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Contents

Contributors vi

Introduction viii

About the Editors xii

PART ONE: CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT 1

1. Are Development and Globalization a Form of Imperialism? 2
YES Henry Veltmeyer, "Development and Globalization as Imperialism" 5
NO Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Globalization and Development" 18

PART TWO: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT 33

2. Is the Present Trading Regime Beneficial to the World's Poor? 34
YES Martin Wolf, "Why Globalization Works" 37
NO Robert Isaak, "How the Rules Rule the Poor" 52
3. Do Fair Trade Networks Create a Fairer Trading System? 64
YES Laure Waridel, "Coffee with Pleasure: Just Java and World Trade" 66
NO Gavin Fridell, "The Fair Trade Network in Historical Perspective" 76
4. Can Sweatshops and Cheap Labour Benefit the Poor? 91
YES Paul Krugman, "In Praise of Cheap Labor" 94
NO John Miller, "Why Economists Are Wrong about Sweatshops and the Antisweatshop Movement" 98
5. Does Outright Debt Cancellation Ignore the Real Problems of Africa? 113
YES George Ayittey, "Smart Aid for Africa" 115
NO Moses Ochonu, "The Case for Debt Cancellation and Increased Aid to Africa" 120

Are the Millennium Development Goals Achievable?



SAKIKO FUKUDA-PARR, "Millennium Development Goals: Why They Matter," *Global Governance*, 10 (2004): 395-402



MICHAEL CLEMENS AND TODD MOSS, "What's Wrong with the Millennium Development Goals?" *Centre for Global Development*, 2004

In 2000, the members of the United Nations adopted a set of goals intended to cut poverty around the world by half by the year 2015. Since then, these goals, commonly referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), have been a dominant focus for discussions regarding development assistance strategies and global awareness campaigns, such as "Make Poverty History".

The end of setting global development goals is not new. Rather the adoption of the MDGs is really the end product of a number of UN development initiatives dating back to the 1960s. The United Nations sponsored three consecutive UN Development Decades in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, each of which focused on achieving economic growth.

In the 1990s, the attention on development shifted to issues relating to "getting policies right". As result, issues of macroeconomic adjustments, establishing good governance policies, and institutional reforms became the central theme. At the same time, the growing international human rights movement focused increased attention on social and economic rights, including the right to food, health care, education, and a decent standard of living.

As the decade of the 1990s drew to a close and a new millennium was about to begin, many members of the United Nations began to call for both a renewal of political will to tackle the challenges of development and poverty and a broader, more comprehensive approach than had been taken in previous decades. In 1998, the United Nations General Assembly voted to create a Millennium Summit of the UN. This summit was held in September 6-8, 2000. Based on the deliberations of this gathering, the 189 members of the UN General Assembly subsequently voted unanimously to adopt the Millennium Declaration. As a follow-up to this, the Secretary-General, all UN specialized agencies, and other institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were asked to develop a plan for achieving the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. The result was the

establishment of 8 goals, 18 specific targets, and a total of 48 indicators. Collectively these became known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The aim of this process was to establish goals that would be both measurable and time bound—that is, they would have a specific target date for their achievement.

The overall aim of the MDGs is to reduce global poverty by half by the year 2015. Achievement of the goals assumed a global collective effort by both rich and poor nations, as well as a coordinated endeavour by all the major economic and social development agencies. The eight principal MDGs are: (i) the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; (ii) the achievement of universal primary education; (iii) the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; (iv) the reduction of child mortality; (v) the improvement of maternal health; (vi) the combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other debilitating diseases; (vii) the establishment of environmental sustainability; and (viii) the development of a global partnership for development (see table on page 218).

Each of the first seven goals is intended to be measurable and they are mutually reinforcing in their collectively tackling various dimensions of the global problem of poverty. The United Nations has set specific targets for each of these goals as well as established indicators by which progress toward their achievement can be measured. Goal 8 is more of an aspirational goal needed to achieve the other seven goals.

What is unique about the development of the MDGs, in contrast to previous UN development targets, is that they are specifically expressed in human rights language. The MDGs are premised on six fundamental values that find expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 22, 24, 25, and 26): freedom, equality, solidarity, respect for nature, and shared responsibility. The purpose of this was to emphasize the point that these goals were not just vague economic aspirations which nations could ignore, but rather fundamental obligations for which all nations and leaders should be held accountable.

In order to ensure that the MDGs were not just an exercise in idealistic dreaming, the UN called on each development agency and every member country to adopt the MDGs and carefully review their policies to ensure that their programs incorporate these goals. Clearly, success in achieving these goals was dependent on a mutual, self-reinforcing progress in each of the goals. No single one can be focused on alone. In addition, the achievement of goals 1-7 will depend heavily on the success of goal 8. In particular, the richer countries must be willing to adapt their development assistance policies, debt relief programs, and trade and technology transfers in ways that facilitate achievement of the goals. To encourage this, subsequent UN meetings such as the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development in March 2002, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002, the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, and the 2005 World Summit in New York have provided opportunities to both measure the progress being made and to

renew commitments. In addition, the UN publishes an annual Millennium Development Goals Report to chart the progress made to date in achieving the goals, and to keep up the pressure to work harder for their achievement.

But how useful are such efforts at setting global development targets? Is this an effective means of collectively rallying global cooperation and ensuring progress? Or, is this a futile public relations exercise by the United Nations likely to breed further aid fatigue and cynicism by setting unrealistic goals that UN decision-makers know from the outset are unachievable? In the first reading, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr discusses why the focus on the MDGs is an important exercise. In response, Michael Clemens and Todd Moss explain some of the weaknesses and failings of the MDG campaign.

✓ **YES**
**Millennium Development Goals:
Why They Matter**

SAKIKO FUKUDA-PARR

Many development goals have been set by the United Nations since the first "development decade" of the 1960s. What is new about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)? First, an unprecedented assembly of the world's heads of state generated them when they met in September 2000. Second, the goals put human development—poverty and people and their lives—at the center of the global development agenda for the new millennium, a shift away from growth as the central objective of development. Third, MDGs are not just aspirations but provide a framework for accountability; they do not simply state ideals but go on to define concrete goals that can be monitored. Fourth, they address not only development outcomes but also inputs from rich countries, thus forming a compact that holds both rich and poor governments accountable for opening markets, giving more aid and debt relief, and transferring technology.

MDGs ARE A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The eight MDGs—poverty, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, environment, and global partnership—have been areas of concern for some time, but they have not been at the center of the UN's development agenda. The first, second, and third UN development decades (1960s, 1970s, and 1980s) were more involved in economic transformation and growth, especially industrialization. The adoption of the MDGs reflects an important endorsement of the central objectives of poverty and human well-being. The MDGs speak directly to improving human lives.

In the development debates of the past four decades, the debate has shifted among economists and policymakers about how much attention should be paid to economic growth, to people, and to poverty. Although almost everyone would agree that all three objectives are important, some assume that economic growth is primary. Human needs are often overshadowed by the preoccupation with the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP). Economic expansion is critical to human flourishing, but it is a means, not an end in itself. Economic development can be ruthless, by benefiting some at the expense of others; voiceless, by excluding the voice of people; jobless, by creating wealth but not jobs; futureless, by exhausting the next generation's resources; and rootless, by destroying cultural traditions and identities.

Many economists have developed alternative frameworks or approaches. In the 1970s, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and economists such as Hans Singer and Richard Jolly argued for the importance of employment. In the 1980s, Paul Streeten, Frances Stewart, and others argued that the priority of development

was to meet basic needs. Starting in the 1980s, Amartya Sen began to define development as expanding people's capabilities to lead lives that they value. Building on these ideas, Mahbub ul Haq launched the concept of human development, which defines development as a process of creating an environment in which all people can lead full, creative lives. He launched the annual *Human Development Reports* in 1990 to track the progress of countries according to measures of human well-being rather than economic growth. The Human Development Index (HDI) was introduced to reflect capabilities in three critical areas: to survive, to be knowledgeable, and to enjoy a decent standard of living. These reports have applied this conceptual framework to explore different capabilities, such as being educated and healthy, but they also investigate areas such as political freedoms and cultural liberties and suggest policy tools to promote expansion of these capabilities. Over the years, a human development approach or paradigm has evolved.¹

The Millennium Declaration and human development share a common vision, guided by the values of freedom, dignity, solidarity, tolerance, and equity among people and nations. These principles are also fundamental human rights, and the MDGs set standards for the "progressive realization" of economic and social rights. They are part of a multidimensional vision that integrates political factors such as civil rights and democratic representation, social factors such as education and health, and economic factors such as growth and employment. This vision considers people not only as the beneficiaries of progress but also as the key agents of change. The MDGs address some of the most critical areas of human development, although they do not deal with participation, democracy, and human rights.² MDGs are not in themselves a paradigm, but they are benchmark indicators of how we are progressing in human development and social and economic rights.

MDGs AS A FRAMEWORK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The MDGs are not a new strategy but a new instrument for mobilizing action. The MDGs are not a technocratically defined set of goals that emerged from an analysis of development constraints accompanied by a finely tuned set of policy prescriptions. Rather, the MDGs are a global commitment and a framework of accountability.

The MDGs' newness is not attributable to their content but to how they have mustered political consensus on common objectives. They also explicitly commit world leaders to a collective responsibility for all people irrespective of national borders. The MDGs were not formulated overnight. They build on a global consensus reached in the 1990s among governments—a dialogue to which many civil society groups actively contributed.³ All but two of the eight MDGs are outlined in the agendas negotiated and adopted at various UN conferences during the 1990s. The MDGs also draw on goals proposed by rich countries; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had earlier drawn up its own development goals.⁴

The MDGs are more powerful tools than mere UN declarations because time limits and quantifiable outcomes, by which progress can be objectively measured and monitored, are specified. They provide a framework for accountability at local, national, and international levels.

