

The Power of UN Ideas: *Lessons from from the First 60 Years*

Based on Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerji, and Thomas G. Weiss, The Power of UN Ideas: Lessons from the First 60 Years, UN Intellectual History Project Series, NY, May 2005



UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice



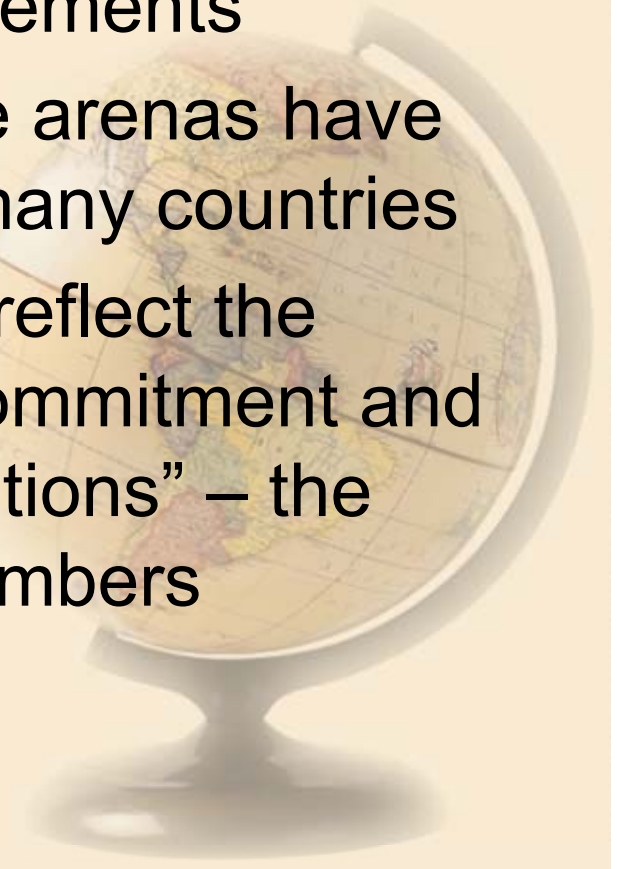
Introduction

- UN's record over the last 60 years deserves to be better known
- Present findings from a critical examination of the UN's past in order to see its future more clearly
- Understanding the past is essential for the UN moving forward in the 21st century
- “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” George Santayana



Three conclusions

- UN's contribution to ideas, analysis, and policy making in the economic and social arena is one of its most important achievements
- UN's thinking and ideas in these arenas have had a major positive impact in many countries
- Success and failures of the UN reflect the strengths and weaknesses of commitment and support from the “two United Nations” – the member states and the staff members



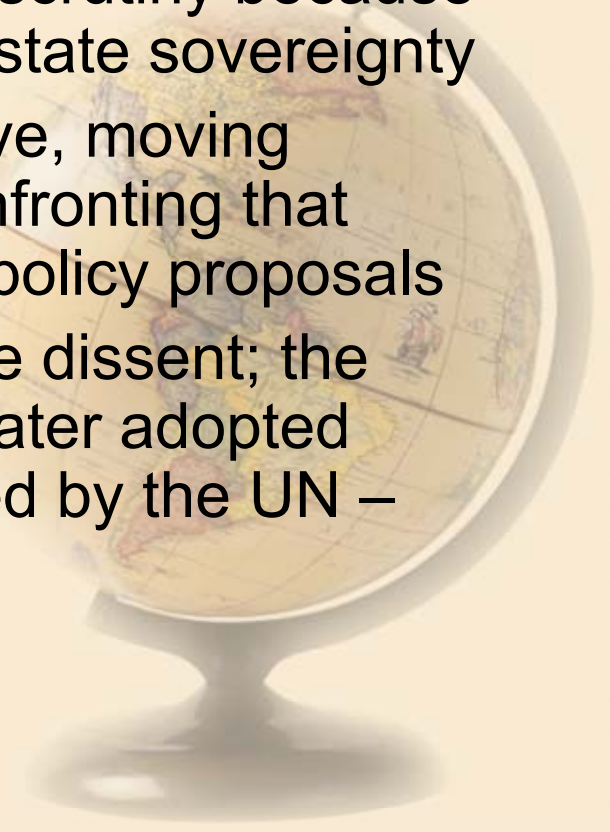
Most salient lessons for the UN 60th anniversary

- Intellectual contributions to ideas, analysis, and policy making in the economic and social arenas are the UN's most important achievements
- UN's original vision was built on four pillars; the first three – peace, development and human rights - have become increasingly intertwined and support a consistent and integrated framework of national and international priorities



Most salient lessons for the UN 60th anniversary

- The UN's fourth founding pillar – sovereign independence – although largely achieved during the UN's first two decades, is now under scrutiny because of a concern for reasonable limits on state sovereignty
- UN has been boldly ahead of the curve, moving beyond conventional wisdom and confronting that wisdom with alternative thinking and policy proposals
- UN has played the role of constructive dissent; the World Bank and sometimes the IMF later adopted positions either pioneered or promoted by the UN – but which they initially opposed



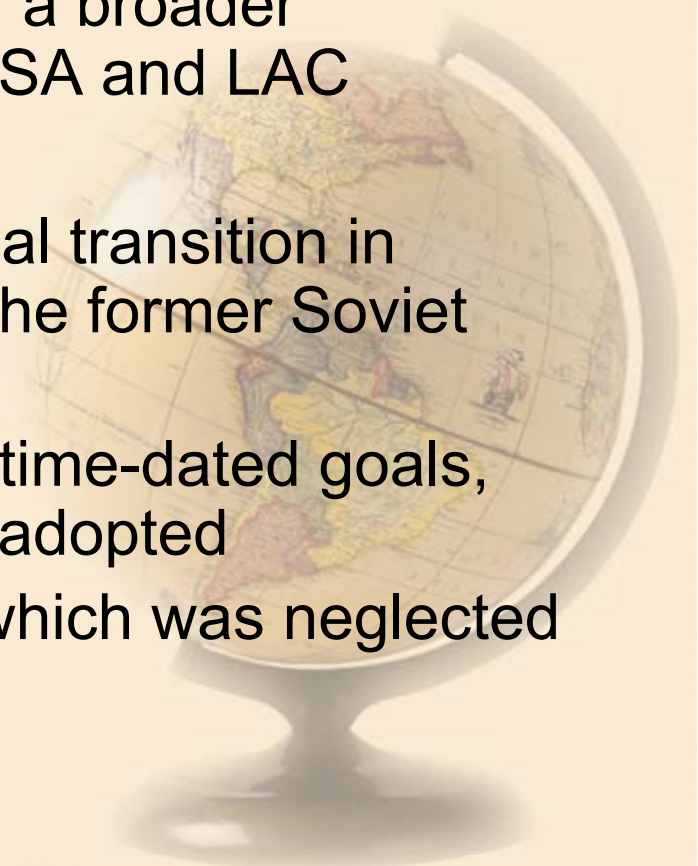
Three factors from the UN's history in economic and social matters

