QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THOUGHT

1. Do you agree or disagree that the power that the IMF and World Bank exercise over many developing countries is a positive force for ensuring good policies?
2. Have the reforms that the World Bank introduced to its policy prescription since the 1990s solved the problems identified in structural adjustment?
3. Are the IMF and World Bank likely to be a cure or a curse for a contemporary world facing ongoing economic crisis?

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CHAPTER 10

THE UNITED NATIONS AND MULTILATERAL ACTORS IN DEVELOPMENT

David Sogge

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To learn about the most important development and humanitarian institutions operating within the UN system and outside it.
- To understand the geopolitical contexts, global economic flows, and tensions under which these organizations operate.
- To appreciate their respective influence and significance.

As the world becomes one place, many of our problems show no respect for national borders. These problems range from killer viruses to regional wars. Fuelling them are inequalities born of maldevelopment and the inflammable politics of injustice and humiliation. To cope with such threats, and to promote their own national interests, governments have chosen to act collectively: they have drawn up joint conventions, signed mutual defence pacts, set up international agencies, and formed economic blocs. Today there are more than 5,000 intergovernmental organizations (IGO-Search.org) and more than 500 major international agreements (Treaties.UN.org).

'Development' has long been a common cause for multilateral action. Rich-country governments have rallied together under the banner of foreign aid, where multilateralism means singing from the same policy song sheets and contributing to the same collection boxes. Multilateral aid accounts for about 30 per cent of all net aid originating from Western governments. Yet that funding share understates the influence of multilateral aid givers and lenders. Multilateral agencies design and transmit most of the policy formulas about how non-Western economies and governments should be run. Some observers claim that multilateral arrangements are intrinsically better than bilateral (one-to-one) arrangements because they tend to specialize in sectors, operate with lower overhead costs relative to financial turnover, and co-ordinate their aid more effectively. But others are less convinced. This chapter begins with an overview of some of the main multilateral actors in development and some claims and counter-claims made about them.

Multilateralism refers to arrangements among three or more states, commonly for peaceful purposes over extended periods. Such arrangements can help governments improve their standing, influence, security, or economic advantage. So-called middle powers like Canada and the Netherlands usually favour multilateral approaches because they bring more benefits, at less cost and risk, than going it alone. Big powers like the United States, on the other hand, tend to pursue multilateralism 'à la carte', co-operating only when it suits them. In the twenty-first century, the unilateral approach has again become more common, as shown in one-to-one trade pacts and increased use of bilateral aid. But despite those tendencies, states continue

drawing together in the face of ever-bigger problems that transcend borders. They are increasingly bound by treaties, consultation systems, and agencies controlled multilaterally. In matters of international trade and investment, there are well-developed multilateral rules and means of enforcing them. Powerful players in global capitalism have thereby gained and consolidated their advantages. Less powerful are the many multilateral institutions with mandates in issues of social development and justice. This chapter discusses multilateral organizations clustered according to the source of their oversight, as follows:

1. the United Nations system;
2. Western industrialized governments;
3. governments of non-Western countries.

We focus on their structures and functions and on their evolution according to shifting ideological currents and power balances. This perspective helps to bring out the distinction between international organizations (the products) and international organization (the process) as a means of grasping their roles and significance.

THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

The **United Nations** was conceived in the closing months of World War II. The triumphant great powers—Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States—negotiated and eventually agreed on a design for a new world body, the United Nations Organization, replacing its weak predecessor, the League of Nations (1919–46). It would be open to all but would reflect the strategic preferences of the United States, the one country then possessing the overwhelming military, diplomatic, and financial means to bring about such a global project. Yet while the US may have wished to call all the shots, it could not act alone. It needed other nations' co-operation and consent if it was to shape a new global order according to its interests; therefore it recruited France and China, together with Britain and the Soviet Union (Russia after 1991), as permanent members of the UN Security Council, supposedly the world's highest authority over urgent issues of peace and security.

During its first phase, up to the late 1950s, the United Nations was the main launching pad for initiatives to promote a peace- and prosperity-seeking world. It was the 'mother church' of developmental optimism. At the same time, the UN was sometimes used as a geostrategic instrument for a few powerful countries. It provided legitimacy and armed forces in support of Western and especially US foreign policy, such as for the war in Korea in the early 1950s and the upheaval in the Congo in the early 1960s. With the UN headquarters in New York City and as its largest funder, the US holds decisive influence over the organization. However, the UN has not always behaved as an obedient servant to American global political and economic ambitions; indeed, it has often been a forum for non-Western countries to resist Western pressures.

The 1960s ushered in a second and more tumultuous phase for the UN. On the front of economic and social co-operation, the post-war emphasis on reconstruction in Europe was overtaken by a new, longer-term challenge: development in non-Western countries, particularly those emerging from decades of colonial rule. At its founding in 1945, the United Nations comprised 51 states; 15 years later, new sovereign nations in Africa and Asia had pushed its membership to 99. The Soviet Union promoted and tried to influence national self-determination, as shown in its support for anti-colonial efforts in Vietnam, Mozambique, and Angola. But so did the United States, which in the late 1940s, for example, hastened the departure of the Dutch from Indonesia. Yet decolonization did not occur in these nations always according to the wishes of the Western 'First World' or the 'Second World' of the Communist bloc. A 'Third World' emerged with legacies of the colonial period, including a vibrant tradition of resistance. As UN membership grew and tilted the General Assembly's one-state-one-vote balance towards the non-Western world, new issues emerged on the UN's agenda and expanded the scope of its agencies' work.

In the 1990s, a third and far more troubled phase began, ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the active propagation of a particularly coarse variety of capitalism. Western nations supported the deployment of UN 'blue helmet' troops to try to restore order where conflict was at its worst, such as in the former Yugoslavia, Haiti, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Yet even more marked were Great Power preferences for pursuing their interests unilaterally, bypassing the United Nations. By the early twenty-first century, Anglo-Saxon coalitions under US leadership and abetted by right-wing

PHOTO 10.1 UN troops in Africa.
Source: Chr. Michelsen Institute/Ingrid Samset

governments had begun to disregard some fundamental rules of conduct in international politics, including UN rules restricting the use of armed force. New US-led ideologies of development favoured the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). They consigned the United Nations and its agencies to fourth or fifth place in the global pecking order. Nevertheless, multilateral agreements such as the UN's Millennium Development Goals and the landmine ban treaty continue to arise. While trade and investment matters have driven much multilateral deal-making in recent years, elites have also sometimes worked jointly regarding the environment and health. When faced with active citizen pressure, those elites may act out of genuine conviction, but often they take stands because they want to avoid a public impression that they are doing nothing. Today, it is hard to detect great optimism about a rapid advance of multilateralism for democratic and equitable responses to problems of rights, poverty, and the environment.

Origin and Oversight of UN Agencies

The twentieth century saw international organizations grow and diversify. Those emerging under UN auspices are among the best known. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for example, became a household word because of its inherently appealing role in meeting the basic needs of children and those caring for them.

Giving rise to these organizations were certain ideas or assumptions. One was a widespread optimism, in both capitalist and communist nations, about what modern science and management methods could accomplish. In the 1940s and 1950s, terms like 'modernization', 'planning', and 'population control' entered the discourse. Guiding the creation of UN agencies was a view of development as essentially a set of technical problems. It was taken for granted that problems could be solved if they got sufficient attention from professionals such as medical specialists, engineers, crop scientists, and economists. Thus, development agencies grew according to a logic of

technical functionalism. According to that logic, each professional group's know-how would be best applied through separate, large-scale organizations managed from the top down. Development was an off-the-shelf commodity ready for delivery to those deemed 'underdeveloped'. The approach seemed rational and democratic, since it was assumed that each nation took part in UN processes with full understanding and without coercion. Talk of interdependence, co-operation, and fellowship further legitimized multilateral rules and norms. These norms helped to insulate multilateral agencies from left/right ideologies and Great Power politics. The idea was to allow 'neutral' professionals to define the problems and get on with the job of solving them. In these ways, the technicians-in-white-coats image of multilateral action camouflaged its politics.