The most divisive element in negotiating the MDGs has been the eighth goal—global partnership—which includes trade, debt, aid, and technology transfer. This goal is important for the developing countries, but it is weak on accountability; it is the only MDG without quantified and time-bound indicators. Developing countries are not interested in opening themselves up to global scrutiny unless there is a real commitment to joint accountability.

An accountability framework is useful only if it is based on evidence. The UN system is mounting a systematic procedure for global monitoring and support. MDGs are monitored by specialized agencies that report annually to the UN General Assembly. The Statistical Division of the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs consolidates information into an integrated data system. At the country level, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) is helping countries develop progress reports based on national data.

Many UN resolutions have been passed, only to be left with no follow-up. Other proposals succeeded in mobilizing massive action and effectively realized their objectives, such as achieving universal coverage in child immunization. The leadership role of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in advocating and monitoring progress was key to the success of those important goals.⁵

The UN secretary-general's personal leadership has helped energize and activate the entire UN system, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The UN has established a special project with three components: support for countries in defining national strategies and monitoring progress; a campaign to advocate for MDG priorities and for the mobilization of all stakeholders; and a research program to identify an agenda for action.

Unlike other UN goals that have been inconsistent with one another or ignored by the Bretton Woods institutions, international cooperation is gradually being aligned with MDG priorities. Although still not implemented fully, the Washington-based financial institutions are committed to including the MDGs in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). These are national policy frameworks being prepared in the world's poorest aid-dependent countries; they define poverty-reducing targets, priorities, and measures on which donors can agree. As shown in the *Human Development Report 2003*, development should accelerate dramatically to achieve the MDGs in most of the world's poorest countries. The PRSPs then should be first to reflect such ambitious goals and targets. But much more needs to be done.⁶

MDGs AS A COMPACT

The MDGs differ from previous international goals in another politically significant way. For the first time, rich countries' inputs are considered alongside the objectives of poor countries. Of the eight MDGs, the eighth—global partnership—is

the most significant departure. It commits rich countries to do more in the areas of access to trade, aid, debt relief, and technology transfer. If this goal had not been included, developing countries would not have agreed to the MDG package.

The MDGs have been followed by the Monterrey Consensus, adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development held in March 2002.⁷ Again, responsibility and accountability are shared. Recipient countries should do more to improve the effective use of resources by employing measures such as combating corruption and strengthening institutions, and donor countries should provide greater support in return.

However, like other international compacts, the MDGs suffer two related weaknesses: asymmetry and noncompliance. Accountability of developed country performance is weak because goal eight has neither timetable nor quantified targets. Moreover, there is little pressure to even report efforts. Sweden has taken the lead in presenting a self-assessment to the Economic and Social Council, but this is not required. Attempts to make reporting a requirement in the UN have failed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL OWNERSHIP

The MDGs are not without critics and skeptics. Some academics, social activists, and government officials have argued that the MDGs create false incentives and distortions. The most incisive voices have suggested the following:⁸

- They leave out many objectives such as employment, reproductive health, human rights, and many other issues that developing countries and civil society groups have been advocating.
- They do not go far enough on global partnership: they leave targets vague and neglect institutional reform. Issues such as the decision-making processes of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the governance of multi-lateral institutions, and the restructuring of the global financial architecture are excluded.
- They impose a large data collection and reporting burden on underresourced government offices.
- They could lead to top-down planning and implementation, thereby promoting a donor-led agenda at the expense of a participatory approach in which communities and countries set their own priorities.
- They could distort priorities by focusing on issues that appear arbitrary. For example, certain diseases are singled out (e.g., malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other communicable diseases), but other emerging issues (e.g., tobacco) are ignored.
- They could weaken the bargaining position of developing countries because the MDGs can be hijacked by the World Bank to create opportunities for further conditionality.

- They could lead to a preoccupation with quantitative rather than qualitative achievement, such as the number of children enrolled in schools rather than the quality of the education.
- They could encourage excessive optimism and lead to discouragement and cynicism if the goals are not achieved.

Although these legitimate concerns do not challenge the fundamental usefulness of the MDGs, they do indicate the need for critical choices. MDGs can be meaningful only if they are "nationally owned." Governments and communities bear responsibility for achieving the MDGs, and civil society has an essential watchdog role at both the national and the global level. As the guardian of collective responsibility, the UN must use its leadership to maintain and mobilize global political commitment. Donor support and inputs need to be aligned with national priorities, not vice versa. Integrating the MDGs in the PRSP process, for example, is therefore essential.⁹

The MDGs should not be interpreted mechanistically. The success and failure of a goal should not be judged simply by the achievement of a numerical target, but by whether it has galvanized political will to shift priorities and to accelerate progress. As critical benchmarks of progress, the MDGs make sense only when they are properly embedded in national strategies for development. Each country has specific challenges and shortcomings; adaptability to national priorities is of the essence. For example, for many countries, the threshold of U.S. \$1 of earnings per day is not meaningful; a \$2 per day threshold may be more helpful for identifying people living in poverty.

CONCLUSION

The MDGs show promise as an effective framework for holding key actors accountable for their commitment to eradicating global poverty in the twenty-first century. If we fast-forwarded to 2015, what would we see?

Only two targets would be met: access to clean water and the reduction of income poverty rates by half—mostly due to China's economic prosperity. In Africa, Latin America, and the Arab world, although the proportion of the poor would barely decline, the absolute numbers of those living in poverty would increase. The 1990s was a decade of dramatic growth in countries such as China and Vietnam. But it was also a decade when development stagnated or even declined in many countries. The *Human Development Report 2003* revealed a decline in the HDI for twenty-one countries; such a decline is unprecedented. Other indicators also show reversals. Primary school enrollment declined in twelve countries. Hunger rates increased in twenty-one countries. Child mortality rates worsened in fourteen countries. Per capita income was lower in 2000 than in 1990 in fifty-four countries. In thirty-seven out of sixty-seven countries with trend data, the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day declined in thirty-seven countries. At the current rate, it would take until nearly the twenty-second century to achieve

primary education for all children. For lagging countries and regions, improvement would take even longer—for example, it would take Africa until 2169 to reduce child mortality rates by two-thirds.¹⁰

The MDGs are thus a clarion call to tackle the enduring failures of human development. Has it been heard? Too many people around the world still cannot meet their most basic survival needs, let alone lead free and creative lives. Every year some 10 million children die of preventable causes, 15 percent of the world's people are hungry, and about a quarter of primary school age children are not in school. Some 1.2 billion people, about a fifth of the world's population, live on less than \$1 a day. The gap between those for whom opportunities for a creative life are ever expanding and those for whom even the basic options are denied is becoming wider and starker.

Should world leaders who sought to establish lasting peace and uphold the principles of human dignity, equality, and equity be taken seriously? Is the ambition to rid the world of poverty in the new century realistic? The answer is yes. The achievements of the twentieth century demonstrate that leaps are feasible in just one generation. Sri Lanka raised life expectancy at birth by twelve years in just seven years following its independence in 1946. From 1994 to 2001, South Africa cut in half the numbers who lived without access to clean water. China cut the percentage of its people living in extreme income poverty in the 1990s from 33 to 18 percent. In Botswana, primary school enrollment nearly doubled after independence in 1970, from 46 to 89 percent in just fifteen years. Actions during the last half of the twentieth century did more to reduce poverty than actions in the previous 500 years, all but eliminating extreme poverty in Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. In the developing world, life expectancy has increased by twenty years, about as much as was achieved in previous human history. Illiteracy has been cut nearly in half, from 47 percent to 25 percent over the past thirty years. And in East Asia in the past decade, the number of people living on less than \$1 a day was halved. In the state of Kerala, India, universal schooling has been achieved. In a generation, Singapore transformed itself from a disease ridden, ethnically divided, and uneducated society to one that has achieved levels of education and life expectancy that rival those of Western Europe.

The MDGs are realistic targets that call on both rich and poor governments, on civil society and international organizations, and on ordinary people to ask: What needs to be done to achieve the goals by 2015? At this moment, the goal that is farthest from being met is the one calling for a global partnership—rich countries simply must do more to facilitate trade, aid, access to technology, and debt relief.

NOTES

1. See Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A. K. Shiva Kumar, eds., *Readings in Human Development: Concepts, Measures, and Policies for a Development Paradigm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
2. Millennium Declaration, United Nations, September 2000, UN Doc. A/RES/55/2.

3. See Louis Emmerij, Richard Jolly, and Thomas G. Weiss, *Ahead of the Curve? UN Ideas and Challenges* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), chap. 4.
4. *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation* (Paris: OECD, 1996).
5. Richard Jolly, "Do UN Goals Make a Difference?" Background paper for *Human Development Report 2003*. See also Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, Dharam Ghai, and Frédéric Lapeyre, *UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), chap. 10.
6. Makiko Harrison, Jeni Klugman, and Eric Swanson, "Are Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers Undercutting the Millennium Development Goals?" Draft mimeograph, 17 September 2003.
7. The consensus can be found on the UN Economic and Social Development website at www.un.org/esa/ffd/aconf198-11.pdf.
8. See John Foster, *The Millennium Declaration: Engaging Civil Society Organisations* (New York: World Federation of United Nations Associations, 2002), available online at www.wfuna.org; Roberto Bissio, *Civil Society and the MDGs* (Montevideo: Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 2003); Howard White and Richard Black, eds., *Targeting Development: Critical Perspectives on Millennium Development Goals and International Development Targets* (London: Routledge, 2002).
9. David Booth and Henry Lucas, "Monitoring Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals at the Country Level," in White and Black, *Targeting Development*.
10. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2003: A Compact Among Nations to End Human Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

X NO
What's Wrong with the Millennium Development Goals?