1. The UN has contributed to economic and social thinking and ideas
2. Many of these ideas have a major and worthwhile impact
3. Many of the ideas have emerged in response to initiatives of the dominant economic powers, especially those of the US



UN Constructive Dissent since the Early 1980s

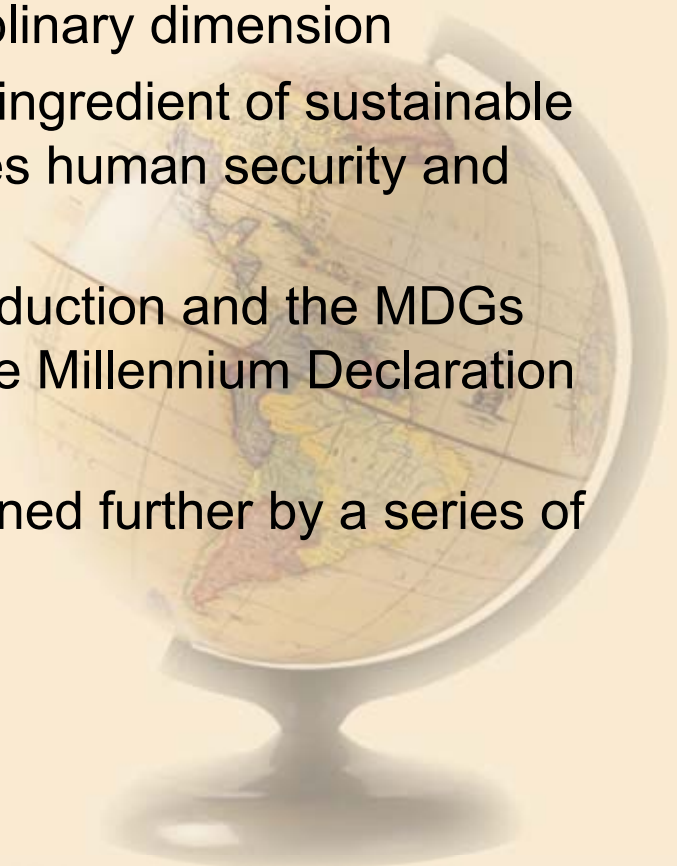
- Special support for the LDCs a focus of UNCTAD
- UNICEF, ECA and ILO argued for a broader structural adjustment policies in SSA and LAC
- Debt relief for poor countries
- ECE proposed the need for gradual transition in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union countries
- UN set and supported quantified, time-dated goals, which the Bank and the IMF later adopted
- UN's emphasis on human rights which was neglected by BWIs



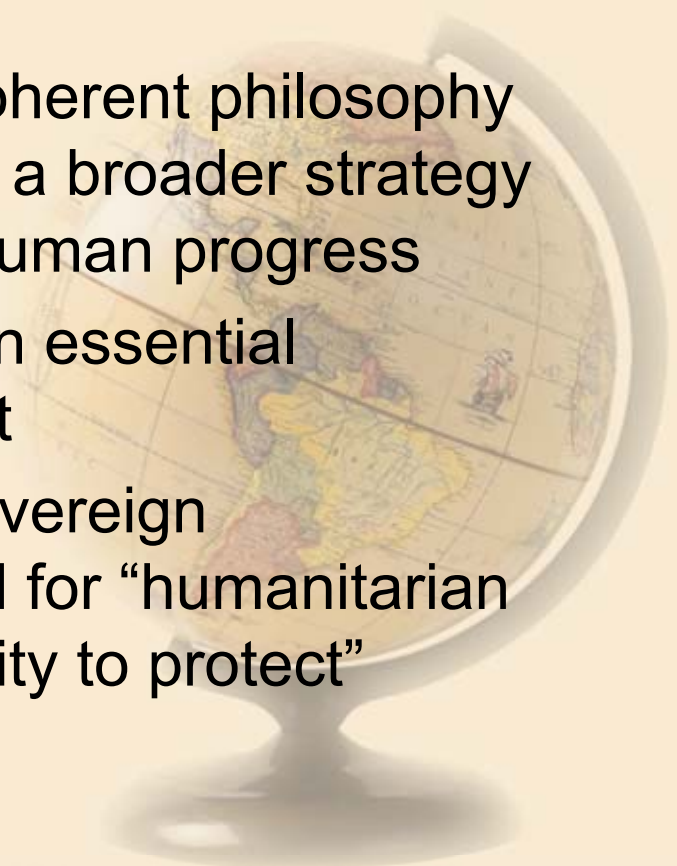
Framing the Issues



- UN pursued a vision enshrined in its Charter and set out ideas and policy proposals to achieve that vision
- UN incorporated four pillars – peace, development, human rights and independence – which are now pursued in an integrated fashion
- UN's vision of development shifted from narrow economic perspective to a broader and multidisciplinary dimension
- Peace building is seen as an important ingredient of sustainable development and development promotes human security and human rights
- Greater emphasis is given to poverty reduction and the MDGs which are set in the broader frame of the Millennium Declaration is a vehicle to bring this about
- The UN development agenda is broadened further by a series of pioneering UN conferences



- UN took the role of constructive dissent in the 1980's
- UN put forward a more and comprehensive strategy on development with the publication by UNDP of the annual Human Development Report in 1990; successive reports have broadened the concept of human development
- Human rights integrated into a coherent philosophy of human development providing a broader strategy for economic development and human progress
- Conflict resolution accepted as an essential condition for human development
- Fundamental rethinking about sovereign independence in light of the need for "humanitarian intervention" and "the responsibility to protect"



- Several key issues identified as major priorities in the early years of the UN, have dropped out or faded away – moderating the causes of extreme instability in developing countries; disarmament and development; and narrowing extreme gap between the richest and poorest countries
- Strong decisive actions on these issues could have changed the entire *problematique* of the poorest countries and of the global economy

