

## EDITORIAL

### The UN @70: Towards the future

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Well into the twenty first century, the United Nations (UN) remains an important cornerstone of the global multilateral system. The UN is viewed as a principle guarantor of the idea of an international system of governance, and the dream of an international system. It is the principal platform through which international values, norms and decisions are made and remade. In the context of mounting challenges and fast-paced changes to the global order, the UN has realised a laudable record of achievements. Some of the UN's successes include the prevention of another post-1945 global war; assembling a body of international legal norms; deploying peacekeeping operations and political missions; promoting human rights; reducing global poverty; and facilitating consensus on the global sustainable development agenda. On the other hand, the UN is also encumbered by a number of challenges with significant implications for its future.

Some of these shortfalls include the UN Security Council impasse as a result of the veto; paralysis around action on the Syrian crisis; inconsistency in response to some cases of human rights violations and mass atrocities; sexual abuse in some peacekeeping missions such as Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo; and limited response to global terrorism among other challenges.

A balanced consideration of the UN's successes and failures points to key questions around the UN's ability to reinvent itself in response to the demand for effective global governance. To put it differently, as we marked 70 years of the UN in 2015, is the UN fit for purpose going forward? The answer to this question is by no means simple; nonetheless the future of the UN will largely depend on its flexibility and its capacity to re-examine and reinvigorate its functions, structures and distribution of resources in tandem with the fundamental principles of multilateralism upheld by member states while remaining relevant to emerging critical policy agendas of the future. Examples of systemic changes that demand innovative policy responses from the UN include

## CONTENTS

1

**The UN @70: Towards the future**

Faith Mabera and Andrea Royeppen

4

**The UN@70: Working together to reform the UN Security Council**

Jakkie Cilliers

7

**The UN@70: Quo Vadis: Exploring the Regionalization of Global Governance**

Francis A. Kornegay, Jr

12

**The UN@70:MDGs and SDGs: Missing the goal posts**

Michelle Pressend

17

**The UN @70: A relic of a bygone era or a fundamental pillar of the global development agenda?**

Bandile Ngidi

20

**Global economic governance in the post-growth era**

Lorenzo Fioramonti

23

**Policy recommendations from UN@70 Seminar**

24

**Acknowledgements**

globalization; global economic crises; growing violent extremism; the changing nature of armed conflict; demographic change and the increasing global movement of people; and the impact of climate change.

The Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) South Africa Office held a one day seminar in Pretoria on 27 November 2015 on the theme of the *United Nations @ 70: Towards the Future*. In 2015, the UN reached 70 years of existence and this marked a critical point of reflection on the significance of the organisation, its key challenges and prospects for its future. Such a reflection is a deliberation on the state of the world today.

In 2005, the IGD in partnership with the FES convened a dialogue on the *United Nations @60* that covered the background on the UN. The 2015 seminar was therefore purposed to reflect further, building upon the earlier discussions of the UN and its importance in international diplomacy. This special edition of *Global Dialogue* brings together a collection of papers that were presented during the 2015 seminar. The focus covered four main themes: (i) UN Security Council Reform, (ii) Global Governance and the Multilateral System; (iii) the Global Sustainable Development Agenda; and (iv) Global Economic Governance.

The issue of UN institutional reform is hardly new. Jakkie Cilliers asserts that although the issue of reforming the UN Security Council has been on the agenda since 1979, no proposal has garnered the required support in the UNGA. In July 2015, a 25-page consolidated framework surfaced on the back of an intergovernmental consultation process that reflected consensus on the size of a reformed UN Security Council but little else. To date, the debate on UNSC reform has remained moribund as debate and controversy around veto usage continues to draw on deadlocked Council action in several pressing areas on the UN agenda. In his view the only plausible scenario is where two-thirds of member states agree on detailed, principled recommendations on reform which address the constraints of power; the need for effectiveness/capacity and the need for increased legitimacy and representation.

The task of reinvigorating the UN and ensuring its relevancy in the multilateral world order of the twenty first century is what Francis Kornegay Jr. explicates. He notes that global governance, which is at the heart of the UN, must come to terms with emergent regionalizing patterns of global economic integration in a multipolar world. A regionalization of global governance scenario would centre on the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) interacting in mutual reforming partnerships with continental and regional economic/security communities like the European Union (EU),

African Union (AU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Furthermore, UN Security Council reform would also be factored into the proposed regionalization-institutional consolidation scenario, including how this would contribute to stabilization based on partnerships with peace and security arms of continental and regional communities.

Although the UN has achieved remarkable gains since the 1987 Brundtland Commission coined the term ‘sustainable development,’ the three dimensions (environment, social and economic) have been treated as separate concepts leading to the prioritization of the economic over the other sectors. Similarly, a largely Anthropocentric approach towards development has led to the subjection of the planet and its resources to the capitol centric demands of humans, at the expense of nature and the commons. The widespread commodification and exploitation of nature and the dualism inherent in the forces of globalisation and privatisation has not only led to global problems such as climate change, but has had far-reaching implications for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which operate within a business-as-usual paradigm towards development and the interrelationship with humans. In analysing the paradigms that inform the UN’s development agenda, Michelle Pressend contends that what is needed is a shift away from alienation between the human and non-human world towards novel understandings of the relationships between the environment, the economy, society and development rooted in harmony, sufficiency and sustainability.

Building on the thematic focus on sustainable development, Bandile Ngidi concurs that the UN policy framework for sustainable development, as set through the 2030 Agenda, presents a focused approach through its ambitious seventeen SDGs and 169 subsidiary targets. However, given that the UN was founded during a different global order, in order to ensure effectiveness and relevancy in the future, it needs to evolve and adapt to match the demands of the post-war, postmodern twenty-first century global order. More specifically, the UN needs to respond to the changing global development environment on three fronts; governance structures and power relations, funding for global development initiatives and hegemony in the space of ideas. The various organs, funds, programmes and specialized agencies that constitute the institutional architecture of the UN have demonstrated the strengths of the multilateral world system in working with an array of actors including member states, regional and sub-regional institutions, international civil society, trade unions, and the private sector.

In spite of commendable achievements, the task for the UN and the range of actors involved in global development is bridging the capacity-expectations gap in the implementation of development goals and targets. For instance, the shortages in development financing will mean that the UN will have to maximize policy collaboration with other key players involved in development including the vast array of NGOs, private sector and philanthropist network.

The ebb and flow of the global geo-economic order has highlighted the need for new thinking to address challenges and problems reproduced within a system oriented towards global capitalism and the growth of gross domestic product (GDP) as a marker of success. Lorenzo Fioramonti unpacks the problematic notion of GDP as the main determinant of economic status and relevancy of states in the global economic and financial architecture.

He argues that a global shift away from benchmarking progress and growth against the GDP framework will open up alternative paradigms of economic thinking that will place more emphasis on the interrelationship between social, economic and environmental wholeness and sustainability. Such a transition to post-growth systems of economic governance, cognisant of the impact of global climate change and the dependency on fossil fuels, will enable the international community to craft a system that is centred on sustainability, prosperity and a harmonious relationship between the human and non-human worlds.

## The UN@70: Working together to reform the UN Security Council

### Jakkie Cilliers

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In 1965 the number of non-permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was increased from 6 to 10. Since then, no proposal to reform the Council has been able to garner the required two-thirds support in the UN General Assembly (UNGA). This is despite the fact that UNSC reform has been on the agenda of the UNGA since 1979, when India – supported by a number of others – and then Latin American states, proposed changes to its size.