According to the first article of its Charter, the United Nations is intended 'to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all'. The Charter's ninth chapter describes the UN's powers regarding economic and social issues. It defines the specialized agencies and mandates creation of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), today composed of representatives of 54 states elected for three-year terms by members of the General Assembly. ECOSOC might seem to be the world's supreme forum for development policy, but not long after its creation it was shown to have little authority, even over the specialized agencies formally answerable to it.

The UN categorizes its organizations mainly according their lines of accountability and funding. The first main category comprises *specialized agencies*. These are distinct organizations, established by **intergovernmental** treaties. They have their own charters and governing bodies; they appoint their own chief executives. States may join or withdraw as they wish. Each has an agreement linking it to the UN, although not all of these agreements involve close, subordinate ties. In formal terms, the World Bank and the IMF are specialized UN agencies, but in practice they operate in complete independence of the UN. Most specialized agencies are funded through obligatory contributions from governments, based on each country's capacity to pay.[1]

The second main category is that of UN *organs*, also termed *programs* or *funds*. They are direct arms of the United Nations itself and are thus answerable ultimately to the General Assembly. Unlike that of the specialized agencies, their funding is through voluntary contributions, chiefly from governments. They therefore face financial incentives to perform well, or at least to develop the means to advertise and 'sell' themselves effectively. A third category comprises UN agencies, such as for peacekeeping and humanitarian action, that operate under the direct supervision of the Secretary-General's office. Major bodies engaged in development and humanitarian tasks are depicted in Figure 10.1.

THE AGENCIES

The UN's family tree has grown many branches over several generations. Its development-related agencies, programs, funds, commissions, and other institutions number several dozen. This section discusses only the most prominent of them, grouped according to their fields of responsibility.

Food, Agriculture, and Rural Development

Established in 1945 following preparatory meetings in the US and Canada, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a UN specialized agency. Its headquarters are in Rome, where an earlier world body, the International Institute of Agriculture, had been based. The FAO's chief mandate is to provide governments with information and policy advice on food, agriculture, and rural development. It also runs development projects and provides emergency assistance in response to droughts and insect plagues. Together with crop research institutes financed by the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, it has pushed controversial 'green revolution' technologies designed for those farmers and agri-businesses with a lot of land, skills, and financial assets (see Chapter 18). In the 1980s, the FAO promoted notions of food security and drew attention to nutritional issues.

But despite its advertised pursuit of fairer rural development, the FAO continues to meet criticism. Donors and even former board members have expressed concerns about the organization's mediocre performance and management. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have criticized the FAO's accommodation of global agri-businesses, including the International Agri-Food Network, an

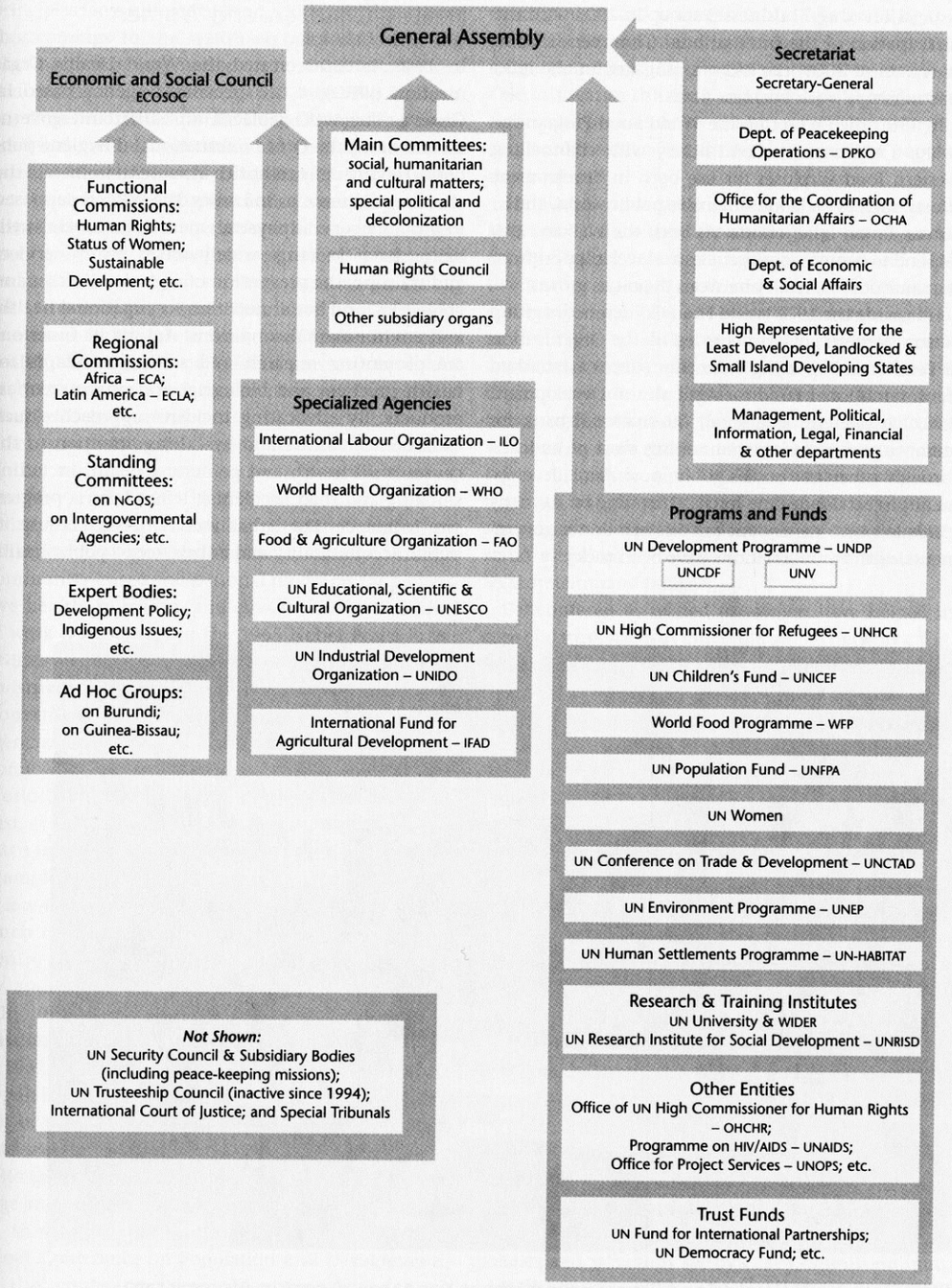

FIGURE 10.1 **Major UN Entities with Development and Humanitarian Functions**

association of agri-businesses set up in 1996 with the participation of the International Chamber of Commerce. As of 2009, the FAO was engaged in about 35 'partnerships' with business firms.

In 1961, the FAO set up the World Food Programme (WFP), a UN organ tasked initially with channelling Western food surpluses for use both in development efforts, such as for labour-intensive public works, and in humanitarian relief efforts. As both the WFP and FAO respond to complex emergencies and seek support from the same donors, rivalry between them has grown.

Following the 1974 World Food Conference, a group of non-Western governments led by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) established the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). It operates as a small international bank for member governments, channelling most of its loans through other UN bodies to support rural development projects. A decline in OPEC funding by the early 1990s left IFAD dependent on Western donor governments, with whom relations have been rocky.