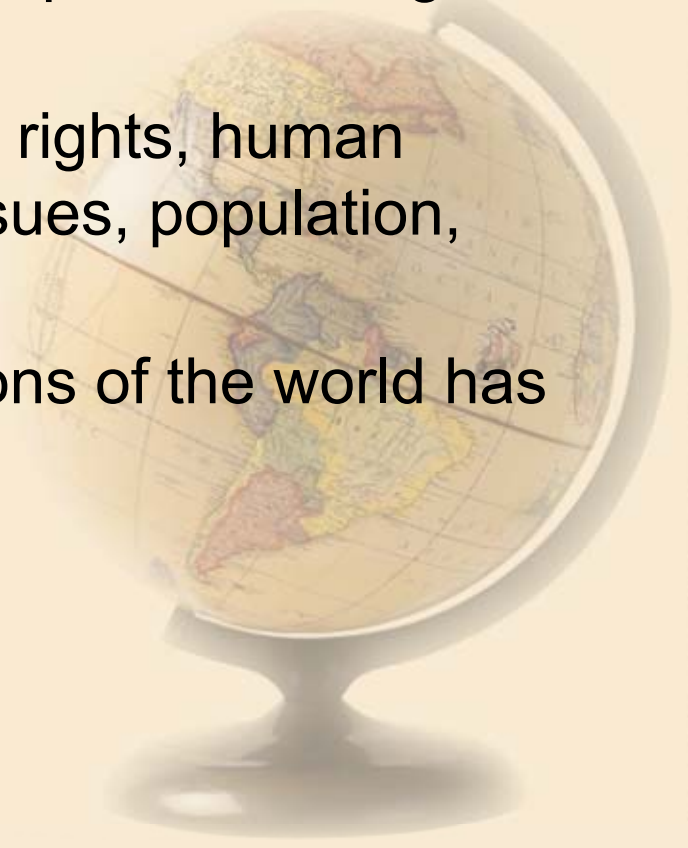


Leading the Way



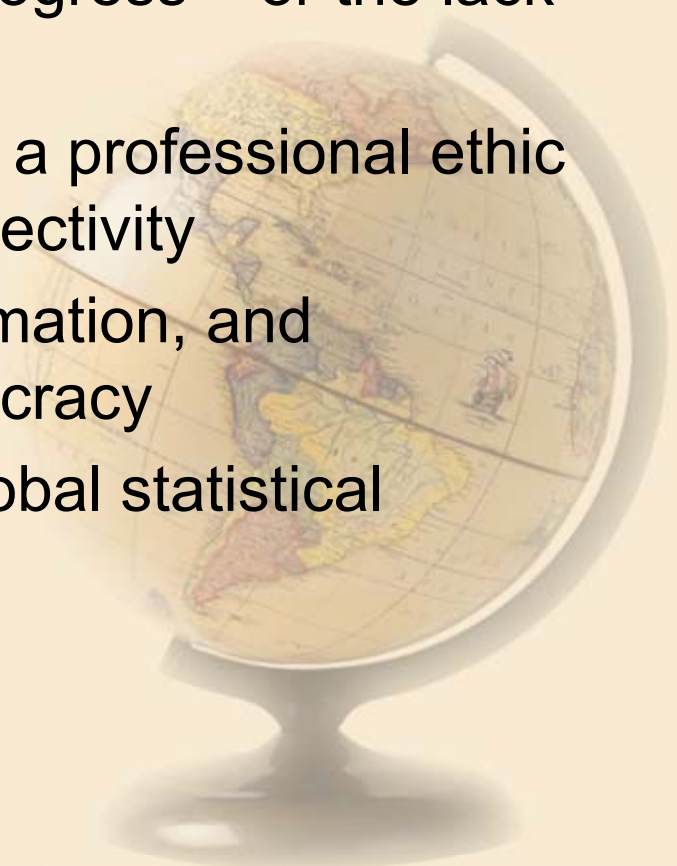
Introduction

- Most of UN's pioneering contributions initially faced controversy and passion
- UN's widened the concept of development making it more complicated and realistic
- Development now includes human rights, human security, gender, environmental issues, population, sustainability and culture
- Measuring concretely the dimensions of the world has been another UN contribution



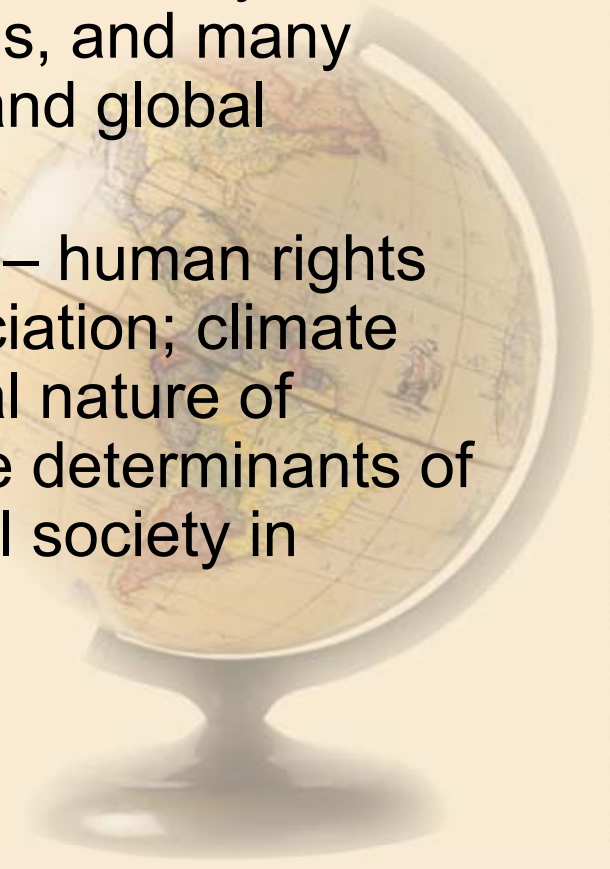
Quantifying the World

- UN played a leading contribution to national and international statistics and set the frame for assessing the world's economic and social progress – or the lack of it
- Played a major part in establishing a professional ethic of statistical independence and objectivity
- Encouraged public access to information, and contributed to the building of democracy
- Supported the integration of the global statistical community
- Establishing national accounts



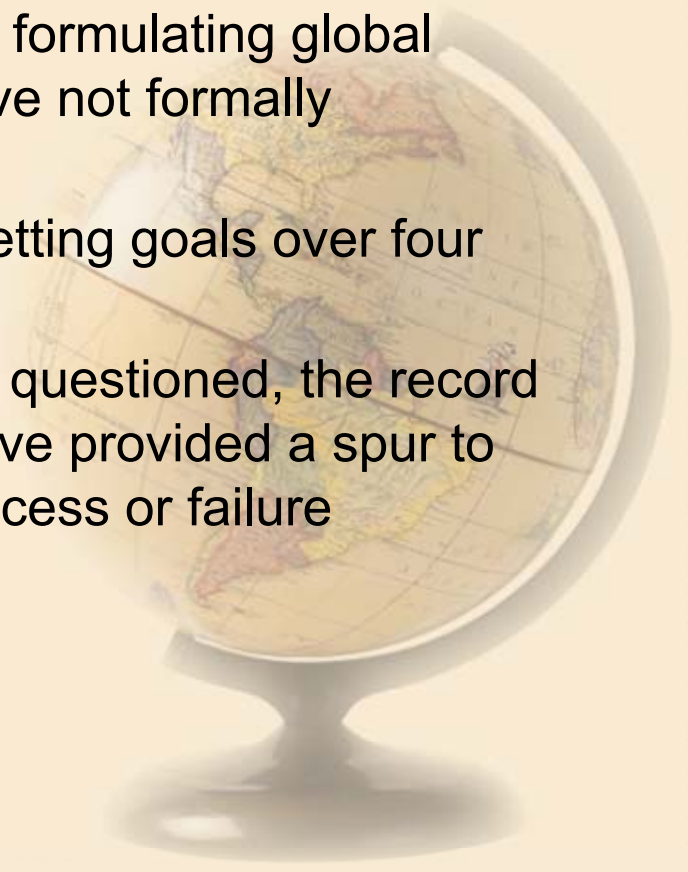
Quantifying the World

- International statistics is still inadequate
- UN lost some of its intellectual authority on such critical issues as human rights, human security, the operation of transnational corporations, and many related areas of global performance and global governance
- Areas needing international attention – human rights performance; overall resource depreciation; climate change and global warming; the global nature of deprivation, inequality and wealth; the determinants of good governance; participation of civil society in decision making and human security