MICHAEL CLEMENS AND TODD MOSS

In mid-September international leaders will gather for a Summit at the United Nations to consider how well the world has kept its promises made five years earlier. In September 2000 at the UN, the largest ever gathering of heads-of-state unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration, committing to reach eight goals by 2015. Known as the MDGs (Table 9.1), these are the yardstick by which current international development efforts are to be judged. A flurry of studies also estimated that, if the MDGs were to be reached, global aid levels would have to rise by \$50 billion per year.

The first message from the Summit will no doubt be grim. Despite gains by many countries (especially India and China), much of the world is off track and will not reach the MDGs. Sub-Saharan Africa will probably miss them by a wide margin. Indeed, if things do not change radically, the number of Africans living in poverty may actually increase, while more than two dozen African countries may not even reach 50% primary school completion in time.

TABLE 9.1
THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal	Targets for 2015 (from 1990 level)
1 Poverty	Halve the fraction of those with income <\$1/day Halve fraction of people who suffer from hunger
2 Education	Universal primary schooling completion
3 Gender equality	Eliminate gender disparity in schooling (preferably by 2005)
4 Child mortality	Reduce the under-five mortality rate by 2/3
5 Maternal health	Reduce the maternal mortality rate by 3/4
6 Disease	Halt and begin to reverse spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases
7 Environment	Halve the ratio of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation
8 Global partnership	7 targets related to: trade, debt, youth, technology, drugs affordability, and special needs

This apparently bleak state of affairs will lead to the second message from the Summit: that more aid is needed. Even though global aid rose from \$53 billion in 2000 to \$79 billion in 2004, the increases have been slow in coming and less than the hoped-for doubling. In fact, the lack of progress in meeting the MDGs will be used to demand more aid sooner and possibly to justify implementing proposals to tax international airline tickets or to borrow from private capital markets. But are the goals really achievable? Are the expectations of what more aid can do realistic? If not, is the aid community setting up Africa, and themselves, for failure?

ARE THE MDGs PRACTICAL TARGETS?

The MDGs are laudable and undoubtedly well-intentioned. But that does not mean they are realistic for all countries. Based on the actual rates of progress for both rich and poor countries in the past, the MDGs are now asking many countries to perform at the top end of historical experience. Indeed, in a few cases the bar for the world's poorest countries is now set well above any historical experience. To take just a few examples:

Goal 1: Halving poverty. African economies must grow at about 7% per year over 2000–2015 in order to halve the number of people living below the poverty line. Just seven out of 153 countries for which we have data accomplished this feat in the preceding 15 years (Figure 9.1). Of those seven, only two were African: Botswana and Equatorial Guinea, neither of which are easily replicable.

Goal 2: Universal primary school completion. Many countries are starting from such a low level that they must now attain in about a decade what rich countries took nearly a century to complete. At least 20 African countries have primary school enrollment of 70% or less, but to reach 100% by 2015 is enormously ambitious if history is any guide (Figure 9.2).

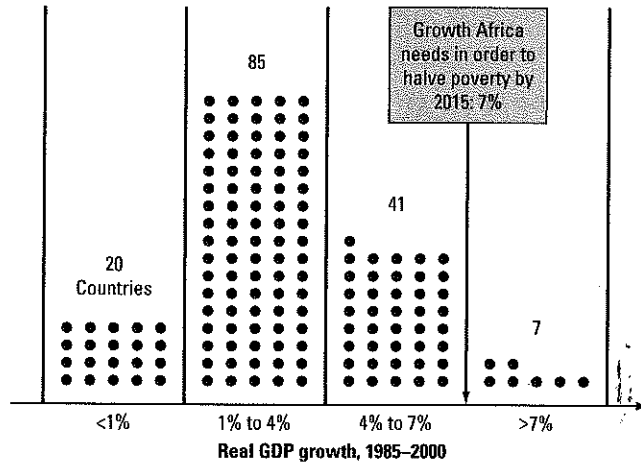
Goal 4: Decrease child mortality by two thirds. If the same goal had been set in 1975, only one poor country in the world (Indonesia) would have met the goal (Figure 9.3).

CAN MORE AID ACHIEVE THEM?

The studies suggesting \$50 billion more is needed each year are frequently misinterpreted and contribute to an excessive—and unhelpful—focus on aid. All of the studies have significant problems with the methods used to arrive at the bottom line. The more careful ones come with caveats, but these tend to get lost once advocates or the media get hold of them. More importantly, by putting a price tag on outcomes, cost estimates inadvertently create an illusion that any goal can be met, if only the right amount of money can be mobilized. Among development experts, however, it is widely accepted that resources are not the sole—and perhaps not even the most important—constraint to meeting the MDGs.

FIGURE 9.1
GROWTH GOAL VS. PERFORMANCE

Each dot represents one country. Only a handful of countries on Earth, in the best of circumstances, grew recently at the rate all of Sub-Saharan Africa would need to grow in order to halve poverty by 2015.



Includes all 153 countries for which the World Bank's World Development Indicators 2005 lists constant-price GDP.

FIGURE 9.2
EDUCATION GOAL VS. PERFORMANCE

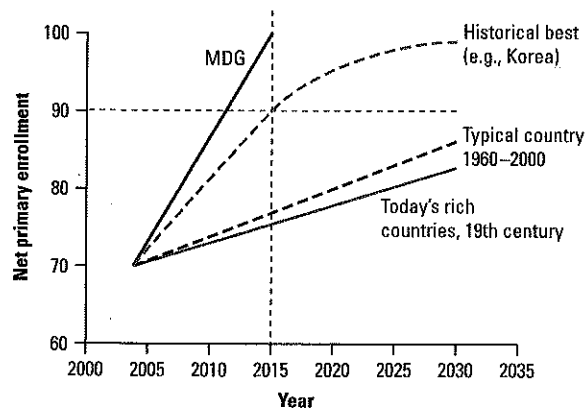
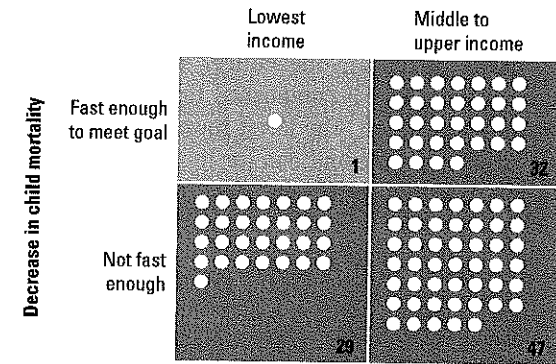


FIGURE 9.3
CHILD MORTALITY GOAL VS. 1975-2000 PERFORMANCE



No amount of aid will make Africa grow at 7%. A huge literature looks at the link between aid and economic growth, and the results are not overly promising. Even those studies that do show aid can cause growth (for example, certain kinds of aid or that given to countries with good policies), also show very steep diminishing returns to additional aid. That is, even if aid boosts growth a little, more aid cannot make Africa grow like China.

In the social sectors it is also already well known that more money often does not translate into results; more health spending does not necessarily mean better health. This is because of deep structural problems in local health and education systems that aid projects have a poor record of rapidly removing. The effectiveness of aid is at times also undermined by the way donors operate.

Most importantly, the weak link between spending and services exists also because health and education do not occur in a vacuum, but rather in a broader economic environment. It may be an uncomfortable truth, but even something as basic as primary education still has a demand side. The desire of parents to keep their children in school is affected not only by the availability and quality of schools, but also by a range of incentives linked to cultural preferences, family circumstances, and wider changes in the economy. Knowing the cost of putting several million children through school may be useful, but it is not the same as knowing how to actually get them in school.

WHAT MIGHT BE THE DOWNSIDE?

A literal interpretation of the MDGs accepts the goals as real targets. A more nuanced view might see the MDGs as a symbol of the kinds of outcomes toward which the world should strive. This view takes the MDGs as a tool, not a practical target. Goals generate discussion, focus attention, and help assign accountability. The MDGs have doubtlessly served these purposes to some degree.

But there is a long history of setting international development goals. In the 1960s the UN set its sights on universal primary education by 1980, and in 1980 it committed to 6.5% economic growth throughout the developing world by 1990—among many, many others. Through the 1980s and 1990s there was growth, poverty reduction, improved schooling, and much else to celebrate throughout the large majority of the developing world, but did anyone notice? These impossible goals focused attention far away from what was accomplished through sound domestic policies, aid, and other forms of cooperation. The latest round of unattainable goals will do so again. That's bad for poor people and bad for the development community.

Indeed, there is a real risk that the MDGs, as currently conceived and promoted, could turn real development successes into imaginary failures. Creating targets such as the MDGs may help to rejuvenate the aid debate and energize the development community. But there is also a danger that the MDGs, by creating utopian expectations of what can be achieved quickly, will create unnecessary impressions of failure.

Burkina Faso, for instance, has net primary school enrollment of around 40 to 45%. Should it be termed success or failure if wise governance, aid, and other types of engagement allow the country to reach only 60% enrollment by 2015? Such a feat would be extraordinary by historical standards, but a patent failure according to the MDGs. It took the United States over a century to make the transition from Burkina Faso's current enrollment rate to universal primary schooling. Would it not energize the development community more to celebrate Burkina Faso's performance than to condemn it as disaster?