In 2006-07, the president of the UNGA again convened a series of meetings of the Open-Ended Working Group on the ‘Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council’. Two sets of facilitators were appointed, first consisting of five and then two members to guide the process. In September 2007, it was agreed to start intergovernmental negotiations, the modalities of which were finalised a year later in UNGA Resolution 62/557. Negotiations officially started early in 2009. Subsequent years saw the development of a 30-page ‘negotiation text’ based on submissions from member states that soon led to an impasse over version 2 versus version 3, among others.

During the 2005-07 period efforts by the G4 group, comprising Brazil, India, Japan and Germany, battled it out to stalemate with the Uniting for Consensus group, the African Group and others. Lacklustre meetings thereafter produced no progress and the process has been effectively moribund for several years. Developed from its previous position, known as the Harare Declaration, the African Union (AU) tabled its proposal (the Ezulwini Consensus) in July 2005. The Ezulwini Consensus deals with various aspects related to reform of the United Nations, including but not restricted to the matter of reform of the Security Council. It notes that Africa ‘is opposed in principle to the veto’, but then notes that as long as it exists, it should be made available to all permanent members of the

Security Council.’ The African position is for 11 additional members on the Security Council, increasing its size to 26. It proposed that Africa get two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats.

The AU position is that the ‘question of the criteria for the selection of African members of the Security Council should be a matter for the AU to determine, taking into consideration the representative nature and capacity of those chosen.’ According to some interpretations, this would open the door even for a system of rotating permanent seats which are accountable to the AU, but this is not formally agreed upon.

Nigeria and South Africa, two of the contenders for these seats, have indicated a degree of flexibility on the issue of the veto but have argued that they would serve in their national capacity when elected by the AU. Egypt is generally seen as the third important candidate and has the advantage of straddling the call for greater Arab representation. While South Africa is the only African member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) grouping, IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) and the G20, its partners in these groups have not come out in clear support of any specific African candidature for a permanent seat.

In April 2015, and after several months of consultations, the then chairperson of the intergovernmental process on UNSC reform, Jamaican Ambassador E Courtenay Rattray, circulated a one-page ‘framework’ outline consisting of various headings, which member states were requested to populate with their suggestions on reform. The results were subsequently summarised in a 25-page consolidated framework document dated 31 July 2015. Perhaps the most important difference to previous closed-door discussions is the public availability of the letters and texts that have been submitted by all states and groups, including the consolidated working text. Eventually Rattray’s framework document was adopted by general

acclimation in the General Assembly on 14 September 2015 (A/69/L.92) instead of a vote, despite the continued objections by countries such as China and others. In the flurry of negotiations that followed these developments, the leaders of the G4 countries met in New York on 26 September 2014 and in their subsequent press statement, they ‘supported Africa’s representation in both the permanent and non-permanent membership in the Security Council.’ Rumour in New York was that pressure from a P5 country would see to it that Rattray was not re-elected to continue with his work. Instead, on 23 October 2015 the new president of the UNGA, Amb Mogens Lykketoft (from Denmark), appointed Amb Sylvie Lucas, the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg, as Chair of the Intergovernmental Negotiations. Amb Lucas served on the Security Council for the 2013-14 term.

A plenary debate on the ‘Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Security Council’ was subsequently hosted on 30 October 2015 during which more than 60 delegates took the floor.

In his remarks South Africa’s representative at the meeting, Mr Wouter Zaayman, said that ‘the main obstacle to progress had been a flawed negotiations process, characterized by an “endless repetition” of positions, and called for talks, based on the Chair’s text, to start before year-end. He proposed that the Chair schedule a few days per element to allow for interactive negotiations, as one-day meetings had resulted in general statements repeated “ad nauseam”. Such a process would not undermine the principles of inclusivity and transparency’, he noted. ‘The new Chair should circulate a schedule of meetings per element, making it clear that interactive negotiations would be employed to steer the process away from a debate format. The Chair also should explore informal bilateral meetings between divergent groups.’<sup>1</sup>

An examination of the consolidated text reflects that movement will be extremely difficult. There are signs of an emerging consensus on the size of a reformed UN Security Council but little else. The framework document does reflect widespread (but not complete) support to include India in some type of permanent (or semi-permanent) category of seats, but only along with others. Many submissions generally referred to increased representation for Africa in some manner or another and there does appear to be greater support for enhanced African representation than before, but that is about where any consensus ends. Instead of substantive reform, various efforts such as that by France on its initiative for voluntary suspension of the veto in cases of mass atrocities has steadily gained

support, as does the code of conduct advocated by the group on Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) that was launched earlier that October.

In summary, key positions on reform remain as entrenched today as they have been for several decades and the prospects for progress are faint. Inevitably the processes during the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the UNGA would disappoint despite the progress during the previous session in adopting a negotiating text. With global competition and flux at its current high level it is unlikely that a state-led process could see any movement on UNSC reform without a change in approach. As was evident from its inability to act on Syria and Ukraine in 2014 and 2015, the veto – or the threat of using it – by any of the P5 members paralyzes the Council. Today the veto is the most serious impediment to the ability of the UNSC to fulfil its global mandate. Apart from the fact that most of the so-called penholders, which take charge of a particular topic are among the P5, every resolution needs to satisfy all the P5 members. The result is often a rush to the lowest common denominator, with efforts to keep the P5 on board taking precedence over all other considerations.

The inordinate influence that the P5 has on the workings and decision of the Council is a particular source of frustration to African countries, as well as to India. India is generally recognized as having a legitimate claim to such privilege based, amongst others, on its 18% of global population, its leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement and its expansive role in peacekeeping over the years. Divisions amongst the P5 frustrate efforts to engage constructively on the Middle East and in the South China Sea where prospects for violent competition spinning out of control is particularly concerning. The only region where the UNSC can effectively act is in Africa given the absence of great power interests.

A realistic prospect for movement needs to balance three divergent requirements: (1) the constraints of power politics (P5 intransigence in particular); (2) the need for effectiveness/capacity (i.e. minimum criteria for membership); and (3) the need for increased legitimacy and representation (which is only achievable through a process through which countries are elected onto the Council, representing regions). This is a task that would necessarily have to unfold over time, to accompany rather than pre-empt global re-alignments in power and influence.

Looking ahead, a reformed UNSC that seeks to provide for a continuation of permanent seats in some form or another would be very difficult. On the one hand it would have to accommodate the two great powers of the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the US and

China – both very comfortable with their current veto power.

But towards the latter part of this century India will also expectedly emerge as a third ‘great power’, buttressing its claim to membership whilst the EU, should deeper integration occur, could claim its role as a fourth global pole. This could only happen at the expense of the role of the UK and France, both of which are current permanent members.

When critics point out that the veto makes the Council dysfunctional, it is difficult to argue that an increase in the number of countries with this power would improve efficiency, as advocated by the G4, L69 and the Africa Group. It is for this reason that the African position is to abolish the veto, a position often drowned out in the subsequent discussions on who should serve as Africa’s representation. At the other extreme is the demand from smaller states for equal treatment and the opportunity to also serve on the Council. This is a view advanced by groups including the Arab group and the Small Island and Developing States (SIDS). Around 60 countries have never served on the UNSC, and many have no interest in doing so. Clearly only a paradigm shift in approach can unlock reform. The hot, flat and interconnected world of today, and the even more crowded world of tomorrow, requires a move away from the competitive management of global issues to a collaborative security framework. Today the world is more interconnected, yet less multilateral, more volatile and more brittle than ever before. South Africa and Africa can lead by adopting a principled approach to UNSC reform that moves away from efforts by individual countries to advance their national interests towards a more flexible, regionally based process of electing countries onto the UNSC. In this approach, we envisage two categories of seats where key countries can be re-elected and shorter, non-renewable terms for others. It is against this background that the Institute for Security Studies launched its initiative on Elect the Council.