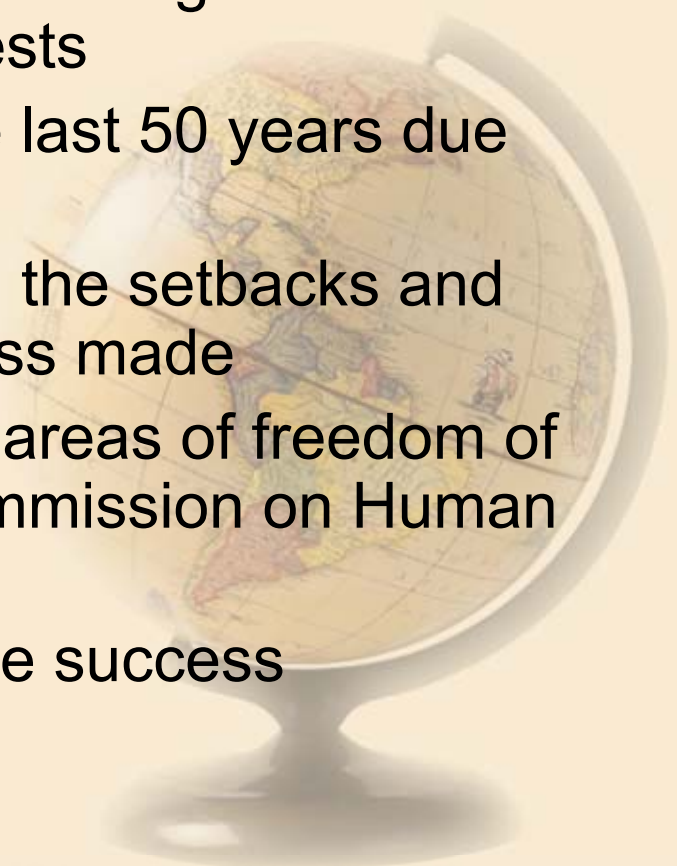
Setting the Goals

- Formulating, adopting, and promoting global development goals
- Since 1960, a total of 50 goals formulated; results have been positive but mixed
- World Bank and the IMF shied away from formulating global goals, and until the last few years ago have not formally recognized them
- MDGs are the latest in the sequence of setting goals over four decades
- Although the value of goal setting is often questioned, the record of achievement is more positive; goals have provided a spur to national policies and a benchmark for success or failure



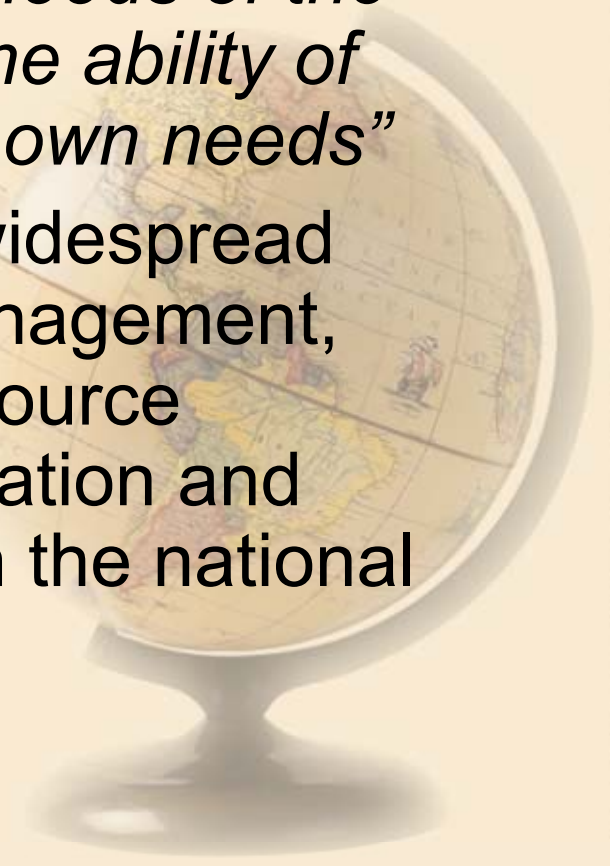
Human Rights

- Boldest idea among the four pillars underlying the UN
- Over the UN first two decades, the idea of individual rights and fundamental freedoms clash again and again with the reality of state interests
- Advances in human rights over the last 50 years due to individuals, NGOs and states
- Despite the doubts and opposition, the setbacks and inconsistencies remarkable progress made
- Work still remain to be done in the areas of freedom of information, cultural rights, the Commission on Human Rights
- UN leadership achieved remarkable success



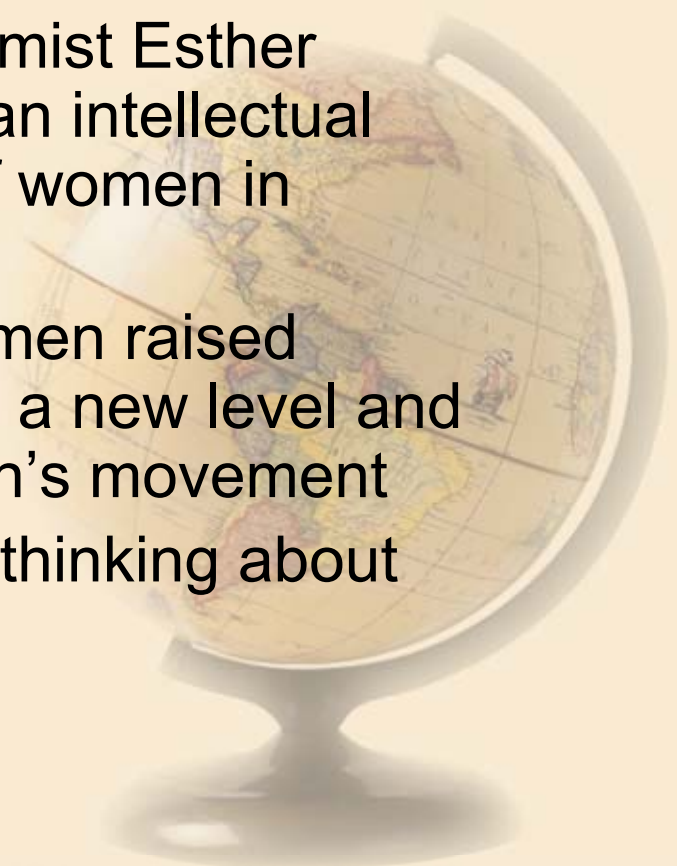
Sustainability

- UN developed a more integrated approach and defined sustainable development as *“development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”*
- UN instrumental in generating widespread interest in national resource management, introducing new concepts of resource management, and putting population and environmental problems high on the national agendas



