

# **THE UN SYSTEM AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Presentation at the Annual Conference  
of the Group of 78  
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# THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE UN

- ❖ Peace (security)
- ❖ Human Rights (civil and political, economic and social). “In broader freedom”, borrowed from F.D.Roosevelt’s “four freedoms”
- ❖ Development: two different meanings:
  - ✓ Cooperation with developing countries
  - ✓ Development of societies (sustainable development as a framework)
- ❖ Interrelations: Peace and development, human rights and development

# HISTORICAL EVOLUTION (1)

- Pre-WWII: ILO, seeds of cooperation in health, education, telecommunications (telegraph), patents (Berne and Paris Conventions), UPU.
- Post-WWII: Highly decentralized structure:
  - General Assembly, Security Council, ECOSOC, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice
  - Secretariat, Funds and Programs.
  - Specialized agencies: FAO, UNESCO, WHO first to join ILO and ITU (Paris Convention).
  - BWIs as specialized agencies. GATT (and later WTO) outside the system.
  - Weak coordination mechanism: ECOSOC and CEB (Chief Executives Board). So, largely an uncoordinated system.

# HISTORICAL EVOLUTION (2)

- The post-colonial order and the birth of development cooperation with Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy", and Truman's "Four Points" speech of January 1949. But the latter remains largely bilateral. Ambivalent position of the Soviet block.
- The mature (golden) age:
  - The "Development Decades"
  - Basic needs, Redistribution with Growth (becomes also the World Bank's Agenda)
  - Mid-1960s: UNCTAD and the Committee on Development Planning, UNDP and expanded technical cooperation

# HISTORICAL EVOLUTION (3)

- The 1970s:
  - The Global Conferences: Human Environment 1972, Population 1974, Food 1974, Women 1975, Human Settlements 1976, Science and Technology 1979, LDCs 1981
  - Negotiations for a “New International Economic Order” launched in 1974, dead by the early 1980s in major confrontation.
- Market reforms: UN is left aside. Tries to take a place in the new era: Adjustment with a Human Face, Human Development.
- Post-Cold War: Summits and Conferences. The Millennium Summit and the MDGs. Monterrey Conference and the “return” of economic issues to the UN, a stillborn process?

# THE MDGs: THE PROS

- ❖ Concise set of clear and measurable, mostly human development goals
- ❖ High level of visibility.
- ❖ Used for advocacy but also, in part, for the design of development strategies.
- ❖ Strongly backed by the Bretton Woods Institutions, the official development assistance community and numerous civil society organizations
- ❖ This realized the aim of using the representative character of the UN to lead global action.
- ❖ Much better monitoring relative to previous processes.

# THE MDGs: THE CONS

- ❖ Highly centralized process of defining goals and targets, with little participation of member states.
- ❖ Viewed as “donor-centric”.
- ❖ Weakness of the “Global Partnership for Development”.
- ❖ No economic issues, even crucial ones: “productive and decent employment” adopted in 2005 but not as a goal.
- ❖ Clearly incomplete targets in many areas, including gender and environment.
- ❖ Many targets drafted in such a way that they were relevant only for the poorest countries.

# THE POST-2015 AGENDA: THE VISION

- ❖ The UN Task Force: vision based on the fundamental principles of respect for human rights, equality and sustainability.
- ❖ High-Level Panel: “Our vision and our responsibility are to end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development”.
- ❖ The vision proposed by the UN Task Force is broader: it adopts a human rights based framework, and places issues of inequality at the center, beyond those associated with extreme poverty

# THE POST-2015 AGENDA: THE CONSENSUS

- ❖ The agenda should encompass the three dimensions of *sustainable development*: economic, social and environmental.
- ❖ It should be a *universal* agenda, thus applicable to developing countries but also to developed countries (to their domestic employment and inequalities).
- ❖ Leave ample space for national policy design and adaptation to local settings. This is essential for the “ownership” of the goals and strategies.
- ❖ High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in charge of follow up, mixing in a novel way the General Assembly and ECOSOC

# THE SDGs (1)

## (Agreed by the Open Working Group)

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.
6. Availability and sustainability of water and sanitation.
7. Affordable, reliable, sustainable modern energy for all.
8. Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Resilient infrastructure, industrialization and innovation.

# THE SDGs (2)

10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Sustainable production and consumption patterns.
13. Urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and maritime resources.
15. Protect, restore and sustainable use of territorial ecosystems: sustainable forests, combat desertification, halt land degradation and biodiversity loss.
16. Peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and accountable and inclusive institutions.
17. Means of implementation and revitalize global partnership for development

# MAJOR ISSUES OF CONTROVERSY

- ❖ How to make the “Global Partnership for Development” effective, and role of associated economic development issues.
- ❖ Domestic inequalities as a (or the) major “emerging issue”.
- ❖ How to share the costs of moving towards sustainable patterns of production and consumption?
- ❖ The role of peace and good domestic governance in the agenda.
- ❖ Weak monitoring and accountability for international commitments. This would be made more difficult by the complexity of the SDGs

# BASIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE UN IN DEVELOPMENT

- ❖ UN ideas, analysis and policy recommendations: The UN has been “Ahead of the curve”, but many times practice has not followed UN ideas.
- ❖ More influence on social and human development, sustainability and setting global development targets, than on economic issues. In the latter case stronger influence in development strategies in the early period
- ❖ Implementation: in some cases, UN organizations directly run the action + role of UN ideas in framing national institutions, including legal frameworks

# GOVERNANCE

- ❖ The “Three UNs”: The intergovernmental, the staff, civil society.
- ❖ Strengthening coordination of the First UN: An Economic Security or Global Economic Cooperation Council? Basic problem: move to a constituency system?
- ❖ Size of the decision-making bodies: “legitimacy” of the General Assembly vs. smaller bodies (Security Council and ECOSOC)
- ❖ For the Second UN: Acting as a system (“One UN”)
- ❖ The Third UN: Expert Groups, Advocacy. The latter has been critical in many areas.
- ❖ Accountability and enforceability for international commitments. The best case: Conventions that become national law. For the rest, a role for peer reviews?

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

- ❖ The weight of developing countries in the UN: development issues would have left the UN without that influence, but this in turn has led to the preference for BWIs by industrial countries.
- ❖ Broader economic initiatives: failure of the NIEO, but success of the Monterrey Conference. High point of relations UN-BWIs, but also weak follow-up and ambivalence of BWIs vs. UN.
- ❖ Twin-track system (John Toye): Independence in ideas and broader forum for debates vs. weak implementation.
- ❖ Formal vs. informal governance: G-7/G-20 vs. multilateral governance.

# THE TWIN-TRACK SYSTEM: THREE HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

- ❖ The fight for a Special UN Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED) in the 1950s. The International Development Association (IDA) is created in 1959 but under the World Bank. Only technical cooperation in the UN – UNDP in 1965.
- ❖ UNCTAD, created in 1964, but given no decision-making powers, but “special and differential treatment” and “enabling clause” agreed in GATT
- ❖ Monterrey Conference: no real follow-up, but effective in reversing the trends in official development assistance.

# MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- ❖ The UN development agenda has a poor record of monitoring, and no accountability.
- ❖ The MDGs: advance in monitoring. The SDGs must go beyond that, including a “data revolution”.
- ❖ It is inevitable that that goals and targets be closely monitored but not legally binding.
- ❖ But need for high-level political evaluations, and in some cases with clear accountability (ODA target).
- ❖ Use the HLPF but also the whole ECOSOC system for monitoring goals.
- ❖ The best framework would be peer-review processes, possibly at the regional level.

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