Health, Children, and Women

In 1948, ECOSOC created the World Health Organization (WHO), a UN specialized agency based in Geneva. The WHO replaced an earlier intergovernmental body, the Office international d'hygiène publique. Having defined health as more than merely the absence of disease or infirmity, the WHO is supposed to promote general physical, mental, and social well-being. Its tasks range widely across health services and training, the prevention of endemic diseases and epidemics, and better nutrition, occupational health, and environmental conditions. Among its functions are promoting research and setting standards for health practices and biological and pharmaceutical products. By advocating inclusive approaches such as basic health care and by calling attention to the causes of ill health and premature death (including smoking and road accidents), it has been a progressive influence. But it has met criticism because its public accountability and adherence to public health

PHOTO 10.2 **UN World Food Programme flight at Kandahar airport in Afghanistan.**
Source: © Catherine Pappas

principles have suffered erosion. Critics attribute those shortcomings to the WHO's accommodation of big pharmaceutical corporations, whose interests seldom concern health problems of the poor. 'Big Pharma' has improved its corporate image by making modest donations to the WHO and by participating in its 'partnerships', of which today there are at least 35. Yet the sincerity of pharmaceutical companies' commitments to universal better health is in doubt, given their resistance to low-income nations' production and use of low-cost generic drugs. Also marginalizing the WHO as a progressive force have been competitive moves by the World Bank (see Chapter 9) to offer health policy advice and Western pressures to restrict the WHO to merely technical matters such as communicable disease control.

Set up in 1946 by the General Assembly to help feed, clothe, and vaccinate children in post-war Europe, the New York-based UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) today pursues a worldwide mandate focused on child survival and development, chiefly through community-based and national programs for preventive health, nutrition, and education. For this kind of work it was awarded the 1965 Nobel Peace Prize. UNICEF also promotes legislation for child protection consistent with the 1990 International Child Rights Convention. In the 1980s, it stood out among aid agencies for its dissent against orthodox macroeconomic austerity policies promoted by the IMF, the World Bank, and most other official donors. In the past, it was one of the few agencies to join activist NGOs in challenging corporations; it denounced, for example, the deadly effects of infant formula foods in low-income countries. UNICEF's data and analyses, much of them produced at its Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, focus on poverty, inequality, and powerlessness.

In 1946, ECOSOC established its Population Commission to draw attention to population issues. Then, in 1967, the General Assembly set up the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), whose original financial backing came from the United States. Its mandate was to disseminate information and promote policies for better access to family planning knowledge and services. In Cairo in 1994, the UN convened its third decennial world gathering, the International Conference on Population and Development. At this conference, governments reached a more unified view of the linkages between population, development, and women's rights. Reinforced by this political consensus, and in the teeth of conservative religious and political opposition, the UNFPA has been able to advance thinking and action on reproductive rights and reproductive health, which have largely displaced the discourse of family planning or population control.

Helping to drive these achievements was the much larger global movement for women's rights and gender equity. That movement gained momentum and effectiveness by helping to create and steer UN commissions, conferences, agencies, and research-and-training bodies. In 1946, building on earlier non-governmental and intergovernmental efforts, the UN launched its Commission on the Status of Women. Along with other organizations, it promoted international conventions on such matters as women's rights in political participation, working life, human trafficking, marriage, and property. For governments adhering to these conventions, these global policy commitments stand as points of reference for national legislation, legal systems, and budgets.

UN conferences related to women have helped to consolidate consensus and build global networks. The World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico in 1975, was unprecedented in scope and importance. Among its results was the establishment of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), a UN organ located within the UN Development Programme. Today its focus is on women's economic security and rights, violence against women, reducing HIV/AIDS, and gender justice in democratic governance.

Extending and reinforcing the impact of these agencies and commissions are **knowledge-based institutes**. Among the most important is the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), headquartered since 1983 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Its work involves the economic, political, and domestic challenges to women's rights as human rights. In July 2010, UNIFEM, INSTRAW, and two other UN bodies merged to form UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. UN Women is tasked with supporting the UN Commission on the Status of Women, helping member states implement policies and standards set by that Commission, and holding the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality.

Education, Science, Culture, and Media

Established in 1946, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency headquartered in Paris, where previously an intergovernmental forum to promote intellectual and cultural life had existed. UNESCO's mandate is to promote national systems of education, natural and social science education, and the exchange of knowledge, cultural policies including cultural heritage, and communications technology and media policy. In intergovernmental conferences such as the one held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, UNESCO has tried to forge consensus around education as a public good that should be available to all (see Chapter 21). Such principles are not easy to promote. They collide with today's globalization axioms, which hold that scientific knowledge and education are not public goods but commodities that people have to pay for in the marketplace. At the same time, along with many other UN agencies, UNESCO has been drawn into 'partnerships' with private-sector actors; today it is engaged in about 30 of these.

Internal management failures have sometimes limited UNESCO's effectiveness. But external challenges have been more serious. In the 1970s, UNESCO's relations with Western donor governments turned sour because it sponsored an initiative by non-Western governments to eliminate biases against them in the world's media (see Box 10.1). Meanwhile, the World Bank, which exercises major influence over education policy in low-income countries, has become a serious competitor.

Environment and Shelter

Following citizen initiatives in Europe and North America, the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden, signalled a major breakthrough in advancing global environmental issues on public and political agendas throughout the world. That initiative helped to spawn further citizen action, national legislation, environment ministries, and further global environmental meetings. It led the UN General Assembly in 1972 to create the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, it has regional and specialized offices around the world. UNEP's chief tasks are to monitor and assess global and regional environmental conditions, to facilitate negotiations of global environmental agreements and supervise their enforcement, to raise awareness about environmental challenges, and to manage specific projects on issues such as climate change and biodiversity. Some UNEP initiatives include anti-poverty dimensions, such as combatting the pollution of urban water supplies (see Chapter 17).

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), also headquartered in Nairobi, focuses on basic development and poverty issues. Founded in 1978, it was an outcome of the first Conference on Human Settlements, known as Habitat I, convened by the UN in 1976 in Vancouver, Canada. In 1996 a second conference, Habitat II, in Istanbul, Turkey, drew up a broad agenda for governments and others to tackle the massive and fast-growing problems of cities in low-income countries. That agenda poses an implicit challenge to market-led development because it holds that adequate shelter is a right, not merely a commodity. Working with member governments and specialized NGOs, UN-HABITAT promotes policies, laws, and planning methods around housing, land use, water and sanitation, security, and urban governance. It also promotes research and knowledge-sharing (see Box 10.2).

Employment and Working Life

The International Labour Organization (ILO), today a UN specialized agency headquartered in Geneva, emerged in 1919 out of the settlement of World War I. A product of civil society, it took shape after many decades of labour organizing and the advance of social democratic parties in industrialized countries. It is unique among world organizations in that representatives of civil society—namely, organized labour and employers' organizations—participate in its governance together with governments. Historically, the ILO's chief function has been to define and promote standards for working and social conditions, chiefly through intergovernmental conventions. In overwhelming numbers, national governments have ratified ILO conventions to advance four 'Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work'—freedom of association and collective bargaining, the elimination of forced labour, non-discrimination, and the elimination of child labour—as well as many other ILO conventions and recommendations.

Nonetheless, some of these universal statutes face opposition, not least from the United States, which has refused to ratify conventions on freedom of association and on discrimination. Those conventions may have overwhelming world support, but without American backing their enforcement is difficult. The ILO has tried to counter the harmful effects of globalization through studies, conferences, and thematic campaigns on 'decent work'. It keeps trying to influence policies of the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, though without much success. For most people in most countries, a decent job is the highest development priority. The ILO is the only UN body regularly paying attention to job creation and decent livelihoods. Originally focused on formal sectors in industrialized countries,

CRITICAL ISSUES BOX 10.1 NEW WORLD INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ORDER

In the late 1970s, officials, journalists, and activists, mainly from non-Western countries, launched a debate about the dominance of Western media in the world and the lack of adequate access to unbiased information among people around the world. They challenged the way that Western media stereotyped non-Western societies by simplifying, exaggerating, and generally biasing coverage while crowding out alternative, non-Western sources of news and analysis. Concentrated in the hands of a small number of Western corporations, ownership and control over news and information gathering, interpretation, and dissemination also has drawn criticism.

