fairly widespread agreement that a role and goal of government is to promote social integration by creating or strengthening institutions that improve social welfare and human security, as well as foster harmonious social relations. Beyond this, however, there is considerable confusion as to what the term “social integration” actually means. It is often interpreted narrowly to mean standards or improvements in social conditions and relations. But the Institute’s work in this area has adopted a broader definition, which includes not only normative aspects but also analysis of established patterns of social relations that support or undermine people’s livelihood and shape their life chances (Ghai and Hewitt de Alcántara 1994).

UNRISD research on social integration and cohesion has evolved over the years, from its initial focus in the 1970s on the effects of war and conflict. Early work focused in particular on the situation of people displaced by war. It subsequently broadened into large, multi-country studies on conflict and political violence based on ethnic, racial, religious and other identities. In the 1990s, social integration was one of the central themes of the Institute’s work.

## PERCEPTIONS AND PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Social integration ranked alongside poverty and employment as a main issue on the agenda of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development. International concern with social disintegration reflected not only the large number of civil wars and ethnic conflicts, but also the reality—or perception—that a whole range of social problems were intensifying in the context of globalization. Migration, crime, the trade in illicit narcotic drugs, global health pandemics and family breakdown all seemed to be on the increase.

In the first half of the 1990s, UNRISD examined these issues as part of a broader inquiry into the social effects of globalization (UNRISD 1995; see also chapters 1 and 2). This work considered the scale and impact of social trends and problems that affect the ability of people and groups to co-exist in society, as well as certain conceptual issues, such as the meaning of social integration.

UNRISD cautioned against reducing the notion to the integration of the excluded into mainstream society. Certain patterns of social integration may impose on minorities and other social groups a way of living that stifles cultural diversity or promotes inclusion in economic and political systems that are exploitative, repressive or ecologically unsustainable (Wolfe 1994). The policy-relevant

question is not how to increase social integration per se, but how to promote a kind of integration that favours the creation of a more just and equitable society (UNRISD 1994b). From this perspective it is necessary to address various limitations and misguided assumptions that often characterize efforts to integrate societies. Three, in particular, stand out. First, it is often assumed that the excluded survive in a social and cultural vacuum. Good policy needs to take into account the forms of social organization, networks, coping strategies and cultures of disadvantaged groups. Second, the discourse of social integration tends to assume that conflict is unnecessary. Yet disintegration of existing systems of social relations and transformation of power structures may be essential before progress toward a more just and equitable society can be made—as occurred, for example, with the demise of slavery and apartheid. Third, a narrow focus on the integration of the disadvantaged into mainstream health and educational systems may divert attention from the structural causes of social exclusion and ongoing trends associated with growing inequality and persistent extreme poverty.

## Migration

Many people respond to the options and uncertainties associated with globalization by migrating, both internally and abroad. While migration trends have been as significant in other historical periods, contemporary flows involve far greater diversity of

cultural contact and constitute a central element in the livelihood strategies of millions of people. Indeed, families and national accounts in many poorer countries depend heavily on the foreign exchange sent via remittances from migrants abroad. In the early 1990s, when the social problems associated with migration tended to dominate public debate on the subject, UNRISD looked at both its integrative and disintegrative effects, often in the same localities. In some villages in West Africa, for example, able-bodied men have migrated abroad leaving the young and old to cope, but women have assumed novel roles and responsibilities, and acquired new skills (UNRISD 1995).

Increased migration seems inevitable, given the opportunities and risks linked to globalization and the widening gap between rich and poor countries. National governments will have to learn to live with the reality of large migrant flows. Yet in many richer countries and regions, borders are being reinforced while the type of financial and economic support that might improve conditions in poorer countries is not forthcoming. The upshot of this situation is a rise in illegal migration that has many disintegrative implications, not least the consolidation of a politically, socially and economically excluded underclass (Van Hear 1994).

UNRISD research also examined the impact of migration on the nation-state and the considerable variations in public policies toward immigrant minorities in Western Europe. Countries that

follow a multicultural approach, such as the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom, acknowledge the ethnic origins of migrants and, provided the principle of equality is not breached, support the public display of differences. Countries such as France, with a republican tradition, are more inclined to discourage cultural practices that are different from the dominant native culture, even as they pursue active policies to integrate immigrants into their societies. And countries such as Germany that adhere largely to the old nation-state model of integration tend to adopt very stringent rules of naturalization, or insist that only natives are entitled to full citizenship. Countries in this group, while supporting programmes to improve the economic and social conditions of migrants, also favour the return of migrants to their countries of origin. Whatever the system, successful public policy in this domain must reflect the reality that immigrants have come to stay and have much to contribute to the societies in which they live. It must also aim to reconcile dominant/majority populations to the ethnic and cultural diversity that immigration has brought about. And under no circumstances should the issue of immigration be manipulated for political ends (Collinson 1998; UNRISD 2002b).