We do not believe that the current intergovernmental processes on UNSC reform will make progress and that tinkering with the current system has no prospect of halting the on-going loss of legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN Security Council and the UN system in general. Praying for a miracle in New York is a recipe where the P5 can indefinitely block progress. In our view the only plausible reform scenario is where two-thirds of member states agree on detailed recommendations on reform, not general principles, and for members to then confront the P5 in the General Assembly with these specific set of demands. To this end, we are working to energise a global network of academics and civil society members to work with their governments to this end.

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## Reference

<sup>1</sup> GA/11715, African Representation, Future of Veto Power, Intergovernmental Process Figure Prominently in General Assembly Annual Debate on Security Council Reform, 30 October 2015, available at <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11715.doc.htm>, accessed 26 November 2015

## The UN@70: Quo Vadis: Exploring the Regionalization of Global Governance

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The United Nations emerged as the post-war brainchild of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the waning days of his life in 1945. Having reached its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, many question whether it remains relevant in addressing the growing challenges facing global governance with its massive bureaucracy and proliferation of programs and agencies coupled with UN Security Council stalemates on resolving major conflicts. In a recent interview article in the *Financial Times* with current Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, he referred to the UN, with its 193 member states, as having become “a sprawling mess” with its 15 specialised agencies, 12 different funds, and a secretariat that employs more than 40,000 people, costing \$5.5 billion in 2014-15.<sup>1</sup> “To complicate matters, all members have an equal vote on issues – and the five members of the ‘security council’ that serves as the UN’s inner sanctum (US, China, Russia, France and Britain) have a veto over decisions. That leaves the institution mired in gridlock.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course, no one threatens to come up with an idea of what might replace the UN. For most countries, the institution remains the unchallenged point of reference for what passes for “legitimacy” in the international system. The real problem is not that the UN has outlived its usefulness as much as it has outlived its founding structure as the centre of the global multilateral system.

In its datedness, it has never lived up to the Rooseveltian idealism that FDR envisioned in a Security Council revolving around a US-Russia-China allied victory triumvirate with the obligatory inclusion of Britain and the reluctant add-on of France. Roosevelt’s main preoccupation with Britain was in dismantling its empire and European colonialism generally as an impediment to American global economic expansion.<sup>3</sup> Not favourably disposed toward Charles de Gaulle, UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill had to pressure Roosevelt into including France.<sup>4</sup> The rest is history, as the onset of the cold war propelled the UN Security Council into a dysfunction that, post-cold war continues largely unabated.

interconnected in a multipolar environment which, in different ways, the Presidents of the US, China and Russia acknowledged in their speeches to the UN General Assembly without alluding to how the UN might adapt to these realities.<sup>5</sup> It is against this backdrop and the overall datedness of the post-war Bretton Woods Institutions that recurrent calls for UN reform (along with reforming the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), are a constant refrain among emerging powers and developing countries. In the absence of any serious movement toward reform, ‘club governance’ initiatives in the form of the G20 with its coalitional ‘caucuses’ and a proliferation of mini-lateral platforms like the G8 (which expanded into the G20) and BRICS have proliferated, interacting with the emergence of global negotiations under UN auspices on the climate and on the world’s economy (World Trade Organization). For the most part, these multilateral supplements to the UN system have not moved global governance very far amid a rapidly evolving post-cold war strategic landscape inspiring notions of ‘new world disorder’ as opposed to ‘order.’

The UN long ceased keeping pace with this evolution. The G20 and formations like BRICS which intended to offset – if not overturn – western dominance, show no signs of breaking the global governance logjam on a wide-ranging agenda of urgent security, economic and developmental, environmental and humanitarian challenges. Moreover, given the multipolar configuring of the global geopolitical economy, the efficacy of a hierarchical multilateralism at the UN-Bretton Woods-G20-WTO centre of international relations in the absence of clearly defined roles for continental and regional governance along the periphery of the world order, increasingly comes into question. Global governance, in essence, must increasingly come to terms with the centre-periphery horizontalizing implications of continental-cum-regionalizing patterns of global economic integration in a multipolar world. Perhaps no better place to start on this long, arduous and uncertain

journey is with revisiting the future of the UN on its 70th anniversary.

### **Fleshing out Global Governance: A regionalized UN system?**

While UN Security Council (UNSC) reform is long overdue and remains an uphill struggle, in some ways, it is a distraction from the bigger UN reform picture and needs to be contextualized within the regionalizing scenario of the reform conundrum. What might this entail? It would mean nothing less than considering transforming the UN system along decentralized lines of continental and regional economic-security governance. This could be carried out in partnership with existing regional and continental economic/security communities via a *UN-Regional Economic Communities Partnership to Build Regional Integration Communities* (RICs) within a reformed UN system.

As a point-of-departure, economic regionalism would constitute the basis for addressing security, social and humanitarian challenges. Exploring frameworks for interregional coordination within such a decentralized regional and continentally reconfigured UN system might also feature. This would factor in the continental-maritime nexus defining interregional landscapes. Conceptually, this suggested approach is predicated on the multipolar reality of global economic integration reflecting a scenario unfolding along regional and continental lines.

This scenario reflects an evolution toward global economic federalism as the underlying and governing pattern in the transitioning multipolar order.<sup>6</sup> As such, this suggests the possibility that UN systemic reform might need to factor a process of institutional governance restructuring to accommodate this pattern, mutually reinforcing existing regional/continental economic communities. Moreover, such a process might have implications for the enhanced incentivizing of a sense of vested interest and accountability among member states in the financial sustainability of the UN and their respective regional communities through shared ownership of such a decentralizing UN restructuring.

The fact that, operationally, various UN agencies are, in the main, governed through country rather than regional offices at one and the same time may provide a basis for regionalization while exposing the incoherence of a fragmented UN system in need of consolidation. As such, regional decentralization and institutional consolidation represent two interactive sides of a UN-centric global governance reform coin. This carries implications for amending the UN Charter to acknowledge due recognition of regional and continental bases of multipolarity.

The institutional focal point of such a process would be the UN's *regional economic commissions* (UN-RECs) under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) interacting in mutual reforming partnerships with continental and regional economic/security communities like the AU, EU, ASEAN and other such formations. Unlike the regional offices of myriad UN agencies, the UN-RECs have regional and continental, not country mandates. Thus, they may be well-suited to be at the cutting-edge of a new UN system prioritizing continents and regions at least on par with the individually sovereign nation-states comprising UN membership. Thus, regional economic communities would serve as the institutional fulcrums of far-reaching UN systemic reforms ranging from the overly-clichéd mantra of UNSC reform to the economic and social agencies (i.e. UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, etc.).

### **UN Economic and Social Commissions: Epicentre of regionalized reform?**

The proposed institutional reform architecture would not de-emphasize UN-HQ in New York though it would elevate ECOSOC. This might mean determining whether or not the New York headquarters via ECOSOC could perform more of a streamlining partnership facilitating the management of the UN system via a 'strategic devolution' process linked to such regional and continental economic and security communities like the EU, AU, ASEAN, etc. This process would revolve around the transformative empowering of UN economic commissions into consolidated regional-continental pillars of the UN. Interregional coordinating mechanisms would network globally through a 'federal' system of 'power-sharing' between the New York 'centre' and its regional-continental 'peripheries.' The end point of such a process could be an evolution toward supranational regional and continental 'integration communities' more closely integrated within a reformed UN system.