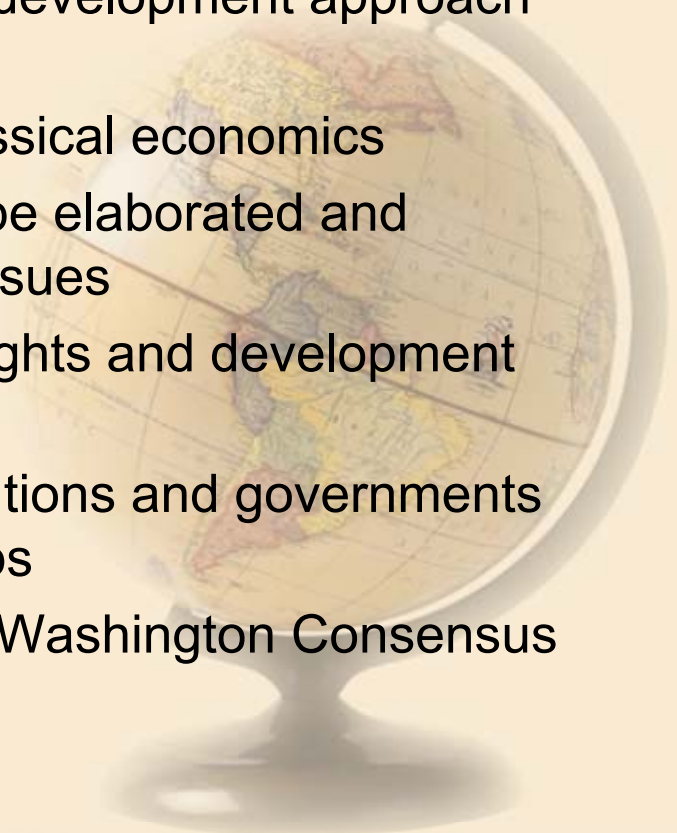
Gender Equality

- The big changes for women in economic and social development started in the 1960s
- The publication in 1970 of *Women's Role in Economic Development* by the Danish economist Esther Bosrerup working in ECE marked an intellectual breakthrough launching the field of women in development
- The four world conferences on women raised awareness and mobilized action at a new level and strengthened the worldwide women's movement
- The focus on women changed the thinking about development



Human Development

- Defined analytically as a process of strengthening human capabilities and expanding human choices
- The creative economic thinking and philosophy of Prof. Amartya Sen the Nobel laureate, gave the human development approach its robust theoretical foundation
- Marked a fundamental contrast to neoclassical economics
- Provides a frame of reference that could be elaborated and applied in a wide range of development issues
- A frame of analysis that brought human rights and development together
- Provided a framework for many UN institutions and governments to change policies and take practical steps
- A successful UN counter-offensive to the Washington Consensus



Human Security

- The long and outspoken concern of the UN for disarmament and development contrasts with the years of silence from the World Bank and the IMF
- A major conceptual shift came in 1994 when the UN Human Development Report articulated the concept of human security
- Still remains controversial
- An idea that appears to be gaining ground

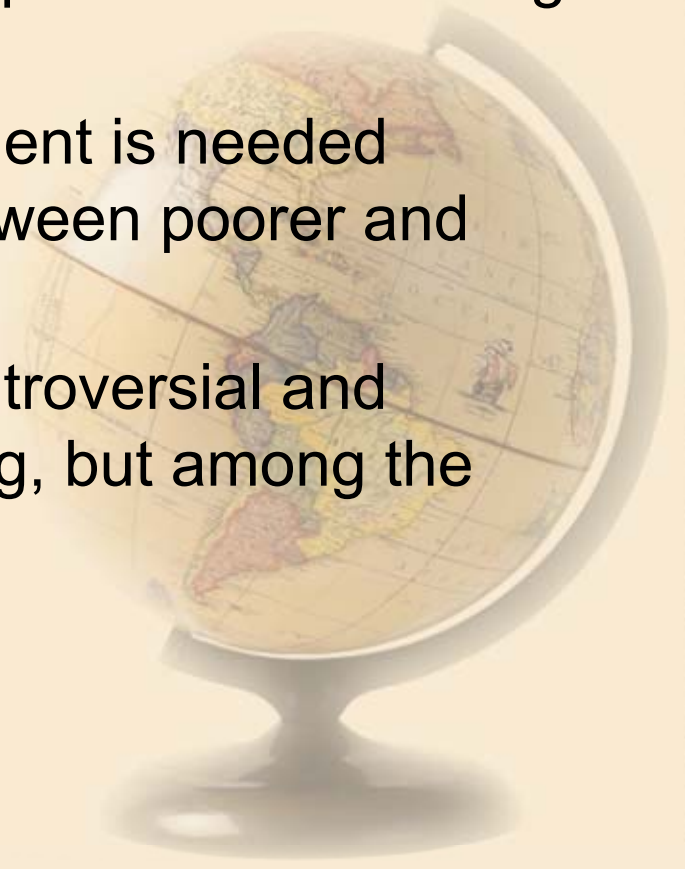


Struggling for Justice and Opportunity



Introduction

- From the beginning the UN emphasized that international action must complement national efforts for bringing about equitable development and reducing global poverty
- An enabling international environment is needed improve economic interactions between poorer and richer countries
- UN's ideas in this area is often controversial and challenging to conventional thinking, but among the most creative