## Crime and drugs

Another livelihood strategy that has flourished in the context of globalization involves the undertaking

of illicit or criminal activities. In the late twentieth century crime rates appeared to have increased in virtually all countries, and the illicit narcotic drugs trade had become a major global economic activity. While public perceptions—often based on anecdotal evidence—may suggest an explosion of crime, crime statistics need to be interpreted with care. They tend to be very unreliable: those that do exist often say more about the criminal justice system than the real number of offences. And what gets reported and how crime figures are interpreted reflect each society's value judgements and cultural norms (UNRISD 1995).

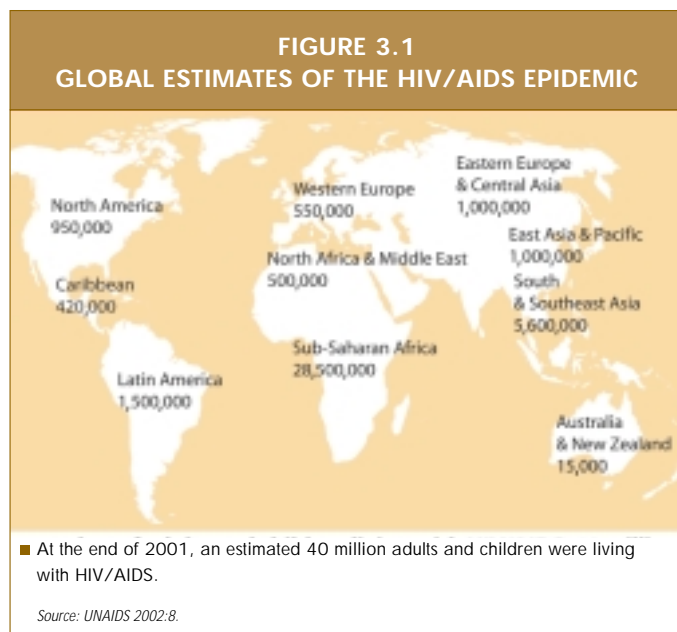
Much of the Institute's research on crime centred on the production, trade and consumption of illicit narcotic drugs. Millions of people worldwide—including peasants in developing countries, urban gangs, criminal organizations, and consumers in the industrialized world—have been drawn into the social and economic networks associated with the drugs trade. Beginning in the late 1980s, UNRISD carried out an extensive programme of work, involving studies in 10 countries (Tullis 1995; Painter 1994; Thoumi 1994; Clayton 1995; Toro 1995; Renard 1995).

By focusing on the entire chain of drug-related activities, these studies showed that nothing less than an integrated approach is likely to produce effective results in curbing production, trade and use. The research was critical of policies associated with the so-called "war on drugs". They may

be able to suppress transit routes or illegal products in some areas, but these tend to be replaced quickly by new ones. More promising approaches involve longer-term and more indirect strategies: education, community organization and treatment programmes in consuming countries; and significant progress in rural development in producing countries. Proposals for the regulation, decriminalization and legalization of drug consumption or production, as well as “harm-reduction” policies, also need to be considered. While they may not diminish consumption, they can reduce the major social problem of drug-related crime and violence (UNRISD 1994a, 1995).

## HIV/AIDS

By the 1990s a new global pandemic threatened the health and social fabric of families and communities around the world: HIV/AIDS (see figure 3.1). Recent UNRISD research has gone beyond an epidemiological or behavioural focus on the pandemic by examining the linkages between HIV/AIDS and development. This work investigates, in particular, the relationship between the pandemic and poverty, gender inequality and weak public services. It also highlights the relevance of external shocks and macroeconomic policies related to debt crises and structural adjustment, certain structural conditions such as those that characterize migrant labour economies, and particular coping strategies involving migration and commercial sex work. Top-down, technocratic approaches that focus on HIV/AIDS-specific programmes are unlikely to achieve their goals unless livelihood opportunities improve, and networks of social solidarity and broad-based political action are strengthened (Collins and Rau 2000). This requires understanding not only the content of successful programmes, but also the processes through which they are developed.