The UN's existing complement of regional economic and social commissions include:

- **Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)**
- **Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)**
- **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)**
- **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**
- **Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ECSWA)**

How might these UN economic and social commissions be engaged in regional and continental integrationist reform processes including

the institutional consolidating of UN functions? Such a prospect would involve an interplay between the UN's centre and periphery in how consolidation at the centre is regionally (and continentally) rolled out in a manner inclusive of continental and regional economic communities. The 'devil will be in the details' in determining how such a transformative process might unfold including its feasibility (i.e. the UNSC-ECOSOC dynamic). This will require a major research and analysis undertaking to determine how best to proceed in undertaking such a process and in identifying constraints, limitations and possibilities (many of which will be deeply political at all levels of engagement therefore complicated in contending with). Given the comparative unevenness and diversity of continental and regional integration globally, a centre-periphery regionalization of the UN system will have to accommodate the geopolitical pluralism of the different landscapes.

An illustrative scenario on how centre-periphery regionalization of the UN, more closely integrated with continental and regional economic-cum-security communities might unfold, may be discerned in the interlinked area of 'development and stabilization' related to UN institutional consolidation. Given the complex matrix of the conflict prevention, management, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction 'food chain' and the fact that, in many instances, peacekeeping has 'mission creeped' into broader stabilization interventions, it would seem that a case can be argued for UN institutional consolidation in keeping with this evolution. As such, it would appear there could or should be greater operational integration between UN peacekeeping and stabilization missions under the Security Council, the Peace Building Commission, UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF (among other possible agency actors) at the UN centre, in partnership with continental and regional economic communities.

Illustratively, what might emerge from this inter-agency consolidation would be something that might be termed, for the sake of narrative, a *UN Development and Stabilization Administration* (UNDSA) under ECOSOC. It would have a continental and/or regional terms-of-reference which transcends UN country-based programmes like UNDP. Via UNDSA, under joint UNSC-ECOSOC oversight, peacekeeping and stabilization missions would be managed under this umbrella administration which should also have oversight authority in coordinating UN country programmes. The UN's five economic and social regional commissions may act as the interface which facilitates integration between the UN and the continental and regional economic communities.

These commissions, which serve as the UN's premier continental and regional think-tanks, would not give up these functions. Rather,

consideration might be given for their terms-of-reference being expanded into an operational role of joint implementation of development and stabilization 'partnership mandates' with counterpart continental and/or regional economic communities in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus, a New York-based UNDSA would be complemented in different continents and regions by 'joint operational development and stabilization divisions' housed within UN economic and social commissions partnering with continental and regional economic/security communities.

These joint operational divisions within UN economic and social commissions could, among other things, consultatively assume capacity-building roles where needed. The aim would be to strengthen continental governing bodies like, for example, the AU and its programmes and instruments and its regional economic community pillars. It would back-stop them in a subsidiary process of devolution wherein the AU and its pillars would take the lead in implementing joint developmental and stabilizing interventions.

Compared to other continental and regional economic community landscapes, Africa is perhaps best placed to serve as a 'model' for discerning how such a joint development and stabilization scenario might unfold given the existence of the AU and its regional pillars. In the case of the EU, the UNECE would not play as prominent a role given Europe's level of development and the EU's supranational level of maturity. However, the current migration crisis facing Europe is indicative of how such UN development and stabilization regionalization might apply to an EU-UNECE partnership.

Of course, it would help if this partnership was linked to trans-Mediterranean coordination with a functioning Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), presupposing settling the Western Sahara stalemate in a manner that does not result in yet another weak mini-state adding to Africa's fragmentation. ASEAN which becomes an 'economic community at the end of 2015 and has a security arm in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) provides a clear partnership match for the UN's ESCAP.

Whether the UN's western Asian ECSWA could effectively partner with the comparatively weak South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) without one or two more UN regional commissions being established for South and Central Asia is an open question. In the Americas, the institutional, organizational and coalitional pluralism involving the Organization of American States, the newer Union of South American Nations and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States as well as regional communities like Mercosur and

CARICOM presents complicated development and stabilization partnering options for the UN's ECLAC.

### **Security Council Reform: Expansion and subsidiarity**

These different economic and social commission-continental/regional economic community relationships might unfold in a regionalization of the UN. The process of devolution under a consolidation in an envisioned UNDSA would have to result in much stronger and longer-lasting stabilizing interventions than currently in play in a variety of peacekeeping-cum-stabilizing missions and crises such as in Libya, Syria and Afghanistan as well as in South Sudan, Somalia, Darfur, Central African Republic, Congo, Mali and Haiti, among other areas of instability. This is where UN Security Council reform enters the regionalization picture, constituting virtually a separate analysis all on its own.

In a fundamental sense, the various and sundry peacekeeping crises confronting the international community cry out for a backtracking into a re-visitation of the trusteeship era of mandated decolonization given the proliferation of fragile, collapsing and failed states interacting with mounting security threats from non-state actors. The manner in which Africa, the Levant and South Asia were partitioned into fragmented imperial fiefdoms by Britain and France followed by the destabilizing proxy battles of the cold war is now blowing back to challenge global stability.

This disorder calls into question the very existence of many of these states as sovereign entities amid the global integrationist trend toward geoeconomic regionalism. Simply expanding the UNSC without trying to examine the overall UN architecture to cope with the security dimensions of stabilization and development, factoring in regional and continental integration imperatives seems pointless. Against this backdrop, in terms of the current panorama of crises, it seems that UNSC reform, linked to UN regionalization, could be considered at two levels. In the first instance, there is a need for dialogue amongst the P5 toward arriving at a stabilizing partnership amongst themselves as a basis for building a more effective Security Council – especially between the Rooseveltian 'troika' that FDR had in mind: US-Russia-China. Their conflicted dynamics notwithstanding, this is especially urgent in coming to terms with the geography of destabilization ranging from the Mediterranean into the Levant extending into the Hindu Kush.

Russia's high risk intervention in Syria (with Grozny-like overtones combined with revisiting a Soviet-like quagmire in Afghanistan) and Taliban gains in Afghanistan point to existential strategic threats in Syria and unsettled post-occupation Afghanistan pose to Russia and Central Asia more generally. This refers to Moscow's own

internal jihadist threat perception in the northern Caucuses and how these also threaten China's 'One Belt, One Road' and maritime silk route calculus – not to mention Beijing's concerns about Xinjiang. Under these circumstances and factoring in an eventual accommodation on Ukraine (which some speculate Moscow is trying to offset by intervening in Syria's civil war), the urgency of a NATO-Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)-Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)- Eurasian security partnership seems increasingly apparent. This, in different ways, has been broached by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and veteran geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski. It needs to be taken off the backburner.<sup>8</sup> Such a formalized east-west settlement, under UN mandate, would strengthen the P5 core of the Security Council and anchor the envisioned permanent UN peacekeeping force.

This force, in turn, should be linked to standby forces as envisioned in Africa in a UN regionalized periphery – a centre-periphery stabilization force architecture, which should include security forces training and capacity-building instead of this being left up to the US. Syria and Afghanistan (an observer SCO member) as well as Libya and possibly Iraq ought to be under medium-to-long term UN stabilization mandates under such a trilateral oversight arrangement. Moreover, these arrangements may have to involve managed transitions toward partitioning into cantonised and/or federal outcomes within regional integrationist frameworks (which also may need to be considered in resolving some African inter/intra-state conflicts).