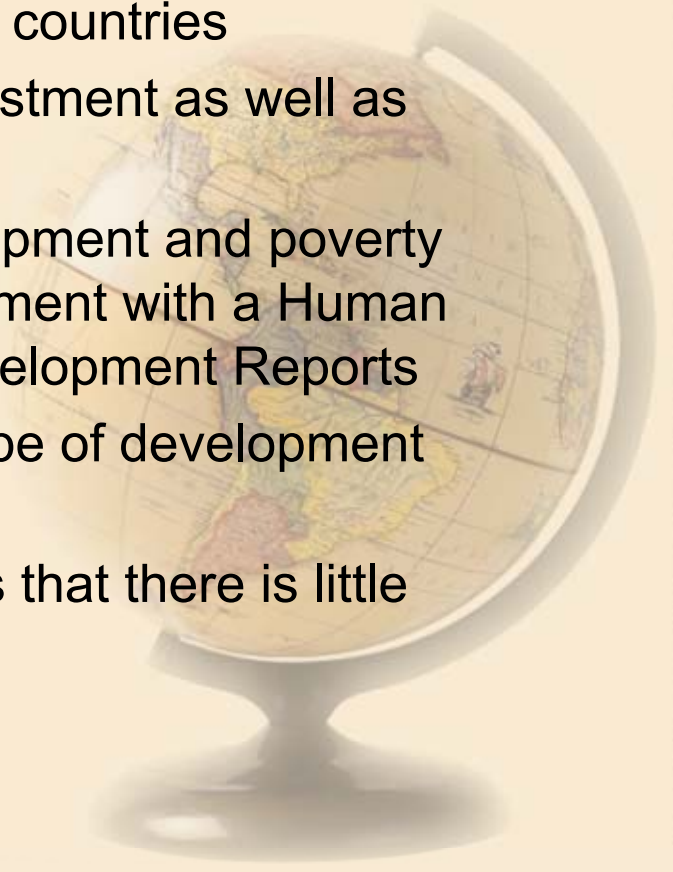
Trade, Finance and Development

- Fresh thinking on trade and finance distinguishes the UN's contributions from the views of the BWIs and dominant policies of the developed countries over the last 50 years
- UNCTAD filled an important and often pioneering gap in the international analysis of trade and finance
- Future confluence of political and economic factors, linked to greater international stability and addressing the sense of global injustice will become important element in the agenda of international economic relations



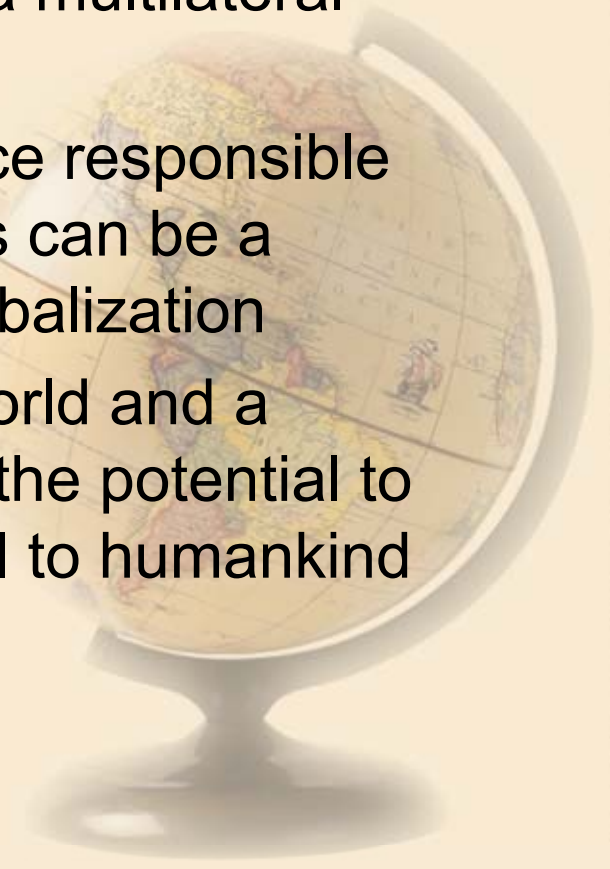
Aid and Technical Assistance

- UN's assistance moves beyond multilateral aid relations to strengthen the economies of underdeveloped countries
- Assistance provided at the request of recipient countries, and integrated in the development plans of the countries
- Technical assistance involves human investment as well as physical investment
- UN consistently emphasized social development and poverty eradication, for example UNICEF's Adjustment with a Human Face and the UNDP's Annual Human Development Reports
- MDGS a more imaginative and realistic type of development assistance
- The responses to the recent demonstrates that there is little "fatigue" for technical assistance and aid



Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Transnational Corporations (TNCs)

- UN's position on FDIs and TNCs evolved from confrontation to cooperation and voluntary agreements
- UN brought to attention the need for a multilateral approach in dealing with the TNCs
- The Global Compact seeks to advance responsible corporate citizenship so that business can be a positive force to the challenges of globalization
- UN provided a useful forum for the world and a spawning ground for ideas that have the potential to make FDIs and TNCs more beneficial to humankind



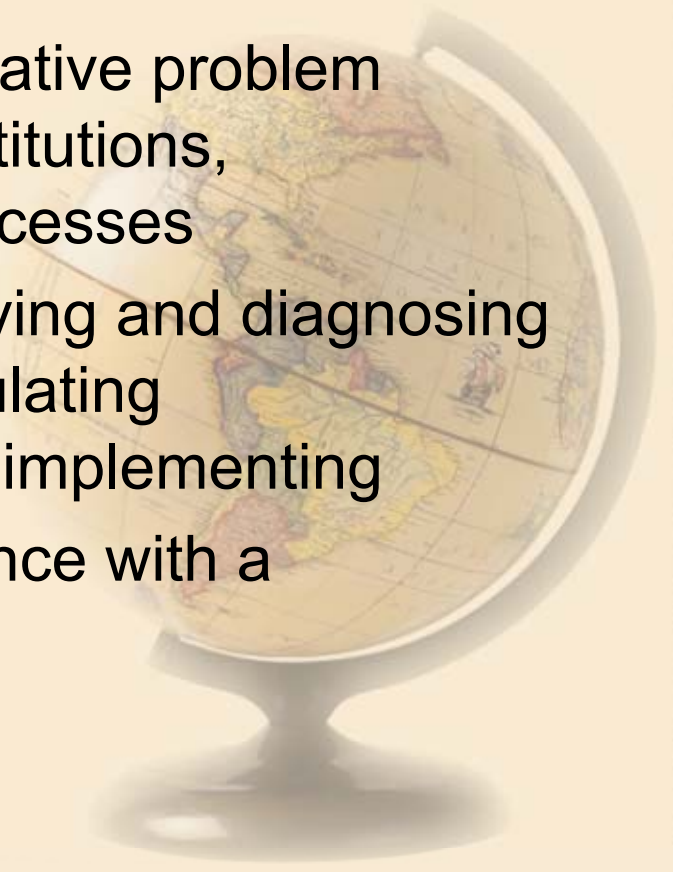
Opposing Orthodoxy

- From early on the UN struggled against the orthodoxy of the day
- UN's position stands in sharp contrast to the orthodoxy of the World Bank and IMF, reflecting the different political base of the institutions concerned
- The BWIs tend to produce analyses and policy recommendations that reflected the interests and perspectives of the developed countries while the UN tended to develop analyses, ideas, and recommendations more in tune with developing countries
- On some issues the BWIs and the UN have come together, especially during the McNamara years