The excessive focus on aid is also potentially risky. Aid can and will play a role in improving the lives of the world's poor. But another \$50 billion or even \$100 billion more, cannot achieve the MDGs. If lots more money does appear, unrealistic promises will undercut much of the rationale for aid and bolster those who claim aid is a waste. If huge increases in aid do not materialize, then poor countries will complain that rich countries have not lived up to their end of the MDG bargain.

WHAT NOW?

The MDGs, despite these risks, are not going away. The UN, its members governments, and the donor community should:

- Accept that it is not feasible for most countries to reach most of the MDGs, especially in Africa;
- Stop misusing costing studies as evidence that we can purchase outcomes with more aid (the studies themselves explicitly make no such claim);
- Consider new ways of recognizing real success at the country level rather than in global targets;
- Avoid these problems with the next round of goals—yes, there will be more—by basing them on where countries are and on reasonable expectations of performance.

CONCLUSION

The vast majority of developing countries will miss most of the MDG targets in 2015. Nearly all African countries will miss most of them. But this will not be a sign that poor countries have failed, or that aid has been a waste. Nor will it primarily be because donors did not spend the right amount of money.

At the same time, many of the world's poorest countries will in all likelihood make great progress in improving the quality of life of their people—and aid will almost certainly have played a crucial part. It would be a shame if the MDGs, in trying to make the case that the world can and should help the world's poor, wound up undermining the cause by over-reaching on the targets and overselling the efficacy of aid.

What poor countries need from rich ones is broad-based, sustained, moderate engagement—not emotional, moralistic, centralized big bangs. Aid can work, but it must be dramatically improved. Innovations like the Global Health Fund or the Millennium Challenge Account are a great start, but we need much more such experimentation and evaluation before “scaling up” makes any sense. And we need to go far beyond aid, investing in key technologies (such as vaccines), opening our markets, finding creative arrangements for win-win labor mobility, and many other avenues to support ongoing efforts by poor countries themselves.

But development is a marathon, not a sprint. In a democratic society, the only way to build support for the long haul is to nurture a constituency by showing the public that good things happen in Africa and other very poor places. The MDGs simply will not do this. They were designed, in fact, to do the opposite.

POSTSCRIPT

The UN's Millennium project has been taken seriously by the international development community. The major UN multilateral agencies, donor governments, and developing countries have all drawn up plans to achieve the MDGs. Certainly it has been a valuable means of focusing the world's attention on the progress being made in development and mobilizing support for development efforts.

At the time of the adoption of the MDGs, critics pointed out that the plan did not include specific commitments by donor countries for the provision of adequate resources to meet these targets. Although some progress has been made, many now suggest that only a massive infusion of new aid funding will ensure that the goals are met. But is an infusion of more money all that is needed to meet the MDGs?

While it is possible that many, or even most, of the goals may be met at the global level, few would suggest that each country will achieve this at the national level. In fact, a large number of developing countries will fail in meeting the majority of their national targets. Some analysts suggest that goals have been unrealistic at the national level since meeting them would require rates of improvement in economic growth and development that are at the outer edges of historical precedent. Thus, the simple infusion of more funds will be insufficient in itself. What then is the value of the MDGs? Is there a danger that, if not fully met, they will simply foster greater cynicism about target setting and future aid-giving? Or will they serve as a symbol of hoping for mobilizing an even greater global collective effort?

Suggested Additional Readings

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InfoTrac® College Edition

Search for the following articles in the InfoTrac® database:

- "Aid Must Be Better Targeted for MDGs," *Finance & Development*, 43, no. 2 (June 2006): 2.
- Sachs, Jeffrey. "A Practical Plan to Achieve the MDGs," *UN Chronicle*, 42, no. 2 (June-August 2005): 5-6.
- Wai-Poi, Matthew. "Financing the Millennium Development Goals," *Journal of International Affairs*, 58, 2 (Spring 2005): 285-290.

For more articles, enter:

"millennium development goals" and "MDGs" in the keyword search.

Web Resources

UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

This official site of the UN's campaign to support achievement of the Millennium Development Goals contains the annual report of the Secretary-General on the global progress in meeting the goals. It also contains a number of other UN documents relating to the MDGs.

WORLD BANK & MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/GMIS/home.do?siteId=2

This is the World Bank's official page for tracking progress in achieving the MDGs. It contains a number of maps, charts, and tables reporting on the achievement of these goals in various parts of the world.

Are the Millennium Development Goals Achievable?

UNDP MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

www.undp.org/mdg/

This United Nations Development Programme provides a number of resources for tracking the achievement of the goals and discussions of the strategies being employed.

MILLENNIUM CAMPAIGN

www.millenniumcampaign.org

This is the site of the UN-supported Millennium Campaign. You will find a number of reports of the activities of NGOs and other civil society groups supporting the MDGs.

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

www.makepovertyhistory.org

One of the larger transnational advocacy efforts that has promoted the achievement of the MDGs, along with other goals, is the Make Poverty History campaign. This site has a number of resources available as well as links to other campaigns.

Issue 10

Has the Adoption of a Rights-based Approach to Development Failed?



YES

PETER UVIN, "On High Moral Ground: The Incorporation of Human Rights by the Development Enterprise," *Praxis: The Fletcher Journal of Development Studies*, XVII (2002)



NO

HUGO SLIM, "Making Moral Low Ground: Rights as the Struggle for Justice and the Abolition of Development," *Praxis: The Fletcher Journal of Development Studies*, XVII (2002)

Following the Second World War, the discourses on human rights and development emerged simultaneously but largely independent of each other. Development discourse focused on the notion of development as a problem of promoting economic growth. Whether this meant increases in the Gross National Product, meeting "basic needs," or promoting "structural adjustment policies," human rights were largely absent from the equation.

Within the human rights field, debates focused on the appropriate balance between traditional civil and political rights and the more collectivist-oriented economic, social, and cultural rights. The dichotomy between these two sets of rights was formally institutionalized by the adoption in 1966 of two separate international agreements—the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

During the Cold War, debates on the appropriate balance between these two sets of rights were largely shaped by the ideological divisions of the Cold War. Western nations, led by the United States, argued that civil and political rights should always be given priority and that true development could be achieved only when civil and political rights are first recognized. Many developing states, led by China, argued that social, economic, and cultural rights needed to take precedence. If someone is starving, what good does a guarantee of freedom of speech do? Some pointed to the so-called Asian Tigers—South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore—as examples where authoritarian governments were successful in promoting development. Human rights might have to take a secondary place until economic development and growth is achieved.

The artificial distinction between these two sets of rights came under increased challenge in the 1980s. The first significant step in this process was the 1986 adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Declaration of the Right to

Development. True development, it was argued, ensures that all human rights are realized—civil, political, economic, social, and cultural. According to this concept, the two sets of rights formed an integral whole.

Acceptance of this notion gained momentum with the end of the Cold War. The 1993 UN Conference on Human Rights in Vienna made the case that all human rights form an undivided, interdependent, and non-hierarchical whole. This theme was picked up in subsequent UN meetings, such as the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development in 1995, which focused attention on the importance of human rights in meeting the goals of social development. A growing number of UN agencies began identifying the promotion of human rights as a part of their development agenda. For example, UNICEF takes the UN Convention on the Right of the Child and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as the reference point for all their programming. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has promoted the development agenda, but focused its *Human Development Report 2000* on "Human Rights and Human Development." As its report noted: "Human rights and development share a common vision and a common purpose—to secure the freedom, well-being and dignity of all people everywhere" (p. 1). As noted in the discussion on Issue 9, the adoption of the Millennium Goals was also framed in the context of human rights commitments to ensure the establishment of a development process through which all humans could reach their full capacities.

As a result of these developments, a growing number of both official government development agencies and non-governmental organizations have integrated human rights discourse into their development programming. Proponents of a "rights-based" approach to development argue that this helps to establish a clearer normative framework for orienting development cooperation. It links development efforts to an internationally agreed set of norms that are backed by international law. As a result, citizens have a stronger basis for making claims against their own states, and civil society groups can more effectively hold states accountable for their actions and policies.

In addition, a rights-based approach marks an improvement in the "basic needs" strategies that many advocated a decade ago. Needs-based approaches tend to focus on the securing of new or additional resources for delivering services to the identified "needy" groups. Such an approach can be driven primarily by charitable or even paternalistic concerns which may overlook some more fundamental issues of social justice. Instead, rights-based approaches shift the focus to a more equitable sharing and distribution of existing resources, with greater attention to those groups and individuals who are particularly marginalized and vulnerable. As a result, some feel that the adoption of rights-based approaches give legitimacy to more progressive, even radical, approaches to development rather than the technocratic, managerial approaches that dominated in the past. Many of the quantifiable measures of development used in the past

are no longer relevant. Instead, development success may now be measured in terms of the empowerment of people and communities to take greater control of their futures.

A growing number of intergovernmental development organizations, governmental development assistance agencies, and non-governmental organizations have adopted the discourse of human rights in their development programming. But, is all this just new window dressing? Has the fundamental way in which development agencies operate been significantly altered? In the following essay, Peter Uvin raises several questions regarding the widespread adoption of rights-based approaches. While he applauds the intentions, he is ultimately fearful that the changes have been primarily rhetorical and amount to not much more than "fluff." Hugo Slim responds by acknowledging some problems with the concept, while arguing that Uvin should not underestimate the importance of the "prophetic" use that many NGOs make of human rights discourse to hold governments and development agencies accountable.