Preparatory research for a larger inquiry has also been undertaken to examine attempts by grassroots organizations, communities and local governments to improve the socioeconomic and political context for HIV/AIDS prevention and

treatment, while mitigating the devastating effects of the pandemic on local societies (Sida/UNRISD 2002). Case studies were carried out on the links between tourism policy and HIV/AIDS in Cuba; the illicit narcotic drugs trade, the prison population and HIV/AIDS in Malaysia and Myanmar; and sex trafficking and vulnerability to disease in South Asia.

While the crucial role of governments and civil society organizations in dealing with HIV/AIDS is widely recognized, far less attention has been focused on the role of the private sector. In collaboration with UNAIDS, UNRISD conducted a survey of the world's largest transnational corporations to identify their responses to HIV/AIDS. Country-level surveys of the top 25 corporations and case studies of selected companies were also carried out in Brazil, the Philippines and South Africa. The findings reveal that the corporate sector is just beginning to wake up to the risks posed to business operations by HIV/AIDS. Moreover, it has yet to recognize its wider responsibilities associated with its influence over the developmental conditions that encourage the spread of HIV/AIDS. Of the top 100 global corporations surveyed, 21 reported that they had an HIV/AIDS policy for the workplace. The research suggests that there are definite limits to voluntary approaches based on the actions of individual companies. Effective risk management also requires an economy-wide response, and one route for achieving this might involve investors

and financial institutions holding companies to specific standards and performance criteria (Bendell 2003a).

## Family crisis?

From the perspective of social integration, the situation of the family is crucial because it constitutes one of the basic institutions of social welfare provisioning and social solidarity. In recent decades statistics related to such aspects as divorce, single-parent families and migration have reinforced the perception that “the family” is in crisis. Is this really the case?

Work carried out by UNRISD since the mid-1990s has shown the ways in which conjugal relations, resource allocation within households, and care for children and the elderly are being transformed—and often strained—by contemporary patterns of globalization, market integration and changes in labour markets. But it has also questioned the tendency to blame families and parents for increasing problems of separation and divorce, unplanned pregnancy, youth crime and domestic violence, as well as the assumption that changes in family structures, such as the rise of single-parent or female-headed households, necessarily result in dysfunctional families or a decline in moral values. The analysis of the family needs to be rooted in an analysis of the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality, and the changing role of the state;

"UNRISD HAS SPENT 40 YEARS ASKING THE HARD QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL REALITIES WHICH SHAPE THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. FROM STUDIES OF THE ILLICIT DRUG TRADE TO IDENTITIES AND CONFLICT TO PIONEERING WORK ON GENDER, UNRISD HAS WORKED WITH REMARKABLE SCHOLARS AROUND THE WORLD TO SHINE THE LIGHT OF NEW KNOWLEDGE ON OLD PROBLEMS. UNRISD IS A LEADER ON THE PATH TO A SAFER, FAIRER WORLD."

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in many countries, these have imposed additional burdens on households and women in terms of the cost of child and elder care, and their role in forming and developing "human capital" (Moore 1994; Lloyd-Sherlock forthcoming).

Different sets of pressures are being placed on families and households as countries undergo liberalization. Very often their coping strategies entail an intensification of women's paid and unpaid labour. In the ex-socialist countries, such as Uzbekistan, social services and rural industries previously provided significant employment opportunities and social benefits for women. Yet labour retrenchment in these sectors has pushed much of the rural population into reliance on precarious forms of self-employment. It has also increased dependence on the smallholder economy where women's labour is intensively used, especially since they substitute their own labour wherever possible for expensive agricultural inputs (Kandiyoti, 2003). This places strains on family relations, and on children. The latter must often be withdrawn from school in order to work on family farms.

Another example is Mexico, where women's employment in industry—particularly production for export—grew significantly in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, however, social provisioning—whether in the form of employment-related benefits or universal subsidies on items of basic consumption—was massively curtailed, and