Global Governance

- Defined as collective efforts to identify understand or address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacity of individual states to solve
- Refers to concrete cases of cooperative problem solving, through the complex of institutions, mechanisms, relationships and processes
- UN is an “intellectual actor”, identifying and diagnosing problems; developing norms; formulating recommendations; and sometimes implementing
- Will grow in relevance and importance with a globalizing world economy

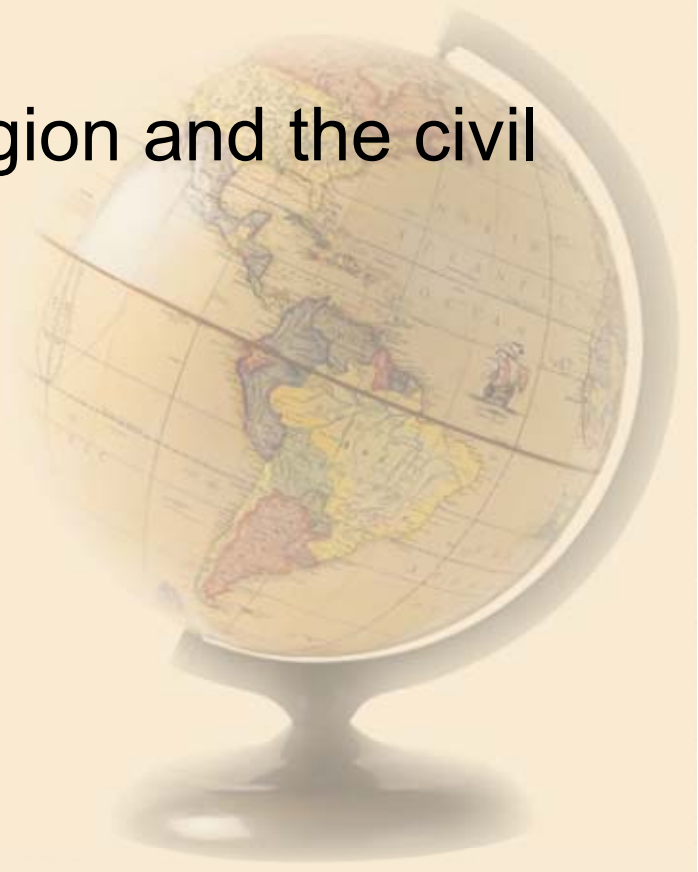


Contrasting Contributions



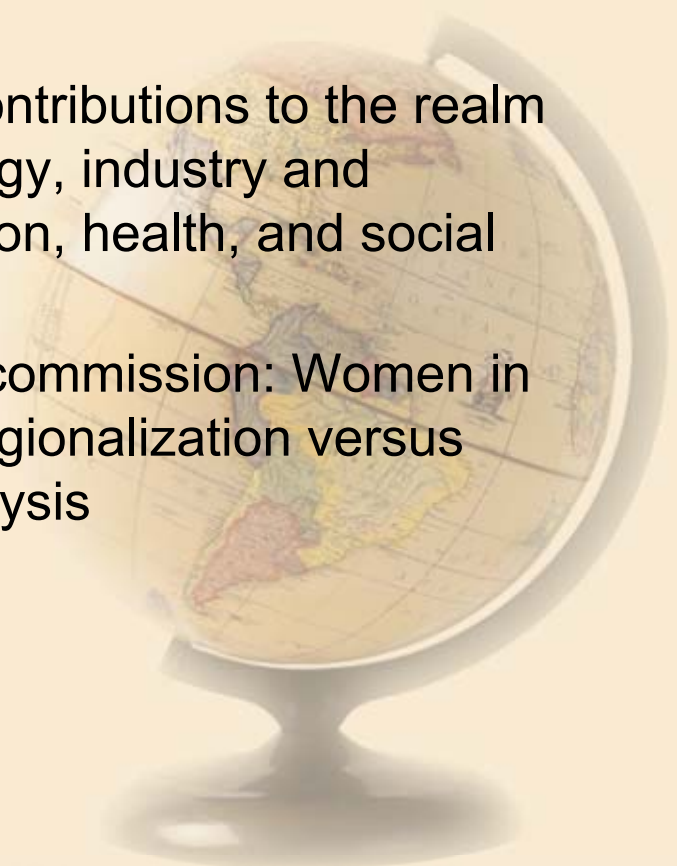
Introduction

- UN is not monolithic
- UN ideas over the past 60 years suggest a cornucopia of perspectives
- Two sources – the world's region and the civil society – will be described



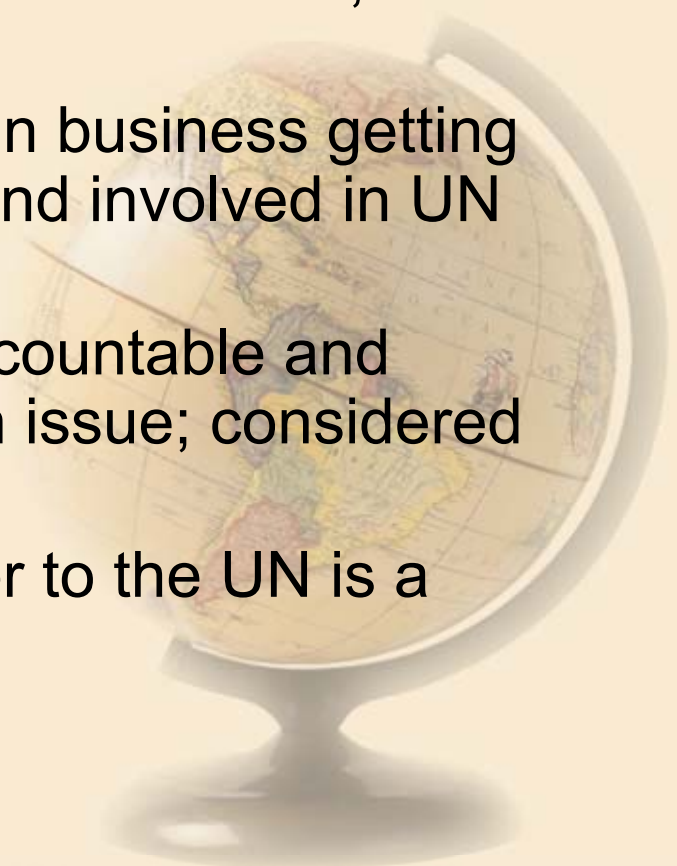
Regional Perspectives

- The strong point of the UN is its regional and country perspectives
- The UN's regional commission have made many important contributions
- Provided regional leadership, including contributions to the realm of ideas and policy analysis in trade, energy, industry and transport as well social policies in education, health, and social welfare, along with technical assistance
- Selected contributions made by regional commission: Women in Development; Development Planning; Regionalization versus Globalization; Independent Regional Analysis