UNESCO was at the centre of this debate. In 1980, its International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by the Nobel Peace laureate Seán MacBride, published its report, *Many Voices, One World*. The Commission made the case for what came to be called a New World Information and Communication Order—NWICO. In essence, this meant democratization of information production and consumption by enlarging, diversifying, and strengthening media, particularly in non-Western countries. To achieve such democratization, inequalities of access to communication infrastructure and technology would have to be redressed.

The US, the UK, and a few other governments, strongly backed by mainstream media and right-wing think-tanks in the West, argued that the NWICO was a stratagem to curb press freedoms and free markets. The US withdrew from UNESCO in 1984, rejoining only in 2003. Arguably, this opposition merely deflected the emergence of a new media order, which has seen contrasting developments: the rise of powerful media corporations, often allied to vested political and business interests, together with the rise of Internet-based and other communication technologies, which are extending and amplifying citizens' voices across borders. (For an overview of the NWICO controversy, see Brown-Syed, 1993.)

CRITICAL ISSUES BOX 10.2 SLUMS: A UNITED NATIONS ALERT

The breathtaking spread of low-income settlements is the chief theme of *The Challenge of Slums*, a historic and sombre report published in October 2003 by UN-HABITAT (also see Chapter 19). This first truly global audit of urban poverty, which follows in the famous footsteps of Friedrich Engels, Henry Mayhew, Charles Booth, and Jacob Riis, culminates two centuries of scientific reconnaissance of slum life that began with James Whitelaw's 1805 *Survey of Poverty in Dublin*.

As one author has written,

> If the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change represent an unprecedented scientific consensus on the dangers of global warming, then *The Challenge of Slums* sounds an equally authoritative warning about the worldwide catastrophe of urban poverty. (Davis, 2006: 20–1)

the ILO today addresses both the formal and informal economies in non-Western countries. Through training and technical assistance projects, such as labour-intensive public works, the ILO has contributed to thinking and action on employment and labour relations. However, in a world where workers are increasingly mere commodities in a global marketplace, the ILO's original purposes are under severe challenge (see Standing, 2008).

Trade, Investment, and Corporate Accountability

In 1964, at the initiative of African, Asian, and Latin American governments concerned about their disadvantaged status in the world economic system, the General Assembly created the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), with headquarters in Geneva. In its first three decades, UNCTAD tried to forge new policies in international trade, serve as a forum for negotiating trade agreements, and steer UN development thinking. Its campaign for a fairer world trade system was heavily influenced by concepts of dependency (see Chapters 3 and 15) and Keynesian social democracy as articulated by its first secretary-general, the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch (1901–86). The Group of 77 (discussed later in this chapter) had internal differences but was united in the view that no single development path was best. Those nations used UNCTAD to try to preserve what little economic sovereignty they had and to gain occasional trade concessions favouring non-Western exporters, such as a 1970 agreement on a 'generalized system of preferences'.

Rich countries generally disliked UNCTAD because they saw it as a forum siding with non-Western countries. Their strategy was to undercut its legitimacy and insist on the primacy of the Bretton Woods institutions. They promoted the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which evolved into the more highly structured World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. The WTO (and GATT previously) operates outside UN auspices. By the early 1990s, after a decade of concerted effort by the US under Ronald Reagan and the UK under Margaret Thatcher, the West finally forced a change. In 1992, the rich countries decisively sidelined UNCTAD as a forum for negotiating trade rules. From that moment on its focus shifted from the global stage, where it had campaigned for systemic change, to domestic arenas, where each government was expected to retool its economy along neoliberal lines. This meant privatizing public assets, lowering taxes on external trade and investment, and radically reducing control over inward and especially outward flows of capital. Attention to domestic markets could wait; the task was to orient national economies in an outward direction. UNCTAD's role shifted from helping non-Western countries negotiate deals with the world economic system to promoting their integration into the Western-dominated world economic system.

Today, UNCTAD's work is in promoting policies. It does this through its intergovernmental conferences, held every four years; through research and analysis, including the compilation of statistics on trade and investment; and through technical assistance to governments on their trade and investment policies. It promotes private foreign investment through such programs as the Investment Deliverables Initiatives, a joint venture with the International Chamber of Commerce, and the Geneva-based International Trade Centre, a joint venture with the WTO chiefly serving exporting companies. In the UN system, UNCTAD has particular roles regarding the so-called least developed countries (LDCs). It runs programs to speed their repayment of international debts, to develop small-scale enterprise, and to attract foreign investment.

In 1973, ECOSOC set up the UN Commission on Transnational Corporations and a research program managed by a New York–based Centre on Transnational Corporations (UNCTC). That centre gathered data, commissioned studies, held workshops, and prepared a draft code of conduct for transnational corporations—a code that Western business interests contested and UN members never ratified. In 1994, following concerted pressure by business lobbies, the UN abolished the UNCTC and placed its residual responsibilities under UNCTAD's Commission on Investment, Technology and Enterprise Development—whose role is not that of a watchdog but mainly that of a *promoter* of global corporations (see Chapter 11).

Humanitarian and Peacekeeping Action

From its earliest years, the United Nations had to face humanitarian emergencies. The forced expatriation of people from Palestine in 1948 led the UN to set up its

Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); 60 years later, that UN program is still vital and effective. However, it is regularly under pressure from Israel and the United States, which seek to delegitimize its work. In 1950, the General Assembly created the office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to co-ordinate action and raise money to help refugees; in the early Cold War years, the priority was on people seeking asylum from Communist Eastern Europe. In 1967, the UN broadened the UNHCR's mandate to include future as well as past refugee flows and to cover the entire world, thus effectively shifting its focus to non-Western settings.

Complex political emergencies, many of them arising from Cold War conflicts, have produced much human suffering. In response to these tragedies, the UN has set up a number of multilateral agencies. At the centre of the effort is the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), headquartered in New York. Its director has the status of a UN undersecretary-general. OCHA's main tasks are needs assessment, fundraising from governments, humanitarian policy development, and field co-ordination involving UN agencies, Red Cross organizations, and NGOs. It supports a number of specialized organizations, including a news network, IRIN, set up in 1995 in recognition of the power of media to mobilize political and financial backing for humanitarian causes.

The UN's humanitarian response is often linked with its peacekeeping missions, of which 64 were undertaken between 1948 and 2011. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), headquartered in New York, has become a significant actor in attempts to create preconditions for reconstruction and development in politically fragile countries. With increasing frequency since the end of the Cold War, troops under United Nations auspices have been placed in zones of conflict. As of 2011, some 82,000

PHOTO 10.3 UNHCR engages in a repatriation operation for displaced refugees.
Source: Chr. Michelsen Institute/Jean-Christophe Goussand

'blue helmets', 17,000 police personnel, and more than 20,000 civilian staff were on active duty in 14 countries; only the United States places more military personnel abroad. Yet in 2011, UN peacekeeping accounted for only about 0.4 per cent of total military spending across the globe.

Armed conflicts have seriously set back economic, social, and political progress in low-income countries. The UN has responded often by deploying its peacekeeping and peace enforcement troops, the 'blue helmets', recruited mainly from the Global South; as of 2011 the five leading providers were Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nigeria, and Egypt. While a few of these missions, such as in Côte d'Ivoire and post-war Mozambique, have contributed to peace, others, such as in Angola, Congo, and Rwanda, have largely failed. That has led to two kinds of criticism from academic and civil society observers. First, such responses often neglect the socio-political causes of conflict, and second, UN interventions on the ground can make solutions more difficult to achieve because they narrow options along 'militarized' or 'securitized' lines. These matters are discussed in Chapter 22.