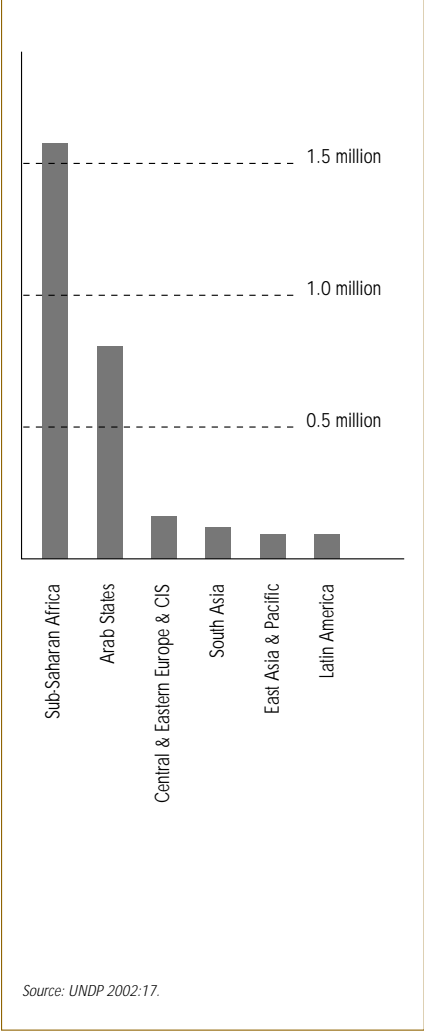
deflationary macroeconomic policies caused real wages to decline. In the era of import-substitution industrialization prior to 1982, the state's pro-business industrial policies (low wages, high tariffs) were tempered by measures aimed at maintaining minimum living standards; in the subsequent period these implicit subsidies disappeared or were targeted to a dwindling proportion of the poor. As a result of declining real wages and the rising monetary cost of subsistence, family survival has increasingly relied on the intensification of women's paid work as a distress response, as well as of their unpaid/care work in both individualized and collective forms (Brachet-Marquez and de Oliveira 2002).

# IDENTITIES AND CONFLICT

Since the 1980s, there has been a sharp rise in the number of violent conflicts based on identities. People’s ethnic, racial and religious sentiments have remained resilient even as economies have become more globally integrated. Rapid social change encourages communal identities to flourish as individuals search for a set of anchoring values. Indeed, cultural diversity is an enduring attribute of human relations, even for societies founded on principles of homogeneity or a nation-state. If not properly managed, identities can infringe on people’s rights. Women’s rights, for example, are often denied in societies where the subordination of women is considered essential to the uniqueness and integrity of local or national culture. Violent conflicts based on identities can also lead to state collapse. The secessionist wars that followed the demise of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the long-running wars in Africa and parts of Asia, the protracted violence in the Middle East, and transnational terrorism—all highlight profound problems with the current world order.

Part of the Institute’s work has been concerned with the study of conflicts, since they affect social relations, institutions and welfare. When UNRISD initiated research on ethnic conflict in the late 1980s, this was a highly sensitive subject within the United Nations. But in the 1990s, as conflicts

FIGURE 3.2  
THE CASUALTIES OF WAR  
(BY REGION, 1990–1999)



multiplied and more countries experienced civil war, the United Nations sought a better understanding of their causes and dynamics. Indeed, the causes of conflicts and the management of postwar reconstruction were at the heart of the Social Summit's agenda item of social integration. Three of the 14 countries included in the first UNRISD project on Ethnic Conflict and Development—Ethiopia, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia—had disintegrated by the early 1990s (Amin 1994; Tishkov 1996; Akhavan 1995). The Institute's research on Burundi shed light on the genocidal carnage that was to follow in Rwanda (Lemarchand 1994). UNRISD researchers observed and analysed the widespread rioting in India that followed the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu militants (Nandy et al. 1998). Similarly, the agreement that brought peace to Lebanon was signed when research on that country's long conflict was being conducted (Hamdan 1997). And the 1990–1991 Gulf War highlighted the plight of the Kurdish people—an issue that was already examined by the project (Chaliand 1994).

UNRISD work has addressed five main issues: the complex ways identities shape conflict and violence; the social reintegration of victims of armed conflict; international assistance and dialogue in post-conflict reconstruction; the management of cultural diversity; and the potential for tension and conflict between women's rights and “cultural” or group rights, which is discussed in chapter 6.

## Violent conflict

Identities provide a sense of solidarity and encompass the totality of social experience. Individuals simultaneously belong to different groups—as members of families, communities, professions, classes and nations, and gender and age groups. As bearers of multiple identities, the focus of a person's sense of self may change as circumstances dictate. Furthermore, identities are experienced differently even by members of the same group.

UNRISD research concluded that ethnicity, religion and race threaten social order only when they displace other loyalties and become the core basis of identity. Primordial identities, in other words, should not be reduced to immutable, genetically determined difference. Ethnic, racial or religious conflicts are not inevitable, and there is little merit in the view that conflicts are rooted in ancestral hatred. They evolve out of specific historical situations that may be linked to the way states are constructed, labour markets are organized and public institutions are governed (Stavenhagen 1996; Young 1998; Bangura 1994b).