The fact that India and Pakistan, followed by Iran, are to become full SCO members including India's permanent Council membership aspirations brings to the fore the future of Kashmir (with the potential to bring equilibrium to the inter-Asian geostrategic balance). This relates to the need to elevate the SAARC as the epicentre of a South Asian regional pillar of the UN system. From here emerges the second UNSC reform consideration. This has to do with institutionalizing *subsidiarity partnerships* with peace and security arms of continental and regional communities. This would apply to the AU's Peace and Security Council and struggle to operationalize its regional standby forces (where there is already ample basis for devolution), the Arab League and/or GCC, the ASEAN's Regional Forum (ARF) and the South American Defence Council linked to UNASUR.

For peace and security 'subsidiarity' to work, a reformed UNSC devolves mandated stabilization interventions to continental and/or regional economic communities under a joint arrangement with ECOSOC-UNDSA and there would need for an expansion of the UNSC permanent membership to accommodate regional

contingencies. To defuse regional rivalries, expanding permanent membership may need to reflect rotational arrangements amongst aspirant regional actors. Within this context, continental and regional peace and security management as a dimension of overall UN reform would need to become an operational dimension of an envisioned UNDSA economic and social commission-continental and regional economic community partnership. The end point of such a scenario should be an integrated UN-continental and regional economic community system reflecting varying degrees of supranationalism as the future global order.

### Recommendations

- Given the urgency of discerning a path toward greater coherence in global governance on the assumption that the UN, with all its short-comings, will remain at the centre of this conundrum, a dedicated study problematizing a regionalization scenario is needed. This would critically examine its viability and should be undertaken as a contribution to UN reform and global governance studies.
- A study into UN regionalization should be conceptualized in terms of an interrelated companion to consolidate under an ECOSOC-UNSC nexus. Key aspects of the UN machinery, especially regarding economic development, stabilization and security capacity-building in strengthening regional and continental economic communities should be considered.
- Such a study should focus on the UN's existing regional economic and social commissions in terms of examining the problems and prospects of operational partnership platforms for UN system regionalization in integrated frameworks with continental and regional economic communities.
- Given the regional economic community architecture of the AU as a continental body, the AU-UNECA relationship, and how it could evolve, might be examined as a point-of-departure for developing a regionalization 'model' for adaptation in other world regions and continental environments.
- Given the geographic interregional connectivity of continental and regional economic communities, a study into possibilities and constraints to UN regionalization should factor in possible governance roles for continental-maritime coordinating mechanisms incorporating

transatlantic, trans-Mediterranean and Indo-Pacific zones of interaction.

- Apart from the need to factor in UN Security Council reform into the proposed regionalization-institutional consolidation scenario and how this would contribute to stabilization, the inclusion of a third pillar to the UN superstructure should be considered and studied. A UN Economic and Social Forum as a global non-governmental, civil society and private sector complement to the Security Council and the General Assembly should be considered. Such a structure could possibly emerge out of incorporating the existing World Economic Forum and a much-needed revitalized World Social Forum into the UN system as its third pillar.

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- <sup>3</sup> There is a considerable literature on the Roosevelt-Stalin-Churchill relationship which can be consulted documenting these World War II endgame dynamics that were precursor to the founding of the UN.
- <sup>4</sup> Roosevelt's Security Council vision was allied 'The Four Policemen': The US, USSR, China, Britain. France was not included.
- <sup>5</sup> The transcribed speeches of US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin are available. Obama, for example, refers to how: "We live in an integrated world – one in which we all have a stake in each other's success. We cannot turn those forces of integration." Putin: "...I refer to the so-called integration of integrations based on universal
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- <sup>8</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "An Agenda for NATO: Toward a global security web," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept. /Oct. 2009, pp. 2-20. While this essay might be read as something akin to strategic co-optive primacy, negotiated under UNSC auspices, it might translate into something more equitable as a strategic power-sharing arrangement.

## The UN@70: MDGs and SDGs: Missing the goal posts

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The world today is facing multifaceted crises as a consequence of global capitalism, which is intrinsically linked to the financial, energy, and food and climate crisis. The climate crisis is probably the most pressing of our time. If anything the climate disorder reveals that, as humans we are no longer in control of nature, “we don’t master the situation and are not the key players.”<sup>1</sup> If climate disorder is considered as the “reawakening of Gaia” (living earth), alarm bells of global warming should be ringing to invoke caution in response to climate change and cultivate alternative responses.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the acknowledgement of the climate crisis, governments are mainly concerned with economic growth and energy security. Governments and multilateral institutions are bent on technology and market-based solutions to solve the climate disorder. Since the introduction of market-based solutions such as carbon trading, cleaner production mechanisms and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), these mechanisms have not only proved to be ineffective in reducing emissions; they also increased the profits of major corporations responsible for the pollution.<sup>3</sup>

This article discusses the fundamental consequences of a development path based on endless growth and why, despite various measures to address the environmental impact of development, the consequences for humanity may result in a deepening abyss of ecological destruction, exploitation and oppression. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that consisted of eight goals and the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets conceived within an economic growth paradigm, widely accepted by the UN, its organisations and programmes, do not question or shake up the global economic rules. This growth path is based on ever increasing extraction of ecological resources, wealth generation for a few and exploitation of both nature and human nature. In the world, today, sovereign states have relinquished much of their agency to the rules of globalisation. This

is to the extent that corporate power has increased significantly and has become a dominant force in world politics. “According to World Bank and Fortune Magazine data, in 2011 of the 175 largest global economic “entities” 110 (over 60%) were corporations. The revenues of Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobil and Wal-Mart were larger than the GDP of a hundred national economies, more than half the world’s countries. In that list Royal Dutch Shell is on par with Norway and dwarfed the GDP of Thailand, Denmark and Venezuela.”<sup>4</sup> The web of life was changed and has evolved into the “**capitalist world ecology**”<sup>5</sup>, which necessitates a different way of thinking about the world and thinking beyond development.

### **The UN, emergence of sustainable development and implementation challenges**

When the United Nations (UN) was established in 1945, its key aspirations were to maintain world peace and ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Declaration of Human Rights (1948) premised on human rights and fundamental freedoms was the foundation of the rule of law for all member states. Following the rebuilding of the war torn countries from the late 40s, twenty years down the line in the 60s and 70s environmental concerns came to the fore. A greater awareness evolved about the negative impact of industrial, human and economic activity on the natural environment and acute environmental degradation.

In response to the scientific and public concern, the first UN conference on global environmental concerns, the UN Conference on the Human Environment, took place in 1972 in Stockholm, as the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE). At this conference, there were clear divisions and a number of contentious issues included the then communist bloc’s view that environmental degradation was a capitalist problem. There were also issues relating to the sovereignty of states and developing

countries feared that developed countries' emphasis on pollution and nature conservation would take precedence over poverty and development.<sup>6</sup> This dualism between the environment and development and an approach that is based on an 'either/or logic' is still prevalent today. Even when the environment is considered, it is based on an approach of separation - alienation. A useful example in the context of this think piece is trade and environment, where imposing environmental standards within the unequal global trade system is considered by many developing countries as a non-tariff barrier therefore restricting the trade of their goods. The situation then and today is that in the global North, countries want to maintain their economic power and dominance in the world. In the global South, countries want to play 'catch-up' and are demanding policy space and "climate space" to grow their economies. So achieving collective action and cooperation, and understanding of the impact on a global scale remains a major challenge.