Steering Action, Influencing Thinking

In 1965, the General Assembly established the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under ECOSOC. Unlike other UN bodies, it has no specific mandate or formal charter. Yet it has high standing in the UN system; its chief executive officer, the administrator, ranks third after the secretary-general and deputy secretary-general. Set up originally to co-ordinate aid efforts, the UNDP has assumed strategic positions high on aid chains as a promoter of policy. Today, it describes itself as a network and advocacy organization for development.

Headquartered in New York, the UNDP has liaison offices in Geneva, Brussels, Copenhagen, Tokyo, and Washington. In non-Western countries where it operates, its resident representative usually serves as coordinator for the entire United Nations system. The UNDP operates in 166 countries, giving it more extensive field presence than the World Bank. Yet in financial terms it works at about one-tenth the scale of the World Bank, whose two main arms, the IDA and IBRD, together lent about US$47 billion in 2009. Because it is answerable to the UN General Assembly and to recipient governments, the UNDP should in principle be among the most accountable and responsive agencies in the aid and development industry. Its dependence on annual voluntary contributions from rich donor countries, however, sets limits to its responsiveness to recipients.

As of 2011, the UNDP was focusing efforts on four clusters of issues:

- governance, with emphasis on participation and responsive institutions;
- poverty reduction, as defined by the Millennium Development Goals;
- crisis prevention and recovery;
- addressing climate change, environmental degradation, and energy deficits for the poor.

In all four issue-areas, the UNDP emphasizes human rights and women's empowerment. Under UNDP coordination, other UN agencies follow a prescribed planning cycle, beginning with a country-level assessment and leading to a UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and a UNDP country program and action plan. Such plans may be technically competent and formulated through consultative processes, but their usefulness can be limited by the widespread assumption that poverty and governance problems are mainly domestic matters to be resolved by authorities within a given national territory. Yet in a globalized world, main drivers of development problems are not confined to the national territory. Rather, they stem from *global* flows of money, information, people, weapons, and other commodities. For example, illicit capital flight, facilitated by corporations and tax havens under Western jurisdictions, takes at least twice as much money out of Africa as the aid system provides for the continent. Hence, a severe constraint on this new UN approach, or any development and aid framework and plan confined to the country level, is that it neglects global flows and the strong incentives that accompany them.

Several agencies operate under the UNDP. The UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) has developed a model in which citizens co-determine where and how aid should be used in local development. The UN Volunteers (UNV), as of 2011, supported about 7,500 persons working in development or rehabilitation projects, most of them linked with UN agencies. The

Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (SU/TCDC), originated in the 1970s at the initiative of non-Western governments seeking more 'South–South' interchange.

Together with the ILO, UNICEF, and UNCTAD, the UNDP has enabled alternative views to be voiced in policy debates normally dominated by organizations based in Washington. The UNDP's *Human Development Report*, for example, has put forward a social democratic view of development. That publication has created intellectual competition for the World Bank's *World Development Report*, which despite editorial flip-flops (switching positions, for example, about the role of the state in development), follows an orthodox line. Policy research from the UNDP's International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, based in Brazil, provides counterpoints to orthodox research results, such as from the Bretton Woods institutions.

Other units of the United Nations system also engage in policy research, thus helping to draw attention to issues and shape understandings of problems. Europe is home to two of the more productive and innovative centres. Founded in 1963, the Geneva-based UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) generates multi-disciplinary research, informed by both mainstream and unorthodox perspectives, on issues of governance, market forces, social policy, and other development topics. The UN University, jointly operated by the UN and UNESCO, was set up in 1969. Headquartered in Tokyo, it comprises a worldwide network of research centres and training programs. One of these, the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER), based in Helsinki, Finland, manages research, trains young scholars, and holds seminars on issues of political economy.

During the late 1940s and 1950s, the UN set up economic commissions in most world regions. They are the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), based in Geneva; the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in Santiago, Chile; the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in Bangkok, Thailand; the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in Beirut, Lebanon. Under active leadership in the 1950s, ECLAC provided non-Western governments with intellectual ammunition in wars of ideas, especially about world trade and investment. ECLAC is still active and influential today, but the other regional commissions have low profiles. They gather statistics, monitor (macro)economic trends, serve as forums for setting standards and developing trade arrangements, and in many cases since the 1990s promote wider roles for private enterprise.

TRENDS AND PROSPECTS FOR UN AGENCIES

The foregoing snapshots of UN agencies focus on the past. What of the future? The UN was established to afford space for vigorous debate. In that spirit, the UN has seen many efforts to speak against domination. In the 1960s and 1970s in particular, non-Western governments tried to use the UN as a place where alternative ideas about development could compete and where issues of fairness and unequal power could gain a place on world agendas. But most of those efforts were stopped dead in their tracks. Powerful interests based in Western countries have insisted that 'there is no alternative' to neoliberal orthodoxy, reflecting the 'global intellectual hegemony' of our times (Gosovic, 2000). Increasingly harnessed to one school of thought, the UN has seen one of its fundamental mandates—enabling contestation and debate about development—set aside. Nevertheless, for a few development questions, the UN has served as a platform and vehicle for **emancipatory** ideas. It has helped to propel improvements in the status of women and their access to reproductive health and reproductive rights (see Chapter 5). It has helped move grave problems such as slums and environmental degradation higher on world agendas (see Chapters 17 and 19). Where these initiatives have seen real success, the active presence of forceful social movements—for women's emancipation, for rights of minority peoples, for human rights defenders, and others—has been a major factor.

UN agencies have many shortcomings: technocratic ways of defining problems and solutions, nontransparency, high overhead costs, low and uneven quality of contact with citizens' organizations, and unproductive working cultures that depress staff morale. But such problems are by no means confined

to UN agencies alone. Others in the aid and development industry also suffer from them. Shortcomings in strategy and effectiveness often stem from fragmentation, waste, and duplication driven by technical functionalism—agrarian/rural issues for the FAO, children's issues for UNICEF, and so on. Yet the lifeworlds of people targeted for interventions are not so easily compartmentalized. Most agencies, however, have shown no real respect for the complexity of development problems. Rather, they often respond merely by adding new objectives and tasks, resulting in 'mission creep'. For example, most agencies today run projects on HIV/AIDS, and as many as 20 UN agencies are engaged with water problems. With this kind of deficiency in mind, UN reform emphasizes a 'One UN' approach, with a single framework guiding all UN agencies in each country. This approach may indeed streamline aid delivery. It may allow the UN to satisfy public authorities who receive aid as well as those who donate the money for it. Donors prefer prompt, streamlined spending. If they cannot 'move the money', they can face political and career problems.

But will management reform address other sources of difficulty? At a deeper level, the effectiveness of UN agencies depends on who holds the purse strings and thus on who sets the agenda and makes the rules. Even though the UN's one-country, one-vote system favours low-income countries because of their greater numbers, the power of money is decisive. Research has shown that the United States successfully uses promises of aid, or threats to withdraw it, to influence lower-income states in the United Nations (Kuziemko and Werker, 2006; Dreher et al., 2008). Top-level UN jobs are held in disproportionate numbers by Americans or citizens of other big powers. In short, the United Nations will go on suffering deficits of good governance unless it can overcome the coercive power of rich nations like the United States.