The Institute's studies of Fiji, Guyana, Malaysia, Burundi and Lebanon showed that certain economic activities may be identified with distinct groups; and competition among them may affect interethnic or interracial relations and lead to generalized conflicts (Premdas 1995a, 1995b;

### Box 3.1—Religious movements and politics

Religion is an important source of value formation and is inextricably linked with ethnicity. It would be difficult to separate religious and non-religious components of the identities of, for example, a Sikh, a Tibetan, a Somali or an Irish person. In many countries there is a close relationship between religion and politics. Political power is underpinned by religious beliefs, while political concerns permeate the heart of the religious sphere. In some countries this relationship has grown even closer as economic crisis and global restructuring have undermined previous arrangements for promoting social cohesion. Religious movements can be classified into four groups based on whether religion is used as a vehicle of opposition or as an ideology of community development.

*Culturalist groups*—emerge when a group perceives itself as a repressed minority and aims to achieve autonomy or self-government. Examples are Sikhs in India, Tibetan Buddhists in China, and southern Sudanese struggles against Islamization. In each case, religion provides part of the ideological basis for resistance against the dominant culture.

*Syncretist movements*—involve a fusion or blending of religions, typically mixing traditional practices with Christianity or Islam, and are largely found among rural people in developing countries. Religious and social beliefs provide the basic elements for building group solidarity in the face of threats from external forces, such as the state, big landowners, transnational corporations or foreign

governments. Examples include the Napramas of north-eastern Mozambique, the Lumpa Church of northern Zambia and the cult of Olivorismo in the Dominican Republic.

*Community-oriented religious groups*—attempt to find God through personal searching rather than through institutionalized religious bodies. They emphasize the community's ability to improve the lives of its members through group effort at a time when central and local governments are unable to satisfy the needs of citizens. Many derive their ideas from the tenets of radical liberation theology. In addition to these groups, there has been a strong growth in several Latin American and African countries of popular Protestant evangelical churches.

*Fundamentalists*—seek to create a more traditional society, transforming laws, morality, social norms—and sometimes political configuration—in accordance with strict religious tenets. They seek to gain control over key areas, such as education, which are firmly within governmental jurisdiction. Fundamentalism is often associated with a literal interpretation of religious texts, which are seen to offer ready-made answers for radical change. Fundamentalists can be found among the followers of many religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism.

Source: Haynes 1995.

Lemarchand 1994; Hamdan 1997). When race or ethnicity becomes indistinguishable from class status, the resulting inequalities may breed xenophobia, discrimination and violence. The erosion of state capacity is also an important contributing factor. Primordial identities may be given full rein when nationalist and secular ideologies collapse, and when values that appeal to majority segments of society are undermined. However, the case studies suggest that most conflicts do not erupt suddenly. While some may escalate linearly, others are more cyclical. Most require mobilizers, organizations and a discourse to activate or sustain them. This makes it important to study the dynamics of movements and the narratives of leaders. Box 3.1 illustrates some of the intricate connections between ethnicity and religion, and the different ways religion has been used by social movements to pursue political goals.

During the early 1990s, studies under the UNRISD project on Political Violence and Social Movements in Colombia, Italy, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Peru, South Africa, Spain and Sri Lanka examined the resilience and internal dynamics of violence (Deas 1995; Moss 1993; Picard 1993; du Toit 1993; Wieviorka 1993; Senaratne 1997). According to this research, violent acts create group solidarity and instil a sense of power in those activists who participate. The studies also analysed the narratives or discourses of violent movements, the ways “discourse communities” are formed and sustained, how interpretations of

texts reinforce group bonding, and the symbolic messages of violent activities. The research questioned the treatment of political violence as pathological or a form of behaviour that is always amenable to cost-benefit or instrumentalist analysis.