Civil Society

- The role of civil society important in all areas of UN activity
- Most crucial in the case of women and children, the environment, and human rights
- The Global Compact instrumental in business getting business more closely interested and involved in UN activities
- The degree to which NGOs are accountable and representative has always been an issue; considered as “loose cannons”
- Having private enterprise get closer to the UN is a “doubled edged sword” to many



Omissions, Distortions and Failures



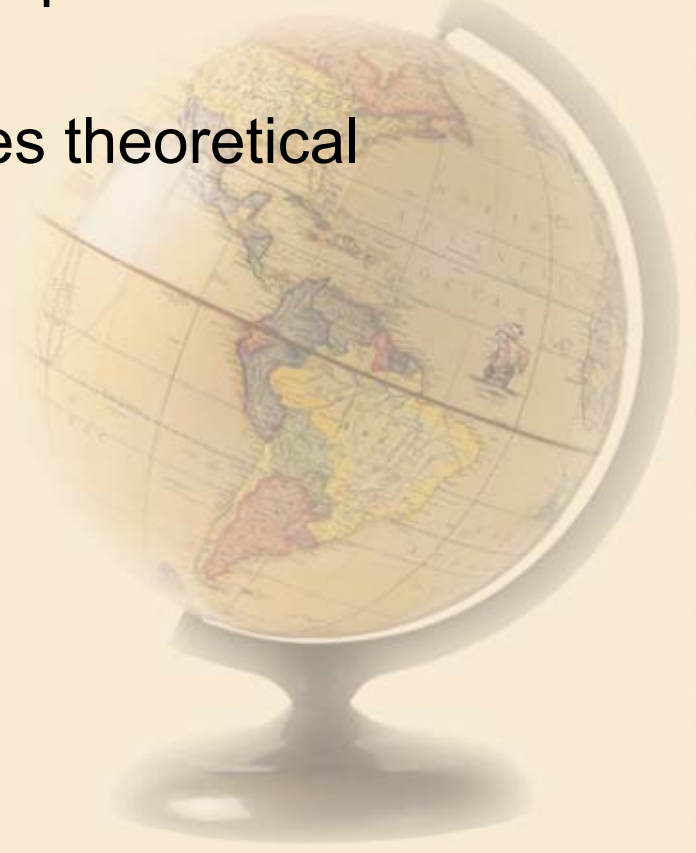
Introduction

- Important gaps in conception and execution
- Ideas floated and then forgotten
- More common were ideas which were dropped, distorted, even consciously destroyed, reinterpreted, or absorbed into a different frame



Slow Reaction to the Washington Consensus

- The UN waited until the 1990s to develop a coherent alternative to the Washington Consensus
- The human development paradigm provides a credible alternative
- In its application in practice requires theoretical strength and intellectual courage



Global Gaps in Income and Wealth

- In the last few years, issues of global inequality is “being brought in from the cold”
- The global income gap - per capita income differences between the richest and poorest countries have increased
- Such inequalities have deep implications for global governance, the functioning of the world economy, human welfare and global equity



Debt Relief

- The Highly Indebted Poor countries (HIPC) Initiatives although welcomed is grossly inadequate: too little, too late and with only a handful of countries
- A sad example of the UN's ideas been ignored or distorted



Special Measures for the LDCs and for Africa

- In 1998, there are 49 LDCs, accounting for 10 % of the world's population with the population of more than 600 million
- Although the UN identified many specific actions to accelerate growth and development in these countries, international support is short of the agreed goals
- The region with the bulk of LDCs is Africa
- The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Millennium Project are the two initiatives to address Africa's problems



HIV/AIDS

- On combating HIV/AIDS UN arrived late on the scene
- Despite promising beginnings, intellectual and operational action fell dramatically short of the challenge



Other Areas

- Rethinking what development really means; defining new objectives for social, economic and cultural development - nationally, regionally and globally
- More work on culture



The UN's Intellectual Challenges Today



Introduction

- Three types of challenges – intellectual, participatory and personnel - emerged



Intellectual Challenges

- Growing divide between the Islamic world the West
- Measures of human security
- New measures to support the LDCs and countries in transition
- Cultural aspects in the development equation
- Responding to the long-run challenges of environment and sustainability
- Global economic inequalities
- Mechanisms to ensure genuine international competition and free markets



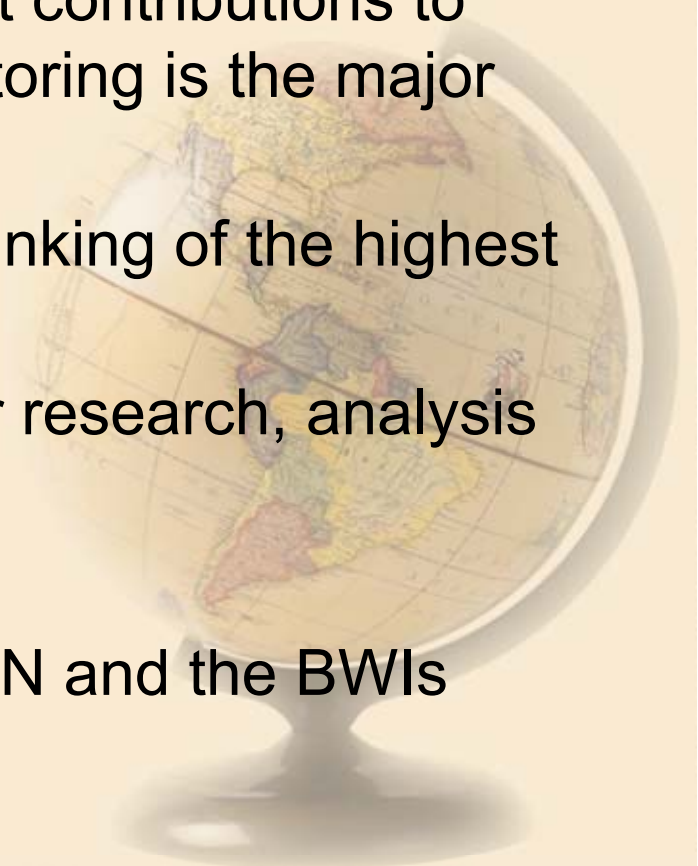
Participatory Challenges

- Strengthen developing countries participation in the management of the global economy
- Recognizing the asymmetries of economic powers and the factors underlying them
- Devising measures to offset these asymmetries
- Requesting the appropriate UN institutions to work closely with the WTO and the BWIs on these issues



Personnel Challenges

- Returning to intellectual leadership through ensuring creative thinking
- Recognition by the UN system that contributions to ideas, thinking, analysis and monitoring is the major part of their work
- Encourage and reward creative thinking of the highest intellectual quality
- Mobilize more financial support for research, analysis and policy exploration
- Disseminating new ideas
- Improving relations between the UN and the BWIs



**“Ideas Matter. People
Matter.”**