✓ **YES**
**On High Moral Ground: The
Incorporation of Human Rights by
the Development Enterprise**

PETER UVIN

Until quite recently, the development enterprise operated in perfect isolation, if not ignorance, of the human rights community.¹ This does not mean that all development practitioners are undemocratic people or lack personal interest in human rights. Rather, it means that development practitioners did not consider human rights issues as part of their professional domain: they neither weighed the implications of their own work on human rights outcomes, nor sought explicitly to affect human rights through their work. This tendency continued until well into the 1990s, allowing the organizers of a prestigious UN-sponsored 1999 Conference on Nutrition and Human Rights to state that "the human rights approach to nutrition is not even on the radar screen"² and that "interaction between the [UN human rights machinery] and the UN development agencies has been essentially non-existent."³

This intellectual and operational gap began to close slowly from the early 1990s onwards. There is nowadays a significant and growing literature, mainly of the 'gray' kind, on the relationship between development and human rights: policy declarations and exhortations of the need for further integration, mainstreaming, collaboration, and analysis are commonplace.

While much of this is to be applauded—at the very least, a major departure from the previous policy of complete blindness and acquiescence seemed overdue—there is still much to worry about in this context. Two issues stand out: 1) much of this work risks being little more than rhetorical, feel-good change, further legitimizing historically created inequalities and injustices in this world, and 2) the many faces of power reveal themselves, as they always do, when the powerful and the rich voluntarily set out to collaborate and redefine the conditions of misery and exploitation for the rest of the world, and fund the resulting solutions.

I intend to critique some of the typical ways in which human rights have made their way into the development agenda. Specifically, I will discuss three levels that are part of a continuum from the most status-quo oriented approach to the most radical. At the lowest level, I will describe the incorporation of human rights terminology into classical development discourse. As this is purely rhetorical, the traditional discourse is not challenged at all. On the contrary, it is validated by its occupation of yet another plane of high moral ground. At a second level, human rights objectives are added to a range of goals and criteria for development agencies, thus allowing for the establishment of new programs with specific human rights aims. A perfect example thereof is the fashionable good governance agenda. At the third and highest level, the mandate of development itself may be redefined

in human rights terms, potentially bringing about a fundamental rethinking of the development paradigm itself—a so-called "human rights approach to development." In this context, the work of Amartya Sen stands out. The following discussion investigates each of these approaches in greater detail.

THE RHETORICAL-FORMULAIC INCORPORATION

During the 1990s, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies published a slew of policy statements, guidelines and documents on the incorporation of human rights in their mandate. An enormous amount of this work was little more than thinly disguised repackaging of old wine in new bottles. As Frankovits rightly states:

With an increasing demand for economic and social rights to be a major factor in development assistance, donors have tended to reformulate their terminology. Beginning with the World Bank's statement at the 1993 Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, followed by frequently heard assertions by individual donor agencies, the claim is made that all development assistance contributes to economic and social rights. Thus agricultural projects—whatever their nature—are claimed to contribute directly to the fulfillment of the right to food.⁴

A few additional quotes on the issue will get my point across nicely. There is the World Bank, claiming that its "lending over the past 50 years for education, health care, nutrition, sanitation, housing, environmental protection and agriculture have helped turn rights into reality for millions."⁵ Or UNDP, declaring that it "already plays an important role in the protection and promotion of human rights.... Its program is an application of the right to development."⁶ Essentially, these statements colonize the human rights discourse, arguing—as Moliere's character, who discovered he had always been speaking prose—that human rights has been the focus of these development agencies all along. Case closed; high moral ground safely established.⁷

Interpreted more benignly, this wordplay constitutes the first step towards a true shift in vision. Indeed, much scholarship argues that discourse changes have real-world impacts: they slowly reshape the margins of acceptable action, create opportunities for redefining reputations and naming and shaming, change incentive structures and the way interests and preferences are defined, and influence expectations. This is, after all, a key proposition of all international law: even in the absence of enforcement mechanisms, international law does matter by affecting actors' perceptions, calculations, reputations, and norms. The same insight is also a key tenet in so-called sociological, institutionalist, and social-constructivist schools of thought in the academic discipline of international relations. Hence, the kind of rhetorical incorporation discussed in this section, while it may change few of the immediate actions undertaken, may make a real difference in the longer run. How much of a change this will amount to is a matter of time.

There are, however, some serious problems with this habit of rhetorically incorporating human rights. Typically, until now, what this approach has produced is not only a simple sleight-of-hand; it is also wrong, for it overlooks the tensions between the logics of human rights and development.⁸ As Donnelly convincingly argues, referring to the UNDP's new work on human development:

Human rights and sustainable human development "are inextricably linked" only if development is defined to make this relationship tautological. "Sustainable human development" simply redefines human rights, along with democracy, peace, and justice, as subsets of development. Aside from the fact that neither most ordinary people nor governments use the term in this way, such a definition fails to address the relationship between economic development and human rights. Tensions between these objectives cannot be evaded by stipulative definitions.⁹

Working out the relationship between development and human rights requires more than simply stating that one automatically implies, equals, or subsumes the other. Michael Windfuhr, founder of Food First Information and Action Network, one of the world's foremost human rights organizations devoted to an economic right (the right to food), correctly adds:

Besides the general misconceptions related to ESC-Rights¹⁰—that they are costly to implement, that implementation can only be done progressively and that they are therefore not rights at all but rather political objectives—one additional basic misunderstanding often comes up in discussions on how to integrate ESC-Rights into development cooperation, the concept that development cooperation automatically implements ESC-Rights because it is oriented to improve health or food situations of groups of the population. A rights-based approach means foremost to talk about the relationship between a state and its citizens.¹¹

There is a real danger in this kind of rhetorical discourse. Far from constituting the first step towards a fundamental re-conceptualization of the practice of development cooperation, it seems merely to provide a fig leaf for the continuation of the status quo. By postulating that development projects and programs by definition constitute an implementation of human rights, the important distinction between a service-based and a rights-based approach to development is obscured.

Another pernicious tendency to manipulate words exists as well. In the previous paragraphs, the rhetorical sleight of hand consisted of arguing that the development community has always—automatically and axiomatically—furthered human rights, and everything is thus fine and dandy. The exact opposite rhetorical trick is sometimes employed as well. It consists of suggesting that major, epochal changes are now underway in the development enterprise, and they follow directly from

the blinding realization of the crucial importance of human rights in development practice. The key human rights contribution to development practice, as repeated in countless documents, is the need for the engagement and participation of the poor in the processes that affect their lives.¹² This argument is breathlessly presented as a major breakthrough that we all ought to feel truly pleased about, as if development practitioners have not been proposing exactly the same thing for decades now, with very little to show for it. When human rights specialists, most of whom are lawyers, write this kind of nonsense, one can forgive them on the grounds of their ignorance. When development practitioners write such things, however, it amounts to deliberate misrepresentation.

The prime reason why development agencies adopt such language with its deliberate obfuscations is, of course, to benefit from the moral authority and political appeal of the human rights discourse. The development community is in constant need of regaining the high moral ground in order to fend off criticism and mobilize resources. As the development community faces a deep crisis of legitimacy among both insiders and outsiders, the act of cloaking itself in the human rights mantle may make sense, especially if it does not force anyone to think or act differently.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

At a second level we find the concept of good governance, developed by the World Bank in the early 1990s. The Bank identified "four areas of governance that are consistent with [its] mandate: public sector management, accountability, the legal framework, and information and transparency."¹³ The good governance notion was an extension and deepening of the Bank's economic conditionality agenda, contained in the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s. It was widely perceived that these programs had not lived up to expectations and this failure was seen as a result of political factors. Economic conditionality had not worked as expected. Governments signed structural adjustment agreements but subsequently failed to implement them correctly, if at all. If only the workings of Third World governments were more transparent and accountable, the thought went, then surely other social groups would demand the right policies and a domestic basis for a stable and liberal policy environment would be laid. As such, the good governance agenda was explicitly designed to be the complement, the political extension, of structural adjustment programs.

The good governance agenda also fulfilled a rhetorical-political function. It allowed the World Bank to discuss the reforms that it proposed as economic and not political matters. In short, it constituted an attempt to de-politicize the concepts of democracy (and *a fortiori* human rights) in order to avoid allegations of undermining state sovereignty, as well as to benefit from the widespread acceptance that economic thinking enjoys in the development community. As the Human Rights Council of Australia puts it: "The use of 'good governance' arises from a perception that governments in developing countries will prove less

resistant to such euphemisms than to talk of 'corruption' or 'human rights.'¹⁴ This apolitical nature is crucial for the survival of international organizations in a world of *de jure*, if not *de facto*, sovereignty.

In some ways the good governance agenda, being defined in a more restrictive fashion, is less politically interventionist than that of democracy and human rights. In other ways, it extends the reach of the international community, for it has almost no backing in international law. Unlike human rights (and some would even argue democracy), not a single international treaty or legal instrument commits governments to transparency, accountability of civil servants, or 'good' public sector management, however defined. State practice, for that matter, differs dramatically even among the rich countries.

The access to public information that U.S. citizens enjoy under the Freedom of Information Act is absolutely unthinkable in most of Europe. Then again, the degree of financial clout exerted by Wall Street on the U.S. Department of Treasury, or by large corporations on the U.S. Department of Commerce, if not on the entire political system in the United States, would be unacceptable to most European citizens. Yet the extent to which French foreign policy, especially towards Africa, is a private presidential matter beyond democratic scrutiny is unimaginable in most other countries. Moreover, the broad-based coalition governments underpinned by corporatist institutions reaching deep into society, characteristic of a number of European countries, are inconceivable in the United States. Indeed, profound differences in the way public institutions are accountable or transparent to citizens, or the way the public sector is managed, exist between rich countries. None of these matters are governed by international legal standards. Although good governance is defined as a technical matter, essentially another term for liberal public sector management, it is a strong extension and imposition of the liberal ideology of its promoters and is also totally unsupported by international legal standards.