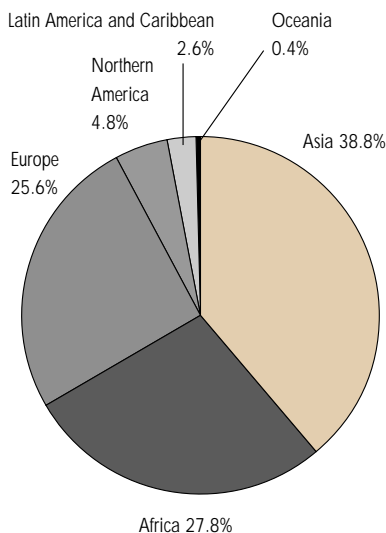
The long-term political violence in the countries studied was found to share characteristics associated with one of two “models” (Apter 1997). Under the “exchange model”, the dynamics of violence follow clearly understood rules. Aims tend to be instrumental; violence waxes and wanes according to perceptions by group leaders of gains and losses in competition for power and followers. Such characteristics were evident in the case of guerrilla movements in Colombia. Under the “inversionary model”, movements, such as Sendero Luminoso in Peru, invest violence with an aura of inevitability as they challenge the foundations of society and politics. The research suggested that situations associated with the exchange model were more likely to be resolved through redistributive and democratic methods; those under the inversionary model tended to require far greater attention to issues of injustice and marginality.

## The social reintegration of victims of conflicts

War and persecution often force people to flee their homes and countries. At the end of 2000, there were more than 21 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people in the world, with Africa, Asia and Europe accounting for the majority (see figure 3.3). Such large-scale forced migration raises questions about survival, livelihood opportunities and social reintegration if those who are forced to migrate return home. UNRISD supported several research projects on this subject in the 1980s and early 1990s. Work was carried out on Afghan refugees in Pakistan; Cambodian refugees; Guatemalan refugees in Mexico; refugees in Chad, the Horn of Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe; and the return of exiles to Argentina and Uruguay.

UNRISD also assessed many of the generalizations and assumptions made by policy makers and practitioners in the field of humanitarian relief. Categorizing people as “refugees”, “returnees”, “stayees” and “internally displaced people” was found to be problematic. Regional boundaries are often porous, with the internally displaced and those who remain in conflict zones often experiencing similar forms of deprivation as those who cross international borders. Privileging the plight of refugees and returnees over that of other victims of conflict may create tensions and undermine reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes.

**FIGURE 3.3**  
**REFUGEES AND OTHERS**  
**OF CONCERN TO UNHCR:**  
**21,798,210**



■ Note: This population includes refugees, asylum-seekers, returned refugees, internally displaced people, returned internally displaced people, and other groups of concern to UNHCR. The total population figure includes eight additional cases. Percentages have been rounded.

Source: UNHCR 2002.

Furthermore, refugee movements are not single events but part of a complex, long-term process of migration (Lattes and Oteiza 1987). Thus it is unwise to assume that refugees will necessarily return home, or that their identities are based on allegiances to the territories they left behind. Moreover, the view that displaced individuals are completely dependent on relief aid is misleading. Most have either received no assistance from humanitarian agencies or, where assistance has been provided, it has been complementary to rather than the basis for their survival strategies (Allen 1996).

Programmes of reintegration must be based on sound knowledge of changes that may have occurred as a result of displacement (Watson 1996). In some cases, such changes may impede reintegration. Traditional ties of solidarity may undergo considerable strain and may be difficult to reactivate when refugees return home. In Chad, for instance, returnees in the eastern Sahel enjoyed the support of family and community members who did not migrate. Returnees in the southwest found that they could not reclaim their lands or rely on previous solidarity networks, because former neighbours perceived returnees as a privileged group that had profited from exile.

Women and children may require special attention, but they should not simply be labelled as “victims”, “vulnerable groups” or “traumatized” (Boyden and Gibbs 1997; Sørensen 1998; Geiger

1994). Women, for instance, may experience freedom in the face of male incapacity; new patterns of gender relations may develop; and opportunities for learning new skills may open up, leading to a sense of greater independence and recognition. Part of the UNRISD research examined the experiences of women refugees and returnees from Afghanistan, Cambodia and Chad (Christensen 1990; Arnvig 1994; Watson 1996). These studies documented the struggles and suffering of women refugees, as well as the changes in attitudes, values, social relations and skills brought about by refugees’ experiences in exile. The Chad study revealed that despite numerous drawbacks, some returning refugees proved to be a dynamic force for social change in their regions of return, as women took on heightened responsibility for the well-being of their households and gained a sense of autonomy in the process. Reintegration programmes must be sensitive to these changes.