In 1983 the Brundtland Commission, or formally known World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) was appointed to focus on environmental and developmental problems and solutions. Shortly thereafter, in 1987, the United Nations (UN) released the Brundtland Report which, includes one of the most widely recognised definitions of sustainable development:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Two aspects are critical to this definition; one it prioritises the needs of people, and two it acknowledges limits to global growth under the current global economic order. However competing visions and a lack of common understanding of sustainable development transpired over the years. The form that sustainable development has taken in the real-world context has either been based on sustainable growth to maintain financial sustainability or a means of environmental protection and limited "development". The three dimensions of sustainable development are environment, social and economic.

These three aspects are often viewed in opposition to each other thereby having to make trade-offs that works in a way where the economic decision usually trumps the other two resulting in "winners and losers". These decisions are centred on human development and economic growth in a manner that development takes priority over other living and non-living beings on the planet. This type of development is devoid of taking into account the relationships between things and people and the interdependence of humanity on planetary relationships. For instance in the development of genetically modified organisms, six largest

agrochemical and seed corporations (DuPont, BASF, Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer and Dow) are "in pursuit of exclusive monopoly over plant gene sequences that could lead to control of most of the world's plant biomass whether it is used for food, feed, fibre, fuel or plastics under the guise of developing "climate-ready" crops"<sup>7</sup>

These highlight that gene giants are using the climate crisis and convincing governments and the public that the genetically engineered seeds is the answer to food security, instead of governments focusing on policies to reduce consumption on fossil - fuels and provide productive support for small - scale farmers and agro- ecological production systems.

To ameliorate the impacts of development and in attempts to achieve sustainable development, a number of commitments principles, norms and decisions have been adopted through negotiated multilateral environment agreements, conventions and protocols. In addition, international environmental laws and measures to ensure compliance at international, national and local levels have been adopted. The principle measures for sustainable development stemmed from the Earth Summit in 1992, based on the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. However, development even with its "sustainable" intentions has been further tainted by globalisation and corporate influence. Policies and programmes spearheading the organisation of agriculture and food production and consumption especially in the African region is primarily to shift small-scale and subsistence farming to commercial farming so that they become part of the corporate distribution network as opposed to enhancing local food production and regional networks.

Seed saving is a core component of sustainable agriculture and agro-ecology. In Africa, 80 per cent of all seeds still come from systems managed by farmers. Yet seed saving processes are being systemically eroded by the adoption of seed harmonisation policies and laws, rendering it illegal for small-scale farmers to save and exchange their seeds. These seed harmonisation laws are based on the 1991 version of the Union of the Protection on Plant Varieties (UPOV), which protects the intellectual property rights as pointed out by African Centre for Biosafety (ACB):

"African governments are being co-opted into harmonizing seed laws relating to border control measures, phytosanitary control, variety release systems, certification standards and plant variety protection laws based on the international legal system called UPOV 1991, to the detriment of African smallholder farmers and their seed systems. If this happens, peasants will lose control of their traditional and indigenous seeds, which will lead to devastating impacts on food security and agricultural biodiversity."<sup>8</sup>

It is important to emphasise there has been an increasing

concentration of food production and food trade within a few transnational and multinational corporations, dominating global value chains. Estimates indicate that the “ABCD group for the alphabetic convenience of their initials, ADM (Archer Daniels Midland), Bunge, Cargill and (Louis) Dreyfus, account for between 75% and 90% of the global grain trade.”<sup>9</sup>

The consequences of rapid globalisation and economic expansion have been to increase global production and consumption levels. This has resulted in devastating destruction of the environment and is a major driver of air, water and soil pollution, increasing the vulnerability of earth’s life support systems. Recent negligence has resulted in the disruption of two dams controlled by two global mining companies Vale and BHP Billiton in the region of Mariana, state of Minas Gerais in Brazil and caused the destruction of almost an entire district’s homes, contaminated the river and the death of fish and other animals.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it has also led to the ‘commodification’ of the natural commons (land, forests, rivers and the ocean) and public environmental goods and services<sup>11</sup> - i.e. making these resources and services a tradable “product” for profit, in other words - a capitalist commodity. Globalisation has promoted the ideology of privatisation facilitating the corporatisation of almost every aspect of life including international trade, health care, education, genetic material and many other basic services

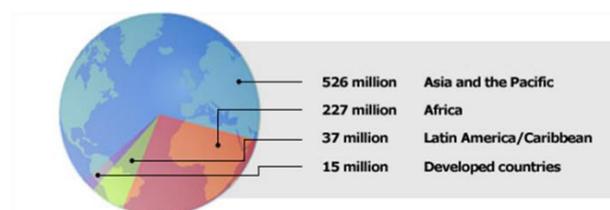
### How are the MDGs and SDGs missing the goal posts?

Looking further into food production and consumption and the challenges of addressing world hunger, the first MDG was to “eradicate poverty and hunger.” SDG one is to “end poverty in all forms everywhere” and SDG two is “zero hunger”. While some of these goals are laudable, the targets and recommendations for achieving these goals sounds alarm bells. Firstly, these goals are set with the framework of the economic growth paradigm and attempts to tinker with the growth objectives without questioning its nature and the global economic rules. For instance the targets in SDG 2 refer to increasing investment, technology development, doubling agriculture productivity, proper function of food commodity markets and so forth. It overlooks how investment agreements either in the form of bilateral investment treaties (BITs) or agreements that government enter into with investors directly, are driven by the imperative of maximizing profit. These investment agreements have become vehicles for facilitating huge capital outflows and the privatisation of public goods. The agreements create a legal framework to dispossess communities from access to land, water and other natural resources and impose a number of other corporate violations of human, cultural and environmental

rights.<sup>12</sup> The result is that the protection of people and nature is systematically violated, further enabling land and water grabs, abusive labour and community relationships, and associated environmental destruction.

Secondly, it is bent on arbitrary quantitative objectives and money-metric measurements such as the eradication of poverty of people living on less than \$1.25 per day. What does this mean? If people are living on \$5 does it mean that they are no longer living in poverty? The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Report on The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014, indicated that global hunger is reducing and that 805 million people were estimated to be chronically undernourished in 2012–14 (Figure 1), of which 98% are from developing countries.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this report mentions that three-quarters of all hungry people live in rural areas, mainly in the villages of Asia and Africa. These measures do not relate to the cost of living in a capitalist world with privatisation of most public goods and services, turning almost every aspect of life into a capitalist commodity.

Fig 1. Distribution of the hungry people in the world based of the FAO 2014 statistics



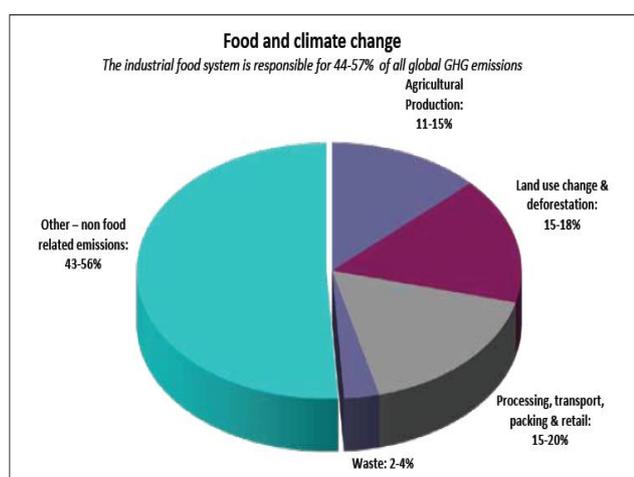
Source: The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014. Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition. Rome, FAO.