More recently, the World Bank has officially converted to 'real' human rights, and its discourse on governance has subsequently become much less technical, at least in documents meant for human rights activists. This produces interesting results. According to the Bank itself, "By helping to fight corruption, improve transparency, and accountability in governance, strengthen judicial systems, and modernize financial sectors, the Bank contributes to building environments in which people are better able to pursue a broader range of human rights."¹⁵ As this quote suggests, and as I have already discussed, much of the human rights conversation still amounts to little more than rhetorical repackaging. Policies that were once justified by their promise to improve investor confidence are now justified for their human rights potential.

Nothing else has changed. It takes more than a few ideological leaps to see how strengthening financial systems is a human rights activity. Certainly the framers of the Universal Declaration and the two Covenants were not thinking of shoring up banking reserve requirements, improving accounting standards, or liberalizing current accounts when they constructed the original human rights edifice.

In such statements, the many faces of power and their associated discourses come together. Human rights, free trade, or the willingness to let multinational corporations (MNCs) buy national assets become conflated, amounting to restatements of the 'good world' as the powerful see it. They are decreed from above, morally self-satisfying and compatible with the status quo in the centers of power. Rich countries remain immune to criticism. Over-consumption in the north, a history of colonialism, environmental degradation, protectionism, the dumping of arms in the Third World, the history of shoring up past dictators, the wisdom of structural adjustment, and globalization are not on the table for discussion. No wonder so many people resent the human rights agenda.

SEN AND FREEDOM AS DEVELOPMENT

At a third level, a new paradigm of rights-based development is emerging in which development and rights become different aspects of the same dynamic. The boundaries between human rights and development disappear, and both become conceptually and operationally inseparable parts of the same processes of social change. Development comes to be redefined in terms that include human rights as a constitutive part: all worthwhile processes of social change are simultaneously rights-based and economically grounded, and should be conceived in such terms. This makes intuitive sense, because at the level of human experience these dimensions *are* indeed inseparable.¹⁶

Amartya Sen has produced significant and often-quoted reflections on this new paradigm. His latest book, *Development as Freedom*, synthesizes many of his earlier insights. He defines development as the expansion of capabilities or substantive human freedoms for each person, "the capacity to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value."¹⁷ He rightly adds, "despite unprecedented increases in overall opulence, the contemporary world denies elementary freedoms to vast numbers—perhaps even the majority—of people." He argues for the removal of major factors that limit freedom, defining them as "poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over-activity of repressive states."¹⁸

An interesting part of Sen's work is his treatment of freedom as simultaneously instrumental, constitutive, and constructive for development. This goes beyond arguing that both development and freedom are nice (so why don't we call them something else altogether). Rather, it sets out the deep and mutually constitutive links that exist between these two concepts and domains in ways that make their inseparability clear for all. As he states:

There is the often asked rhetoric: What should come first—removing poverty and misery, or guaranteeing political liberty and civil rights, for which poor people have little use anyway? Is this a sensible way of approaching the problem of economic needs and political freedoms—in terms of a basic

dichotomy that appears to undermine the relevance of political freedoms because the economic needs are so urgent? I would argue, no, this is altogether the wrong way to see the force of economic needs, or to understand the salience of political freedoms. The real issues that have to be addressed lie elsewhere, and they involve taking note of extensive interconnections between political freedoms and the understanding and fulfillment of economic needs. The connections are not only instrumental (political freedoms can have a major role in providing incentives and information in the solution of acute economic needs), but also constructive ... I shall argue that the intensity of economic needs *adds* to—rather than subtracts from—the urgency of political freedoms. There are three different considerations that take us in the direction of a general preeminence of basic political and liberal rights:

1. Their *direct* importance in human living associated with basic capabilities (including that of social and political participation);
2. Their *instrumental* role in enhancing the hearing that people get in expressing and supporting their claims to political attention (including the claims of economic needs);
3. Their *constructive* role in the conceptualization of “needs” (including the understanding of “economic needs” in a social context).¹⁹

Such ideas have made great inroads in international development discourse. Take this statement, for example, from the UN Secretary-General’s *Agenda for Development*, which clearly discusses the first two types of relations between development and human rights:

Democracy and development are linked in fundamental ways. They are linked because democracy provides the only long-term basis for managing competing ethnic, religious, and cultural interests in a way that minimizes the risk of violent internal conflict. They are linked because democracy is inherently attached to the question of governance, which has an impact on all aspects of development efforts. They are linked because democracy is a fundamental human right, the advancement of which is itself an important measure of development. They are linked because people’s participation in the decision-making processes which affect their lives is a basic tenet of development.²⁰

This was written five years before Amartya Sen’s book, by an institution that is not exactly the hotbed of philosophical innovation. And we can go back further in time as well: cannot Wilson’s four freedoms be seen as direct precursors of exactly the same ideas? Hence, we have to acknowledge that these concepts have been around a long time in the development field. Rather than congratulating ourselves on how smart and insightful we have become since we all read and talk about Sen’s work, we ought to ask why we have not acted on these ideas before.

And this is where we encounter the limits of Sen’s major contribution to development. There is no politically grounded analysis of what stands in the way of his approach. In addition, Sen does not even try to move beyond the level of broad paradigmatic insight. This is hardly a cause for discarding Sen’s major contribution: no man is obliged to do everything. What it does mean, though, is that agencies, by signing up to Sen’s vision, remain committed to little more than improved discourse.

Why then the barrage of praise for Sen’s seminal contributions to development? The reason is deeply linked to the constant search for high moral ground that preoccupies so many in a field where competition for scarce resources is intense. In the development enterprise money is never made, only spent. The voices of those who receive the services supplied are hardly heard, actions are rarely evaluated, and product quality measures are almost totally unknown. In that world, the creation of attractive visions is a prime mechanism to ensure survival and growth. Such visions combine the appeal of science with the high moral ground of ‘doing good.’ Indeed, their essential function is just that—providing visions of oneself, markers of identity, trademarks of progressiveness. Many of the ideological changes that the development community goes through are traceable to this imperative, and the glorification of Sen’s fine work is no exception. With insightful and stimulating conceptual formulations, but zero practical guidelines or obligations, there is little to disagree with in Sen’s thinking: adopting it costs nothing. Aid agencies are left with a pure win-win situation.

In addition, Sen has been able to restate well-known concepts intelligently in *economic-sounding language*. He is an economist by profession, and a good one. Over the years, he has constructed a body of work that is deeply erudite, methodologically and theoretically sound, and empirically rich, as well as—a rarity in his profession—multidisciplinary and informed by a strong ethical vision.²¹ Because he is an economist employed by prestigious universities such as Harvard and Cambridge and is therefore certifiably authoritative, the fact that he speaks the language of the dominant ideology of “economism” simply adds to his appeal—an appeal that has come to border on beatification since he received the Nobel Prize. We, the do-gooders working in the margins, need every economist who comes our way! Nevertheless, there are a few limitations in his work that should be discussed.

Specifically, if we believe Amartya Sen is right, what do we do differently when we redefine development along his path? It is interesting here to look at the institution whose discourse has most taken over Sen’s ideas: UNDP. Their excellent 2001 *Human Development Report* deals with human rights, human development, and the relations between the two. This report is chocked-full of interesting insights, and has a distinctly different intellectual feeling to it than, for example, a typical World Bank report or even UNDP work a decade ago. Yet the most remarkable finding comes from the section that describes the practical

implications of "promoting rights in development."²² According to the Report, there are five concrete things to be done in the new approach:

1. Launch independent national assessments of human rights;
2. Align national laws with international human rights standards and commitments;
3. Promote human rights norms;
4. Strengthen a network of human rights organizations; and
5. Promote a rights-enabling economic environment.

Four out of the five implications—ensure that governments make references to human rights in their constitutions and remove contrary laws; educate, sensitize, or mobilize people in human rights; create national human rights commissions or ombudsmen—are largely legalistic and technical and will not challenge anyone. These are all potentially useful activities, but they do not reflect any mainstreaming of human rights into development practice. They are simply small, technical add-ons. Only the fifth seems to offer the potential of going further. Allow me to quote from it at more length from the same report:

How to create an enabling environment in which public policy can most effectively provide resources for advancing human rights? First, the public sector must focus on what it can do and leave for others what it should not do ... Second, with this division of labor, the state can focus on the direct provision of many economic, social, and civil rights.... Third, the major economic ministries, such as finance and planning, need to integrate rights into the economic policy-making process ... Fourth, the private sector also has responsibilities in creating an enabling economic environment. Chambers of commerce and other business organizations should contribute to efforts to further improve human rights ...

This is all the new approach amounts to: a standard repetition of the late 1990s liberal dogma of the sanctity of economic growth combined with a measure of human resource development and pious statements that ministries and corporations ought to think about human rights. Vagueness dominates. Are UNDP's suggestions different from what the World Bank's *World Development Report* would allow? If so, how would they be operationalized? What would the role of external aid agencies be? Not a word on any of these questions. In addition, none of the human rights objectives relate to UNDP, the aid enterprise, or the international community itself. All of them are to be implemented out there, in this separate place called the Third World, but do not require any critique of the global system and our place in it.