## Post-conflict rebuilding

Since the 1990s, the international community has taken a strong lead in efforts aimed at rebuilding societies that have been devastated by war. United Nations organizations, bilateral donors and NGOs have been prominent in these efforts. Rebuilding entails state and judicial reform, revival of social institutions and trust, psychological and moral rehabilitation, and economic reactivation. Major challenges include ensuring that the assistance provided by international agencies contributes to, rather than substitutes for, local capacity development, and achieving a proper balance between relief and development (UNRISD 1993). The Institute addressed these issues in work on Vulnerability and Coping Strategies in Cambodia, and in the War-torn Societies Project (WSP) that focused on Eritrea, Guatemala, Mozambique and Somalia.

UNRISD research in Cambodia, which commenced after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1993, examined the social and economic impact of the large peace-building operation and reconstruction efforts associated with food security, psychosocial rehabilitation and democratization. UNRISD work in Cambodia also stimulated social science research at a time when it was relatively neglected there (Tickner 1996; Murshid 1998).

The large-scale involvement of multilateral and bilateral agencies in Cambodia quickly restored

certain democratic institutions and trade, as well as inflows of aid, technical assistance and investment. However, the assistance programme suffered from a number of problems related to urgency and scale, which not only complicated planning and co-ordination but also fuelled inflation and an artificial boom in the capital, Phnom Penh, accelerating migration to the city. Furthermore, the Cambodian government and other institutions were often sidelined in the planning process. Public administration and service delivery were also seriously weakened, as skilled Cambodians sought out the better-remunerated employment opportunities offered by international agencies (Curtis 1998). Some troops and other foreigners showed little respect for Cambodians and their culture, which contributed to the rise in prostitution in the early 1990s (Arnvig 1994). The lessons for peace building are unmistakable: it is necessary to minimize the distortionary effects on local economies of large-scale humanitarian interventions; to ensure greater participation of local people and institutions in reconstruction programmes; and to foster relations of respect between foreign personnel and host communities (Utting 1994).

WSP work was based on an action-research methodology (see box 3.2), and drew on past UNRISD work on participation as well as the analysis of peace-building and reconstruction experiences in post-conflict societies. This analysis had highlighted not only the complex nature of

the rebuilding process and the need for action on multiple fronts, but also the ways in which international agencies and economic policies could both help and hinder rebuilding, and the need to integrate different actors—including former enemies—in consultative and decision-making processes (Carbonnier 1998; Sørensen 1998; Moore 1996; Weiss Fagen 1995; UNRISD 1995).

WSP action-research took the form of a dialogue on policy issues involving a wide range of local and international actors at national and local levels. Researchers provided technical information to aid the discussions. The project encouraged regular consultations between external and internal actors, helping to deepen informal relationships between them, and led to a better

### Box 3.2—From conflict to dialogue in Guatemala

The Guatemalan government signed a peace accord with guerrillas of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union in January 1997, following over 35 years of civil war. The peace accord provided a basis for selecting Guatemala as one of the countries where the War-torn Societies Project was to be implemented. The project studied the country's peace-building experiences through participatory research methods, which promoted dialogue and generated policy recommendations for different actors.

The first phase of the work involved preparation of a country note based on research and on extensive consultations with all relevant actors. The country note provided an overview of the challenges of post-conflict transition and recommended five policy areas requiring urgent attention: state reform, socioeconomic development, justice and security, multiculturalism, and international co-operation.

Five working groups were established around these policy areas, with researchers providing technical inputs to the discussion and collective analysis. There were problems at the beginning, stemming from the fear and distrust that long years of conflict had created. Yet a collective group identity gradually developed.

Through its promotion of dialogue on public policy issues, the project fostered Guatemala's budding democracy in several ways. The working groups became forums for what were, at the time, the country's most systematic consultations on post-conflict issues. The working groups established a non-hierarchical, non-confrontational space in which government officials, political parties, civil society organizations and hitherto excluded groups made contributions that led to consensus. The dialogue allowed participants to discover the limitations and complexities of government decision-making processes, and helped heal the historically unhealthy relationship between government and civil society groups.