Thirdly, the SDGS aim to lift poor people out poverty yet they do not seem to question the unsustainable consumptive patterns of the wealthy and middle class and the productive system which feeds these consumer lifestyles. The goals boldly state, “It is time to rethink how we grow, share and consume our food”.<sup>14</sup> However, the UN has entered into numerous partnerships with transnational corporations<sup>15</sup> that undermine food sovereignty<sup>16</sup> and ways to meaningfully address climate change. GRAIN (2011) stresses that, “Agriculture and food production and trade liberalization are key drivers of climate change. Industrialised agriculture and mono-crop production with its reliance chemical fertilizers; heavy machinery and other petroleum-dependant farm technologies contribute significantly to climate change.” GRAIN (2011) further highlights

that: “The impact of the food industry as a whole is even greater: destroying forests and savannahs to produce animal feed and generating climate-damaging waste through excess packaging, processing, refrigeration and the transport of food over long distances, despite leaving millions of people hungry.” The industrial food system is responsible for 44-57% of all global greenhouse gas emissions (Figure 2).

Promoting trade and export-led growth directly contributes to climate change through food processing, packaging, long distance refrigeration and massive transport infrastructure systems that add to the use of fossil fuels.

Figure 2: Food and Climate Change



Source: Grain 2011, *Food and Climate Change the Forgotten Link, Against the Grain*

These targets that promote economic growth and capitalist solutions make it highly unlikely that these goals will be achieved and may make matters worse. Getting the ball in the net requires a transition that begins to look beyond development and will need to consider ideas of de-growth and de-materialisation in a manner that restores, renews and nurtures the earth. This means the need for transitions that are neither cosmetic nor return to “development alternatives” but argues for a radical change for “alternatives to development.”<sup>17</sup> This change needs to challenge “the whole conceptual basis of development, its way of understanding nature and society, its institutions and its discursive defences” and draws on thinking of *buen vivir* (well-being) as an alternative set of values.<sup>18</sup>

The values of ‘*buen vivir*’ entail living in harmony with nature, producing what is enough through local democratic participatory approaches. The relevance of the adoption of this concept is that the “state is expected to guarantee the basic condition(s) for the

reproduction of life of its population without jeopardising the regeneration of the natural biodiversity” and this “involves exchanging the market system for one that vindicates the right to life (sustenance, reproduction and subsistence) and subjects the economy to social and political criteria”<sup>19</sup>

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- <sup>16</sup>“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, countries, and state unions to define their agricultural and food policy without the dumping of agricultural commodities into foreign countries. Food sovereignty organises food

production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption. Food sovereignty includes the right to protect and regulate national agricultural and livestock production and to shield the domestic market from the dumping of agricultural surpluses and low-priced imports from other countries. Landless people, peasants, and small farmers must get access to land, water, and seed, as well as productive resources and adequate public services...”

(Via Campesina, The International Peasant’s Voice: [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org))

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## The UN @ 70: A relic of a bygone era or a fundamental pillar of the global development agenda?

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70 years in the life of any institution is a crucial reflection point. 30 years short of a centenary and 30 more years to alter, define and 'save' the last half century and paint a rosier picture of a centenary of work. The United Nations (UN), formed in the dying days of the Second World War, is confronted with such a point in its history. Formed in October 1945, the UN is as much a creature of the era of its founding, as it is an organization designed to respond to changing geopolitical developments and landscapes. It is this contradiction which the UN as it reflects on its 70-year anniversary which was celebrated in October 2015 will have to confront.

The United Nations finds itself in a global developmental environment much different from its founding in 1945 and significant differences in this environment challenge the UN to respond in a manner that will ensure its continued existence and relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The UN will have to do this while also ensuring that the voices of the global south are represented in this process.

In this regard, we argue that the UN is faced with the need to respond to the changing environment on three fronts; governance structures and power relations, funding for global development initiatives and hegemony in the space of ideas. With regard to the latter, especially as it relates to ideas about how to pursue global development.

The founding of the UN was an outcome of successive attempts by influential geopolitical players, in particular those from Western countries to create a global governance architecture. It is often viewed as the natural successor of the League of Nations which emerged post the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War. The initial rationale for pursuing a global governance structure arose from a need to adjudicate territorial disputes and create international structures and regulations for aviation, security and commercial activities (both legal and illicit). Post 1945, this body would also include trade, security and policy reflection on a wide range of

matters with national, regional and multilateral appeal.

The UN has grown into an organisation that now boasts a wide range of organizations which fall into the following categories; *main organs* and *funds, programmes and specialized agencies*. The main organs consist of the following institutions; the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat. The numerous The UN has developed an impressive organizational architecture whose global reach is unparalleled which in itself, is an achievement. However, if one is no friend of complacency and mediocrity, it is clear that there have been some contemporary concerns about the role of the UN and the inclusivity and reach of its decision making, especially in the global South. More importantly, in the remaining 30 years as it nears its centenary, the role of Africa in addressing some of these concerns requires some discussion.

Africa will be crucial to the development dialogue in the next few decades as we approach the centenary of the UN as Africa has a young working age population, the mineral bounty it possesses is the feedstock needed for technological development (i.e. platinum for catalytic converters and fuel cell technology and the coltan required for our cell phones). It also has 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land for global food security. The major complication is the concern that many African leaders have had about the insufficient African representation and sway in global decision making in UN or UN-associated platforms on trade, security, justice and development. From a security and governance front, there is also something to be said about the role of Africa in the global decision making structure and its relation to development , in particular the historic and contemporary role of the UN peacekeeping missions ('the blue hats') and the impact of their 'temporary permanence' in African affairs. In particular, African

leaders are demanding the following: **two permanent seats** and **five non-permanent seats** which will provide a crucial role in global decision-making for the continent's five sub-regions.

The statement by South African president, Jacob Zuma at the 2015 General Assembly in New York further reinforces how African leaders view this matter;

*'With the celebration of 70 years since the end of the war and 70 years since the formation of the UN, the spotlight falls on the shape of the world order currently, especially the exclusion of Africa from permanent membership of the UN Security Council.....The time has come, therefore, for the world to seriously reflect on this exclusion of Africa yet again, 70 years on, and seriously discuss the question of the meaningful reform of the UN Security Council, as we commemorate the contribution of Africa to the war against fascism'*

It stands to reason, that the urgency with which the UN responds to this proposal by African member states will be a marker of the relevance and legitimacy of the UN and its institutions to the African people. This is important in a world that is increasingly moving its focal lens away from the West, towards the East. This realignment of global power and decision-making presents some critical challenges to the hegemony of the UN and the Western nations which yield considerable influence within the UN. With the advent of the new Sustainable Development Goals as an overarching framework for action in addressing the development challenges faced by the world, major questions emerge.

Very crucially, it is a mistake to think that the agenda for global development must be carried out by the development institutions and agencies. The African continent is replete with examples that show that issues of security & conflict, and governance are central to solving development challenges. That is why the African continent requires material input and influence in UN institutions other than just the development institutions.

More importantly for the UN, is a question around how a continent like Africa funds its role in achieving the SDGs? Answers to this question will also define in many ways, the seriousness with which the UN views domestic resource mobilisation challenges in Africa. For instance, in the age of stateless and increasingly influential corporate entities which are much stronger politically and economically than nation states, what international conventions are needed to respond to base erosion and profit shifting? What role can the UN play in this regard, if it accepts that some of the insights from the Mbeki report which concluded that every year, \$50 billion in illicit outflows from Africa exceeds the official development

assistance from donor countries and organisations. These findings make Africa a net creditor to the rest of the world, more importantly the developed nations and their 'tax havens'.