The rising influence of large corporations poses serious challenges to the integrity and competence of the United Nations. That influence—the 'privatisation of multilateral institutions' (Bøås and McNeill, 2003: 142)—has led to a weakening of the public orientations of many UN agencies. It manifests itself in the UN's 'Global Compact'. This agreement with corporate actors was set in motion in 1999, at the World Economic Forum, a gathering of world elites held annually in Davos, Switzerland. The UN Secretary-General then solicited corporations to engage more closely with the UN, and thereby improve their bottom line through sales opportunities and improved public profiles. In exchange, they had to endorse guidelines on corporate behaviour. That offer was easy to accept, since the guidelines were not legally binding and would not be seriously monitored in any case. Among the main arrangements are 'partnerships'. In specific projects, McDonald's and Microsoft have teamed up with UNESCO, Novartis with the WHO, Citigroup and Chevron-Texaco with the UNDP, and so forth. The Global Compact has sponsored conferences and publications with titles like *Fighting Poverty: A Business Opportunity*. The strategy has required many UN organizations to add new staff and entire departments to manage it, such as the UNDP Division for Business Partnerships. Collaborations between UN agencies and big business today number in the hundreds and are no longer merely experimental and arm's-length but structural and intimate. As a result of the Global Compact, many corporations have gained public goodwill (they have been 'bluewashed') through their association with UN agencies, which, in their turn, have gained a few more resources. Yet there has been embarrassment for the UN, such as revelations that some corporate members of the Compact have violated OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Moreover, evidence indicates that the intimate ties to corporations have weakened UN capacities to think and act critically on important issues of development and global governance (Utting and Zammit, 2009).

Most UN agencies also have developed ties with non-governmental organizations, both international and domestic. In 1946, the first year of its existence, ECOSOC granted 'consultative status' to 41 NGOs; today there are close to 3,000 NGOs with that status. For development projects and humanitarian action, UN agencies routinely recruit NGOs to manage projects and deliver humanitarian aid. These arrangements amount to simple subcontracting, but both parties prefer the term 'partnerships'. For example, the UN refugee agency UNHCR has contracts with more than 800 NGOs under a large formal system it calls Partnership in Action. Indeed, a former UNHCR director referred to NGOs as 'our right arm'. In most cases, however, the relationship is contractual rather than genuinely collaborative.

MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS ANCHORED IN WESTERN GOVERNMENTS

Some multilateral arrangements are clubs open only to rich countries. But in addition to wealth, membership criteria include adherence to certain economic and political norms and preferences. The following organizations reflect the military or geostrategic interests of rich countries, with important consequences for non-Western countries and regions.

Development Policy

Established in 1961 to succeed a European steering committee for American 'Marshall Plan' post-war reconstruction aid, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is today a club of 34 upper-income-country governments, including former aid recipients such as South Korea, Chile, and Poland. Guided by orthodox economic precepts, it promotes consensus on macroeconomics, trade, investment, taxation, and public service reform—in short, almost everything of concern to member governments except military and security issues. It was instrumental in 'locking in' official commitments to market fundamentalism. 'The most historically consequential obligation of OECD membership is adherence to its Code of Liberalization of Capital Movements' (Abdelal, 2007: 88). The OECD's influence works through its vast linkages with governments and private-sector actors. It carries out 'peer reviews' among official agencies and runs sophisticated communication strategies to make its findings virtually gospel among political classes. Rivalled only by the World Bank as an official think-tank, the OECD produces large streams of analytical reports, data, technical standards, and policy proposals. Some policy production takes place through open, public processes, but many policies are prepared behind closed doors. Its importance for development is in the realm of concepts, knowledge, and discourse; it has been an active promoter of Washington Consensus policies (see Chapter 9). Faced with the failures of those policies, the OECD, together with the rest of the aid and development industry, now has added talk about poverty reduction to its discourses.

European Organizations

The European Commission (EC), headquartered in Brussels, is the executive branch of the European Union, which today consists of 27 Western and Eastern European countries. Only Norway, Switzerland, and most nations of the former Yugoslavia are not members. In the 1980s, the EC emerged as the world's largest single multilateral aid donor, accounting for about one-third of all multilateral aid spending and for about 10 to 12 per cent of total world official aid. In recent years, EC and European bilateral aid together account for two-thirds of total net aid from OECD countries.

The EC manages its relations with low-income countries through several ministries or 'Directorates General'. In 2010 it formally launched a 'super ministry' for foreign affairs, the **European External Action Service** (EEAS). However, pre-existing directorates general involved with low-income countries have successfully defended their turf. Key among these is the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, which designs and manages EU development and aid policies, with special attention to Europe's ex-colonies, formally referred to as the ACP (Africa-Caribbean-Pacific) countries. Yet another, the European Community Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO), works closely with EuropeAid. As an interlocking set of bureaucracies, the EC is plagued by poor management, infighting over bureaucratic turf, above-average overhead costs, slow delivery, non transparency, an overload of objectives, lack of priorities, and spending biases towards better-off countries in its near abroad—that is, North Africa and southeast Europe (see Maxwell and Engel, 2003). Even more serious are charges of incoherence. What Europe gives in aid is far surpassed by what it takes through trade deals, natural resource extraction (fish from West African waters, for example), and capital flight to tax havens under European jurisdictions. This redistribution from poor to rich supports the critique that multilateralism helps to conceal old predatory relationships and to prettify them as neutral, market-based 'partnerships'.

A more positive but less well-known European case is that of the Council of Europe (COE). In 1949, 10 European governments signed a treaty creating it, with a mandate to promote human rights, democracy,

and the rule of law throughout Europe. Its founding strategic purpose was socio-political cohesion and thus stability at a time of political and trade union movements seeking greater social justice. Headquartered in Strasbourg, France, the COE has 47 members, including low-income countries, such as Armenia and Macedonia, formerly in the Soviet sphere of influence. Canada is among several countries with COE observer status.

By pioneering intergovernmental conventions on human rights in 1950 and socio-economic rights in 1961, the COE has set important standards for domestic legislation to combat discrimination and social exclusion. Under COE auspices in 1959, the European Court of Human Rights was set up to enforce obligations inherent in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Signed in Rome in 1950, that convention was the first international legal instrument safeguarding human rights on a broad basis. The COE's work is particularly relevant for anti-poverty policy in countries on Europe's eastern periphery. Its formal committees, research, workshops, and conferences regularly draw attention to gaps between formal rights enshrined in an important but often neglected multilateral treaty, the European Social Charter, and actual performance by the more than 40 states bound by that treaty.

Founded in 1956 and based in Paris, the COE Development Bank is Europe's oldest multilateral financial institution and the only one with a mandate to promote social solidarity. Its loans go to public-sector bodies for purposes of social integration (housing, rehabilitation of poverty-hit zones), environmental protection, and human services in health and education.

The COE is mandated to follow fundamental societal principles rather than conventional 'development' objectives. Perhaps for that reason it is often overlooked among multilateral organizations. Yet its mandates and activities predated by four decades the themes of human rights, social cohesion, and democracy that are the talk of today's multilateral development organizations.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is an ad hoc intergovernmental organization. It emerged in 1973 at a moment of détente in the Cold War as a means of lowering tensions between the West and the Communist Eastern Bloc. When it was founded, dictators still ruled Portugal and Spain. Hence, neither bloc could crow loudly about human rights and democracy. However, in 1975, the US, Western European states, and the Soviet Union with its Eastern European allies signed the Helsinki Accords, a non-binding agreement basically acknowledging the geopolitical status quo in Europe. The agreement includes provisions meant to promote respect for national sovereignty, human rights, and national self-determination; the OSCE was tasked with monitoring their observance. Headquartered in Vienna, Austria, the organization today comprises 56 states, including all of Western Europe, the United States, Canada, and all countries of the former Soviet Union. It is common for OSCE teams, co-ordinated by its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), to monitor elections in former Eastern Bloc countries. With improved politico-military stability as a main objective, the OSCE promotes arms control, police and military reform, and border management. It has also assumed tasks in respect to what it terms the 'human dimension'. Drawing on broader concepts of security, these tasks include governance (such as election monitoring), minority rights and reduction of ethnic conflict, promotion of media diversity, and curbing the small arms trade and human trafficking.