*Source: Torres-Rivas and Arévalo de León 1999.*

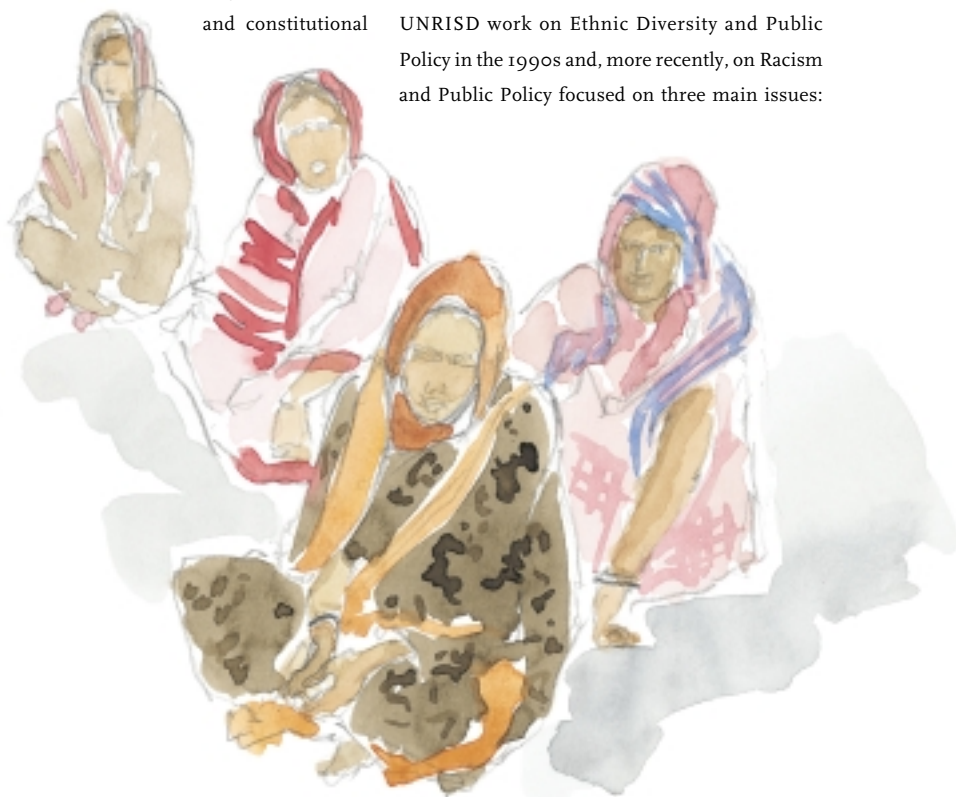
understanding of their respective agendas. The ultimate goal was to improve participation and national ownership of the rebuilding process, as well as the quality of external assistance.

## The management of diversity

Many policies and institutions exist for managing cultural diversity. They range from legal instruments and constitutional

arrangements, to socioeconomic initiatives and educational policies that seek to change behaviour and promote inclusiveness. Special programmes may help to correct historical injustices or bring excluded groups into the mainstream. But because they have differential impacts, even among beneficiaries, and are often contested by different groups, it is difficult to predict their outcomes or draw lessons that may be applicable to all situations.

UNRISD work on Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy in the 1990s and, more recently, on Racism and Public Policy focused on three main issues:



constitutional arrangements, highlighting federalism, decentralization and electoral rules; resource distribution; and cultural policies (Young 1998, 1999; Nnoli 1995). Federalism and decentralization are two approaches that disperse power, thereby creating multiple arenas for representation and participation. Research warned, however, of the dangers of secession, discrimination against “non-natives”, uneven development and jurisdictional conflicts if the political culture and bargaining skills for moderation are weak.

Undoubtedly, correcting ethnic and racial discrimination or disadvantage must involve reform of governance institutions. All groups in society ought to feel a sense of belonging, representation and shared interest in the institutions that govern their lives if governments are to enjoy popular legitimacy and stability. However, institutions that seek to manage diversity may not always produce the best outcomes. Indeed, they may generate unexpected detrimental effects. The peculiarities of the sociocultural setting in which they are applied must, therefore, always be considered.

The management of diversity also involves working out arrangements for the distribution of resources to correct inequalities linked to discrimination. This is usually attempted through employment, admission into educational institutions, award of government contracts and access to social services. The content, application and outcome of such policies may vary according to

whether the disadvantaged population constitutes the majority group and has strong access to policy-making institutions, or whether beneficiaries are a minority with limited influence on government. Redistributive policies, therefore, have varied widely in countries as different as Brazil, India, Malaysia, South Africa and the United States (UNRISD 2002b).

Cultural policies present both opportunities and problems. At their core is the issue of recognition: the need to grant juridical and social equality to all communities, including celebration of their holidays and promotion of their languages in relevant institutions. Pursuit of multiculturalism, however, must not treat cultural difference as an absolute or supreme value. Sometimes, the politics of identity can reinforce cultural norms and practices that subordinate certain groups, such as women (see chapter 6). A sense of shared values or civicness is vital if societies are to enjoy stable development.