CONCLUSION

As could be expected, there is less to the emerging human rights approach in the development regime than meets the eye. Much of it is about the quest for moral high ground: draping oneself in the mantle of human rights to cover the fat belly of the development community while avoiding challenging the status quo too much, cross-examining oneself, or questioning the international system. One can see power at work here, which is to be expected. Most of this rethinking constitutes a voluntary act by people in New York, Washington, London, or Geneva (not to forget Medford, Massachusetts). Smart and well intended, most of them, but not exactly people in great need to overthrow the established order or second-guess themselves. The people in whose name the innovations are adopted did not fight for this change. It is not part of a fundamental reshuffling of the cards of power or a redistribution of resources worldwide: no such dynamic has occurred. As a result, one could expect little more than fluff, self-congratulation, and more or less hidden transcripts of power.

I am aware that I am painting a particularly negative picture in these pages. As someone who has strongly argued that the old development paradigm and associated practice was in need of profound repair,²³ I am certainly not making the case that we should simply leave things alone, or that any alteration of the development mandate in the direction of a greater attention to human rights is by definition a bad idea. I also appreciate how major change always starts small, and how even rhetorical gains sometimes turn out to be the snowballs that set in motion fresh avalanches. I even realize that there are organizations and people, in both rich and poor countries, who are courageously rethinking long-held ideologies and practices in human rights terms. That said, for this paper, I have chosen the uppercut approach to argumentation: pricking through a few balloons in the hope that when they burst, the noise will be enough to rouse academics, policymakers, and practitioners from the comfortable sleep of the just.

NOTES

1. Katarina Tomasevski, *Development Aid and Human Rights Revisited* (New York: Pinter, 1993) and Hans-Otto Sano, "Development and Human Rights: The Necessary, but Partial Integration of Human Rights and Development," *Human Rights Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2000), 742.
2. Lawrence Haddad, "Symposium Synthesis and Overview," *SCN News*, no. 18 (July 1999), 14.
3. Urban Jonsson, "Historical Summary on the SCN Working Group on Nutrition, Ethics, and Human Rights," *SCN News*, no. 18 (July 1999), 49; David P. Forsythe, "The United Nations, Human Rights, and Development," *Human Rights Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1997), 334. Note that the right to food is probably the most well developed of all economic, social, and cultural rights; hence, the situation is even worse in all other fields of development!
4. André Frankovits, "Rejoinder: The Rights Way to Development," *Food Policy* 21, no. 1 (1996), 126; see also Human Rights Council of Australia, "Inquiry into the Link

- between Aid and Human Rights," Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade, February 2001, sections 2 and 3.
5. James C. Lovelace, "Will Rights Cure Malnutrition? Reflections on Human Rights, Nutrition, and Developments," *SCN News*, no. 18 (July 1999), 27; World Bank, *Development and Human Rights: The Role of the World Bank*, (Washington DC: World Bank, 1999), 3-4.
 6. "Integrating Human Rights with Sustainable Development," *UNDP Policy Document 2* (1998), 6.
 7. See also Katarina Tomasevski, "International Development Finance (Agencies)," *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: A Textbook*, eds. Ashjorn Eide, Catarina Krause, and Allan Rosas (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1995), 409.
 8. Sano, "Development and Human Rights," 744.
 9. Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights, Democracy and Development," *Human Rights Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (August 1999), 611.
 10. Economic, social and cultural rights.
 11. Michael Windfuhr, "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Development Cooperation," in *Working Together: The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation-Report of the NGO Workshop*, eds. Andre Frankoyits and Patrick Earle (Stockholm: October 16-19, 2000), 25.
 12. DFDID, *Realizing Human Rights for Poor People* (London: DFID Strategy Paper, 2000), 5; Stella Mukasa and Florence Butegwa, *An Overview of Approaches to Economic and Social Rights in Development in Uganda-Draft report for DANIDA* (Kampala: Nordic Consulting Group, June 2001), 40; Arjun Sengupta, *Study on the Current State of Progress in the Implementation of the Rights to Development*, Commission on Human Rights, 56th sess., July 1999; Arjun Sengupta, "Realizing the Right to Development," *Development and Change*, 31 (2000a), 553-578; Note by the Secretary-General for the 55th session. A/55/306. Aug. 2000b. E/CN.4/1999/WG.18/2.
 13. World Bank, *Governance and Development* (Washington DC: World Bank, 1992), *passim*.
 14. HRCA 2001.
 15. World Bank, *Development and Human Rights*, 3.
 16. Craig Scott, "Reaching Beyond (Without Abandoning) the Category of 'Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,'" *Human Rights Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1999), 635-6.
 17. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 87.
 18. *Ibid.*, 1; see also UNDP, *Human Development Report 2001* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19.
 19. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 147-8.
 20. United Nations, *An Agenda for Development: Report of the Secretary-General* (New York: UN, A/48/935, 6 May 1994), par. 120.
 21. Please note that, in the community of his economist peers, the latter qualifiers—all the ones that follow the words "methodologically and theoretically," in fact—are much less appreciated. As a colleague recently remarked: "Sen couldn't get tenure in any good American economics department on the basis of his famous work."
 22. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2001*, 112.
 23. Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1998).

X **NO**
Making Moral Low Ground: Rights as the Struggle for Justice and the Abolition of Development
 HUGO SLIM

It is always a pleasure to reply to the exciting, broad-brush strokes of a scholar like Peter Uvin. He paints an expressive and important picture of the adoption of human rights speak by powerful sectors of the international development establishment—or "enterprise," as he usefully describes it. Not surprisingly, I find myself agreeing with much of what he says and admiring the way in which he says it. There is indeed "much to worry about" when the powers-that-be adopt the liberationist language of the oppressed and drape their projects in revolutionary garb. Peter Uvin is right to be concerned that much of the new rights agenda in international development circles is really about "fluff and power." In this reply, I would like to amplify some of his main themes. But, above all, I would like to take them further and think about what happens when people other than the development establishment use human rights to talk about poverty.

But first, there are a couple of things that might be usefully added to Uvin's piece. It is slightly inaccurate to say that the development enterprise has lived "in perfect isolation, if not ignorance, of the human rights community." This is partly but not entirely true. Assuming that "the development enterprise" includes NGOs, churches, and community-based organizations (CBOs), then this statement is not correct. For those of us whose work is primarily concerned with Africa, it is easy to forget the experience of Latin America, South Asia, and even South Africa.

In these societies and their polities, the idea of human rights has played a central part in the struggle for development, social justice, and peace. In conflicts and political repression in Latin America, Freireans and liberation theologians conceived of development as a popular movement for social justice. While their analysis was essentially Marxist in many of its aspects, most of them were not averse to the political philosophy of human rights and framed their struggle for land, livelihood, democracy, and peace in rights terms. In this process they radicalized many European and North American NGOs. The highly conflictual experience of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin American politics played an equally major part in the Church's determination to reach a conclusion about the ideology of human rights and to endorse them as an important and acceptable aspect of Catholic teaching. Similar processes took place in South Asia around land and gender rights and in South Africa around the struggle against apartheid.

In reality, therefore, there are perhaps two development traditions—a Latin American-style one and a more paternalistic and scientific one. In NGOs that I know best, people have tended to stay in one tradition and seldom move between the two. One exciting possibility is that the introduction of human rights

into development might mean that we see a more Latin American flavor to development struggles in future.

Another topic that may have been overlooked in Uvin's piece is the way in which human rights ideology is (perhaps increasingly) contested. This can take three main forms. Particular rights, around gender or childhood for example, can be contested at the periphery of a majority of rights that are generally accepted. In this way, states or groups can argue moral relativism on particular rights. More fundamentally, however, and in a way which Uvin himself comes close to doing, states, societies, or groups can reject the whole way the human rights regime functions as simply a bossy and superior aspect of Western hegemony serving Western interests. In other words, while societies may share many of the values expressed in human rights ideology, they will reject the human rights regime. Finally, of course, others will take cover under both these objections to use them as a means of ignoring international law and opinion while they deliberately violate human rights.

The fact that human rights ideology is contested is important when it comes to rights-based development because inevitably such contest will lead to conflicts that might not arise if a less legal and political discourse were pursued to focus on public goods. So, for example, one could envisage a government refusing to work with UNICEF on a child health program because it cannot tolerate the particular politics of child rights and state obligation that accompanies the program. Such a government could just as likely be a right wing U.S. donor government as well as an aid recipient government. Development pragmatists might argue that using the idea of rights in such situations is a sure way to ensure that nothing gets done for poor people. Thus, rhetoric or not, rights-talk can simply be a bad tactic in certain situations.

But enough about what Peter Uvin may have overlooked in his wide-ranging sketch. Let us now focus on his main point, that the adoption of rights-based development is really all about "fluff and power" and the taking of moral high ground without changing one's practice in any meaningful way. For this is a serious charge and one which is pretty well on target as things stand. In many NGOs advocating a rights-based approach, there is as much confusion as excitement. While most development people have got their hearts around a rights-based approach, they have not yet got their heads around it. Many feel that rights are important, but they may also have a hunch that Peter Uvin is onto something and that reading Sen and talking rights makes for little more than an "improved discourse" which may not be of much use to people enduring poverty around the world.

So, what about rights as fluff? Much of the breathless adrenalin rush of the new rights talk does indeed seem to offer a new way of feeling good. I began to embrace the political philosophy of human rights three years ago and have always noticed how passionate I can become when talking about rights and what a warm

glow it leaves me with after lecturing on the subject. Peter Uvin is right. Simply talking about human rights quite literally makes me feel virtuous. At last, rights-talk seems to give the dry, quasi-scientific theory of development a moral and political vision. It can really make one quite excited. Such is the sad life of a British academic! This aspect of rights-talk is a bit like prayer. One mouths eschatological ideas about human dignity and the coming of heaven on earth. One prays and feels good but has very little idea of its power and effect. It does indeed allow one to walk the "moral high ground" and makes one feel self-righteous.