'Sphere of Influence' Organizations

Since recognizing the formal sovereignty of states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Western powers have sought to maintain ties with their former colonies or dependencies. To this end, they set up multilateral organizations with active secretariats mandated to promote policy dialogue, cultural ties, and even development efforts. The major Western **sphere of influence** bodies include the Organization of American States, la Francophonie, and the Commonwealth.

The Organization of American States (OAS) originated from US efforts in the 1880s to advance its commercial interests in Latin America. When the Cold War began, amid fears of left-leaning movements in civil society, the US began aligning its security and intelligence-gathering policies with its development and aid policies. In 1948, 20 Latin American governments and the United States signed the charter of the OAS; in later decades, 13 Caribbean countries and Canada also joined. Cuba was expelled in 1962. Headquartered in Washington, DC, the OAS cultivates consensus among governmental and business elites in the western hemisphere on issues of development, women's status, drug trafficking, and human rights. It does so by way of special committees and intergovernmental conferences. In an effort to create another version of its highly contested North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico, the United States enlisted the OAS to help create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), but today this and other US-driven initiatives appear to have lost momentum. Meanwhile, multilateral arrangements driven by Latin American governments, some of which are noted later in this chapter, are moving ahead.

The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) comprises 56 member states in which French culture and the French language play at least some role in national identity. Canada is a member, and Quebec has the status of 'participating government'. Founded in 1970 as the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique, la Francophonie is headquartered in Paris, with branch offices in Gabon, Togo, and Vietnam. Promotion of the French language and cultural diversity are its chief purposes. As with comparable bodies, it also supports activities to foster respect for human rights and democracy and to improve education, media, information technology, the environment, and the economy—in particular, the integration of member nations into the world economy. France's decline as an imperial power and weaknesses and divisions among members of the club have cumulatively weakened the OIF, despite some efforts by Canada to shore it up.

The Commonwealth of Nations, known before 1950 as the British Commonwealth, consists of 54 countries, all but two of them (Mozambique and Rwanda) ex-colonies of Great Britain. A number of Middle Eastern and Arab-aligned countries such as Sudan, though eligible, have declined to join. With a secretariat in London since 1965, the Commonwealth organizes gatherings of public officials and businesspeople for diverse political, cultural, and commercial purposes. The Commonwealth has tried to promote consensus on governance, seen chiefly in conference declarations and the occasional expulsion of member states. Its Commonwealth Foundation facilitates interchange among and support to professional associations and non-governmental organizations. In 1997, the Commonwealth Business Council was set up to promote trade, investment, corporate social responsibility, and public–private partnerships.

MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS ANCHORED IN NON-WESTERN GOVERNMENTS

In the twentieth century, the triumph of nationalist parties and armies over the colonial powers created optimism about collective action in non-Western countries. After World War II, a number of multilateral arrangements independent of the rich North sprang up among governments of the South. These arrangements included regional political alliances (e.g., the League of Arab States, 1945) and trading arrangements (e.g., the East African Community, from 1967 to 1977, then revived in 1999). Created on crests of enthusiasm, many of these associations later became dormant or died altogether, the victims of internal difficulties or external opposition. Today, however, a number of non-Western countries have formed multilateral blocs that are steering global politics towards complex yet more equitable balances of power.

Lobbying Blocs

A 1955 conference in Bandung, Indonesia, was the first multilateral forum in which leaders of the South could voice their collective demands for an end to colonialism. They also denounced their countries' adverse integration into the world economic system—something they saw as a main factor keeping their countries poor. Six years later, the same group, now reinforced by newly independent African countries, set up the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an intergovernmental association without a charter but oriented by UN principles. Today, the NAM comprises 118 member states and 18 observer countries; its Co-ordinating Bureau is based at the UN in New York. Founded to counter the Cold War (a competitive struggle triggered in part by the decline and fall of colonialism), the NAM seeks to uphold 'the right of independent judgement, the struggle against

imperialism and neo-colonialism, and the use of moderation in relations with all big powers'.

Concerned about forming a coherent front in negotiations with rich countries on trade issues, most of the non-Western countries attending the 1964 UNCTAD conference formed the Group of 77 (G77). Today enlarged to 131 members, including China, the G77 continues as an informal caucus at the UN. Its representatives gather at each year's UN General Assembly meeting and sometimes at UNCTAD assemblies. An early accomplishment was to put a New International Economic Order (NIEO) on the world's agenda. Led by Iran, Venezuela, Mexico, and Algeria (countries whose income was rising, thanks to increases in world oil prices in 1973), the G77 wanted three things: faster economic growth, greater integration into the world trading system, and more foreign aid. These were hardly radical or new claims; indeed, they posed little threat to the global status quo. Yet Western powers rejected them. Several took steps, such as reduced supervision of transnational corporations, contrary to what governments of the South were demanding. Northern powers reduced the leverage of G77 and NAM countries by shifting most North–South economic negotiations to the World Trade Organization (see Chapter 15), thus sidelining UNCTAD and other UN forums.

The largest and most influential subgroup in the NAM and the G77 is the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Founded in 1969 at Rabat and headquartered in Saudi Arabia, it consists today of 57 governments. Financed with revenues derived largely from Western consumers of oil and gas, it promotes solidarity and co-operation among Islamic states. Its work is both cultural (protection of holy sites, broadcasting) and developmental (the Islamic Development Bank and various institutes of education and research).

To provide members with analyses of the deteriorating situation facing most of its members, the NAM summit of 1986 set up a commission under the leadership of Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere. Following publication of its 1990 report, *The Challenge to the South*, the NAM put that commission's secretariat, the South Centre, on a permanent footing as a think-tank. Especially after 2005, when it gained new leadership, it has become an important source of critical analyses of global governance, trade, and South–South co-operation.

While some of the older Third World blocs have suffered marginalization and decline, new groupings are now emerging. Among them is the Group of 20, an informal alliance founded in 2003 at the WTO meetings in Cancun, Mexico. It is led by the strongest members of the southern bloc: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—collectively known as BRICS. At Cancun, these rising regional powers frustrated the negotiating stance of the rich-country bloc. The Group of 20 (in fact 23 members as of 2010) suggests a revival of the non-Western campaign for a New International Economic Order—something the rich countries hoped they would never see again.[2] New initiatives by Turkey regarding the Middle East and by South Korea regarding East Asia point to increasing self-assertion and autonomy from the United States. Deliberations about global economic measures no longer take place among governments of seven or eight rich countries, but among twenty. The all-powerful suasion of a single northern hegemonic nation is increasingly a thing of the past; new or resurgent powers in the Global South have begun going their own way, often with others. Some of their strongest effects are within regions, though collaborations, such as between Turkey and Brazil, also cut across continents. It is not clear that policy-makers in Washington, DC, have awakened from dreams of unending domination to begin to confront these trends.

Regional Blocs

Governments in many parts of the world have sought to improve their economic prospects through economic pacts, or *regional trading arrangements* (RTAs), with their neighbours. Sometimes called developmental regionalism, this strategy has gained ground as an alternative to dominant neoliberal strategies that call for economic openness towards the rich countries of the North—strategies that have exposed many to predatory globalization.

Among Asian nations, there is a veritable 'noodle bowl' of RTAs, of which the most important is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Founded in 1967 by the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand out of shared fear of Communist advances in Vietnam, ASEAN has since admitted Vietnam along with Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. Its regional trade promotion efforts began only in the 1990s and have

not curbed trade with the rest of the world, contrary to the fears of business interests in the Global North. In 2010 the ASEAN–China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) took effect—a further impulse to regional interaction and to multi-polar geopolitics.