But human rights don't only do this. They can act socially as well as piously. And rights-talk can function differently from different mouths. Human rights can sound and act very differently when they are spoken from what Gustavo Gutierrez calls "the underside of history"—the muddy side where people pay the price for those walking along the top. The same language of rights that may be rhetorical fluff in one place may be words of extreme courage and radical change in another. The power of speech is the power to name and define things. Rights-talk in Washington or Paris might be used piously as new words for the same old liturgy in the cathedrals of international trade and development. This might indeed be "repackaging" of old wine in new bottles as Peter Uvin suggests. It represents the power of re-dressing rather than power of redress. But from another place (a slum or the scene of a rigged election) and spoken from another voice (that of a poor man or a woman land rights lawyer) the same words of rights-talk could function prophetically as a demand for redress to change and challenge power.

So, I think the shift of development talk from previous discourses of philanthropy, charity, modernization, and progress to one of human rights can be made to be extremely significant. Most importantly, rights-talk has the ability to finally politicize development between the muddy low ground and the moral high ground. Human rights give a language of political contract to matters of poverty, injustice, and armed violence. Rights-talk stops people being perceived as 'needy,' as 'victims,' and as 'beneficiaries.' Instead, it enables these same people to know and present themselves as rightful and dignified people who can make just demands of power and spell out the duties of power in terms of moral and political goods. In grammatical terms, it moves them from being the objects in somebody else's sentence to being the subject of their own free speech. This requires courage, knowledge, and organization but it has often happened and it will happen again. Human rights can fire people up. It is a political philosophy that can have deep meaning to people—meaning deep enough for them to risk their lives and die for. This is what happened in Boston in the 18th century. It has happened many times since and is happening somewhere every day.

But does this mean that I have only moved from an idea of rights as fluff to one of rights as prophetic fluff? I hope not! But to be sure it is necessary to look at Peter Uvin's second point about rights-based development talk as simply

serving Western power. Power certainly does tend to use ideas to serve its own interests and there is a serious risk that this is happening with rights ideology. As Uvin suggests, neo-liberal economic and political projects of "good governance" are simply being re-packaged in rights terms. There is little evidence that the structural violence and injustice of global power systems are being truly challenged by the philosophy of equal rights now mouthed by power itself. The traffic of change-talk still really flows in one direction only. Human rights in the mouths of OECD governments send a predominant message to the effect that "human rights demand that you—poor countries—must change." As Uvin observes, rights-talk has engendered very little revolutionary analysis of the structures of poverty or serious consideration of the demands these same human rights make for powerful countries to change their ways.

Yet I would like to suggest that the situation is not quite as simple or as bad as Uvin presents it. There may well be a way in which the fact that Western power continues to talk a discourse of rights may increasingly make it accountable to those rights. In welcoming human rights into the citadel of development, I have a hunch that rights ideology may function as something of a Trojan horse for those who really mean what they say about human rights. Peter Uvin's analysis focuses on governments, multilateral agencies, and transnational corporations as the adopters of the new rights talk. But, as noted above, there are others using human rights in a different and prophetic way down in the muddy lowlands. And, there is also a group of international NGOs who straddle the middle hill country between the moral highlands and the muddy lowlands who are also using human rights talk in a slightly different way to mainstream power. While these NGOs can be more pious than most on occasion, they can also challenge Western power extremely effectively from time to time. Between them, the lowlanders and the NGOs might make up an important group who, like the Greeks before them, may be able to leap out of the Trojan Horse and take the real struggle for rights to the heart of politics and policy-making in governments, corporations, and public opinion. Once inside, they may also find that the citadel contains many others who are sympathetic. For, dare I say it, government departments, political parties, and transnational corporations contain people who benefit from living on the powerful upper side of history but who would also like to change the world in pursuit of human rights. Uvin is right to claim that—in the main—the move to rights has not resulted in a thorough analysis of the construction of poverty and a system-wide strategy for its transformation. But some organizations among the powerful are making some connections. For example, the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) has important policies that see the links between global trade and poverty, arms exports and violence, and energy consumption and ecological crisis.

The challenge for people using human rights prophetically rather than piously is to organize and create a counter-veiling force to the complacency and oppression

of those on the moral high ground. (This is the part of the paper where Uvin's feel-good law kicks in as using rights-talk starts to make me feel virtuous again!) In practice, this means producing the analysis that Uvin notes is lacking and making the connections between global power structures and poverty. It means having the courage to build local, national, and global movements that argue for specific duties to be met by governments, corporations, and individuals that will enable all people to enjoy their rights. Above all, it involves abolishing the development enterprise as a neo-colonial program of correction administered from rich to poor and replacing it with a common political project that recognizes everyone's equal rights and judges the behavior of all on the basis of how they realize or violate these rights. This would involve all involved looking in the mirror as well as looking down from the moral high ground.

Then, finally perhaps, we could also do away with the very word 'development.' The common struggle for human rights and social justice would at last bring the end of the era of development. We could begin to talk a proper moral and political language of equality, fairness, social justice, right, and responsibility. This would be an equal discourse that has no notion of some people being whole (developed) and other people being inadequate (under-developed). Rather, everyone would be sharing responsibility and working towards common goals. This would be heaven. But we are encouraged to start making it here on earth or, at the very least, to continue to ensure that the basic moral goods involved in such a vision are struggled for each day. In doing so, rich and poor alike would have to meet on the muddy low ground where they all really live, and make it moral.

POSTSCRIPT

The growing acceptance of "rights-based" approaches to development has been applauded by many working in the field of international development. What it does, they argue, is to put discussions of politics, power, and social justice back into development planning, which too often focuses exclusively on technical and utilitarian economic calculations. Injecting rights talk into development discourse restores a sense of passion and justice and mobilizes people in a way that technocratic economic models of development cannot.

But, is there a danger, as Peter Uvin suggests, that simply shifting the discourse toward human rights will have little effect on the day-to-day operations of development agencies? Is rights talk mere "fluff" as Uvin claims? Is there a need for a greater "mainstreaming" of human rights into development agencies themselves? If so, what changes would this necessitate? How would development agencies operate differently if human rights were more fully integrated into development planning?

Hugo Slim reminds of us of the useful "prophetic" role that rights language provides for critiquing development policies. At the same time, the definition of many of these rights remains highly contested. For example, within many Western countries themselves, the appropriate balance between political/civil rights and social/economic/cultural rights is still subject to considerable debate. What is the appropriate balance between individual and collective rights? If these issues are still contested in donor countries, how can the appropriate balance of rights be incorporated into the policies of development agencies?

Suggested Additional Readings

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- Speth, James Gustave. "Poverty: A Denial of Human Rights," *Journal of International Affairs*, 52, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 277.

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Web Resources

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION ON REFUGEES

www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches.html

This section of the UNHCR's website contains a number of documents relating to the relationship between human rights and development, including the text of the Declaration on the Right to Development passed by the United Nation's General Assembly in December 1986.

DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

www.drc-citizenship.org

The Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC) is a network of international partners working on the concepts of rights and citizenship in a variety of developing countries.

ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT

www.awid.org

AWID is an association promoting the enhancement of women's rights in development programs. Look here for a primer on "A Rights Based Approach to Development."

INTERACTION

interaction.org/rba/about.html

The official website for the American Council for Voluntary International Action contains an InterAction 2003 paper on "An Introduction to the Concept of a Rights Based Approach to Development."

HUMAN RIGHTS TOOLS

www.humanrightstools.org

This site is primarily designed for human rights activists. It contains information of relationship of human rights to humanitarian assistance and development.

RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN DEVELOPMENT (RAID)

www.raid-uk.org

Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID) was founded specifically to promote a rights-based approach to development.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

www.ihnnetwork.org

The International Human Rights Network is a non-governmental organization supporting other agencies in applying rights-based approaches in their work. Their site contains considerable background material as well as links to other human rights-oriented websites.

Issue 11

Has Gender Mainstreaming Been Effective?

- ✓ **YES**
ARUNA RAO, "Making Institutions Work for Women," *Development*, 4, no. 1 (2006): 63–67
- ✗ **NO**
REBECCA TIESSEN, "What's New about Gender Mainstreaming? Three Decades of Policy Creation and Development Strategies," *Canadian Journal of Development Strategies*, XXVI, Special Issue (2005): 705–728

The question of how gender concerns should be addressed within development policy has been the subject of considerable debate and analysis over the past several decades. In the 1970s and the 1980s, advocates of the "women in development" (WID) approach argued for the need to "integrate women into development." As a result, development agencies tried to become more aware of the needs of women and give more attention to projects designed specifically to improve the incomes or production of women. The WID approach sought to integrate women into existing development processes by ensuring that women-specific activities were included in the list of projects being undertaken.

However, some analysts soon argued that the WID approach did not go far enough. Since the approach tended to be rather narrow, such as improving health services to women or improving women's incomes, more fundamental relationships of inequality were not addressed. As a result, WID projects often were unsustainable and often treated women as only passive recipients of "women's aid." Critics suggested that because development planners did not engage in a more comprehensive gender analysis of the situation, WID projects often were blind to the roles and responsibilities that men played in contributing to the ongoing disempowerment of women.

As a result, a shift to a "gender and development" (GAD) focus has taken place in order to address the more fundamental issues of unequal gender relations and to ensure that women are given full participation with the development process. Each development program, and specific projects within it, should be subjected to comprehensive gender and development analysis that examines related social, political, and economic structures and development policies from the perspective of gender inequalities. Projects are then designed not to just address immediate objectives such as increases in food production, but also to take into account the impact of the project on gender imbalances.