In Latin America, a major RTA is the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR), or Southern Common Market, founded in 1991 by Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay and joined by Venezuela in 2006. Since 2004, these and other countries have moved towards something much more ambitious, a Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (UNASUR), or Union of South American Nations, a merger of MERCOSUR with its older counterpart, the Comunidad Andina, or Andean Community, composed of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Modelled on the European Union, UNASUR intends to lower barriers to trade and travel, to issue a common South American currency, and ultimately to set up a South American parliament. Regional leaders are today developing a new supra-national body, Comunidade de Estados Latino-Americanos e Caribe (CELAC) or Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. In essence, CELAC will be an alternative to the OAS, whose legitimacy (as a US-dominated body) is in decline in Latin America.

Africa is home to a number of RTAS, many of them dormant. The forerunner to today's Southern African Development Community (SADC) was established in 1980 by Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—then all on the 'front line' against an aggressive apartheid-ruled South Africa. SADC now consists of 15 governments, including that of South Africa. In its early years, SADC served as a vehicle for aid projects that reinforced southern Africa's outward economic orientation rather than its internal market. However, low purchasing power, huge differences in economic, political, and military capabilities, and uneasy political relationships among governments have set limits to real integration.

The significance of regional blocs for equitable development and responsive government has been modest at best. Trading arrangements may have contributed to growth, but such growth remains uneven, even polarized, as stronger economies tend to reap the most benefits. Nevertheless, multilateral action informed by principles of mutual advantage, especially within dynamic regions such as Latin America and Southeast Asia, are shaping large new vehicles for development and political power.

ONE WORLD, MANY REGIONS

This chapter has noted the rise, and in many cases the decline, of three categories of multilateral organizations. A thread running through the stories of those in the UN community—and many of those anchored in Western states—is the role of a **hegemonic power**, the United States. Together with several other 'Anglo-Saxon' states, it has influenced development agendas

CURRENT EVENTS BOX 10.3

MULTILATERALISM: WHICH WAY FORWARD?

Political analyst Jens Martens has suggested that the political world has reached a critical choice in regard to the future direction of multilateral arrangements. One course is to continue on the old path, where decisions are based on individual benefit; the other is to pursue a more communitarian path along which the needs of formerly excluded groups and peoples are fully accounted for.

> International politics is at a crossroads. On the one hand, the path towards an elite multilateralism, which shifts decisions on global policy increasingly into exclusive clubs and political circles while excluding democratic control and participation; on the other, the path to a multilateralism of solidarity, which emphasises and strengthens the responsibility of democratically legitimate public institutions and complements this through a comprehensive involvement of civil society organisations and the well-regulated interaction with the private sector. In the spirit of the UN Charter, one can only hope that over time, this model of a multilateralism of solidarity will prevail over the elite club model of global politics. (Martens, 2007: 6)

and often determined which issues are to be managed multilaterally or not, and, if so, within which multilateral forum. At the same time, the bloc of Western nations has successfully led others (though not without resistance) to enlist multilateral agencies in spreading a standard package of policies about development and governance in non-Western countries. Whereas the words 'equity', 'non-alignment', and 'self-determination' once inspired multilateralism, today we hear corporate capitalist terms like 'global competitiveness' and 'public–private partnerships'. Many multilateral bodies now reflect—and propagate—a new 'common sense' about development. Thus, global governance over development and the humanitarian response has been constrained. As a result, a number of UN and other multilateral institutions have lost legitimacy, especially in the eyes of many in the Global South.

Yet, as this chapter has noted and as other chapters explore in greater depth, other forms of multilateralism are emerging. Among states, these include regional alliances of governments pursuing mutual trade and security advantages. These are helping to reapportion power along North–South and West–East dimensions. As power balances shift, so do governing norms. Among social and political movements, global networks are sharing ideas and demonstrating new solidarities. Some of this 'bottom-up multilateralism' in global civil society has shown, as in the cases of women's rights and environmental sanity, important leverage for positive change. Whether and how much public action by citizens' groups can contribute to emancipatory outcomes—or to global backlash born of humiliation and anger—is central to today's unfolding drama of the world's becoming one place.

SUMMARY

Governments and non-state actors have increasingly pursued multilateral approaches to a wide range of issues, including those facing lower-income countries. This chapter discussed the rise, and in some cases the decline, of multilateral organizations considered relevant for development (apart from the Bretton Woods and related bodies, which are discussed in other chapters). The chapter highlighted their origins, purposes, operations, and impacts in terms of power and politics. Official multilateral bodies fall into three categories, as distinguished by their geopolitical alignments and accountability systems: UN specialized agencies and programs; global and regional bodies answerable to governments of industrial countries and the Global North; and organizations accountable to non-Western actors. For the first two clusters, a major influence has been the hegemonic power of the United States, whose interests can be detected in these organizations' development priorities and policy formulas. Many of these agencies and organizations have failed to gain real legitimacy, especially in the Global South. The chapter also called attention to new forms of multilateralism, some of them driven by non-state actors, that are helping to create political spaces and alternative approaches to development and global governance.

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THOUGHT

1. Given the grossly unequal distributions of power and wealth, how can multilateral initiatives produce more equitable development outcomes?
2. Why should some countries prefer to engage in multilateral arrangements 'à la carte' rather than to accept comprehensive international agreements?
3. How might multilateral arrangements among countries of a specific region, or among countries sharing cultural affinities, lead to positive development outcomes?
4. The historian Arnold Toynbee wrote that the twentieth century would be remembered as an age when 'human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race'. In light of this chapter's contents, how valid is that observation?

5. The political analyst Jens Martens (see Box 10.3) writes that world politics today faces a choice between elite multilateralism and a multilateralism of solidarity. What forces have created this choice? Which kind of multilateralism would you bet on in the long run, and why?
6. The UN and its agencies have been criticized for serving unilateral political interests under the guise of multilateral politics. How valid are such criticisms?
7. Given the emergence of new powers in the Global South, to what extent will traditional North–South fractures continue to dominate multilateral processes?

SUGGESTED READING

Bøås, M., and D. McNeill. 2003. *Multilateral Institutions: A Critical Introduction*. London: Pluto Press.

Cox, R.W., ed. 1997. *The New Realism: Perspectives on Multilateralism and World Order*. London: Macmillan.

Gowan, Peter. 2003. 'US: UN', *New Left Review* 24: 5–28.

Hulme, David. 2010. *Global Poverty: How Global Governance Is Failing the Poor*. London: Routledge.

Mazower, Mark. 2009. *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Schlesinger, Stephen. 2003. *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview.

RELATED WEBSITES

Note: Almost all of the multilateral organizations discussed in this chapter maintain websites. They can be easily found through Internet search engines.

Choike: A Portal on Southern Civil Societies
www.choike.org

Encyclopedia of the Nations
www.nationsencyclopedia.com/United-Nations-Related-Agencies/index.html

Global Policy Forum
www.globalpolicy.org

Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
www.mopanonline.org/home

Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Mondialisations (online research library on global affairs, in English, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese)
www.mondialisations.org

World Campaign for In-Depth Reform of the System of International Institutions
www.reformcampaign.net

NOTES

1. The minimum contribution is 0.001 per cent of the UN's budget, an amount paid by 53 countries in 2009. Currently, the US pays about 22 per cent of the UN's budget. If assessments were based purely on each country's share of the world's gross domestic product, the US would pay about 30 per cent and some poor countries less than the 0.001 per cent minimum (CRS, 2011: 27).
2. The Group of 20 should not be confused with the G20, a group of finance ministers and central bank governors of major world economies set up in 2008 to replace the G8 group of rich-country finance ministers.