Global development advisory firm, Dalberg found that the development financing gap stands at about \$2.6 trillion globally and this is needed to fulfil the SDGs goals of ending poverty and hunger, ensuring universal access to education, healthcare, energy and housing *inter alia*. The firm found that with innovative approaches, we can unlock \$90 billion in Sub Saharan Africa alone for this effort, through some quick wins such as lowering the cost of remittances, pursuing new approaches for investment of domestic pension funds and drawing in the surplus incomes of those currently outside the banking system. This combined with effective recovery of tax revenues and losses through other means such as transfer pricing, would go a long way towards funding the development priorities of the continent. Such thinking shifts the discussion away from a debt, conditional foreign direct investment or aid focused discussion, towards sustainable ways of funding development through domestic resources.

Moreover the discussion of development funding priorities, especially through debt, is a discussion of power. It is a discussion with repercussions for the present and future as the repayment is not only financial, but social, as the recent debates in Zambia around the eradication of fuel subsidies as part of reforms to access IMF funding indicate. As a discussion of power, which the UN needs to engage, it is not only an issue of financial resources, but also an interrogation of which ideas have currency in global decision making. Furthermore, a central question emerges: Does the emergence of alternative nodes (such as BRICS) and paradigms in development thinking present a hegemonic challenge to the ideational influence of the UN?

In the post-2008 crisis environment, we need to ask whether the Washington Consensus is losing its allure in the policymaking arena or reemerging with different features. The Washington Consensus is a set of policy proposals spearheaded for countries in economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s for the developing world by the IMF, World Bank and the United States Treasury Department. These proposals included macroeconomic stabilization, reductions in social spending and trade and market liberalisation; with disastrous social and economic consequences.

This was the 'shock treatment' that left many postcolonial African economies on the brink by the start of the 1990s. Moreover, such ideas of development placed the market, in lieu of the state, at the centre of the development discourse. These are ideas, which over

the last few decades have found favour in scholarship, policy and the practice of economics. Unfettered market fundamentalism, was seen by many economists as the main cause of the 2008 crisis, from which the global economy has not fully recovered. It therefore is not surprising that the 'Washington Consensus' has received much needed criticism, after the social upheaval it has caused in Africa and Latin America.

Therefore, in an environment where the global South is emerging with its own institutions and alliances, significant possibilities exist

for Africans to influence the ideas that underpin development efforts, to reflect African realities, priorities and concerns. It is by no means a significant rupture, but nonetheless it presents an opportunity for the UN to transform, and in so doing respond to some of the questions we have engaged above. The urgency and quality of its response will be a sufficient indicator of whether the UN is a relic of a bygone era or a fundamental pillar of global development efforts. The following 30 years, as we approach the centenary of the UN in 2045, will be telling.

## Global economic governance in the post-growth era

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In global governance, power and status are intimately connected with the size of a country's economy. In his influential book, *The rise and fall of the great powers*, Yale historian Paul Kennedy concludes that economic wealth is arguably more significant than military strength when it comes to determining a country's global status. In particular, economic growth has become the key parameter to assess a nation's relevance at the international level, through its key indicator, the gross domestic product (GDP). Definitions of 'superpower,' 'middle-power' or 'emerging power' are all determined by GDP. The commonplace distinction between 'developed' and 'developing' world, which has driven finance and trade policies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is also a result of GDP. Global governance institutions, too, by-products of GDP: powerful 'clubs' like the G7/G20, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and even the more recent BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), are all determined by actual or prospective estimates of GDP. A good GDP track record can catapult a country from irrelevance to leadership or vice versa.

But if the critique against GDP is integrated into policy reforms and economic growth at the global level languishes, how may this affect global political processes?

### **A new Bretton Woods?**

The global economic system was designed at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, when economic growth and GDP became essential tools in the pursuit of economist stability at the international level. For several decades, they reigned unchallenged. In the past few years, however, there has been a growing debate about the adequacy of GDP as a measurement of economic performance, let alone human welfare. Indeed, GDP suffers from a number of weaknesses. It only measures output, without considering the value of inputs and the cost of negative externalities. As a consequence, GDP incentivizes governments to exploit natural

resources and pollute, given that the human, social and environmental costs therein are not featured in the national accounts. A country that depletes its energy and environmental resources for industrial output is seen as productive by GDP. By contrast, a country that preserves nature, maximizes wellbeing and curbs excessive consumption may very well be punished in the GDP framework. As climate change worsens and environmental degradation also affects the social and economic performance of many countries (think of China and India, for instance) the contradictions within a system of governance that pushes for more GDP growth while trying to attain sustainable development are becoming apparent. Against this backdrop, numerous calls have been made, not only by experts but also by leading policy makers to move beyond the current GDP framework

The French government established a high-level commission in 2008, when both the OECD and the EU launched their 'Beyond GDP' campaigns. The UK and the US governments followed suit with new surveys on wellbeing. In 2012, the Rio+20 focused on new measurements and targets, paving the way for the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. Even in the emerging powers, the influence of GDP has taken a bit of a knock since. For instance, the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, announced in 2013 that GDP will no longer be considered a parameter of success in China, ending a tradition in the Communist Party to reward officials that maximize GDP growth in their localities. A year later, over 70 Chinese cities ditched GDP as an economic policy tool. As admitted by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, "GDP fails to take into account the social and environmental costs of the so-called progress. We need a new economic paradigm that recognizes the parity between the three pillars of sustainable development. Social, economic and environmental well-being are indivisible."

### **New global leaders**

GDP has been instrumental to create the world's pecking order. Thus, if GDP were replaced (or even complemented) by different

measures of wellbeing, prosperity and sustainable development, it is fair to expect that global leadership may undergo a major earthquake.

For starters, conventional powers, both in the West and in the East, would rank way below countries that have been more efficient at building equitable and sustainable economies. The only current G7 members to survive the shift would be Germany (relatively high in wellbeing) and Canada (good degree of prosperity). By contrast, the world's largest economies in GDP terms would disappear from the global rooms of power. Indeed, the US ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in prosperity, mostly due to its poor track record in safety and security, 36<sup>th</sup> in wellbeing and at the very bottom in sustainable development, due to its massive ecological footprint. China is the 51<sup>st</sup> country in terms of overall prosperity, mainly because of governance issues and a poor democratic record, the 85<sup>th</sup> in wellbeing and at the very bottom for environmental performance (118<sup>th</sup>).

The new global leaders would be countries that have been able to marry economic progress with human and ecological wellbeing. Among them we find nations like New Zealand, Austria, South Korea and Costa Rica, followed by Ecuador, Colombia, Switzerland, Iceland and Australia. If these countries were to act in coordination, what impact would they have on global governance? Regionally, South America would climb to the top, together with Europe and the South Pacific. By including the value of the informal economy and the variety of household and community services provided free of charge (which are neglected by GDP), the income of many European economies would increase significantly.

The infamous acronym PIGS, describing the allegedly inefficient economies of Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain, would also need some rethinking, as these countries' economies are much more prosperous in non-GDP terms than the current metrics reveal. Africa's economic miracle, as epitomized in the 'Africa Rising' discourse, evaporates all together. Most African economies are indeed very low on genuine progress or wellbeing. When the environmental costs of their systems of extraction and production are discounted from their growth rates, their 'overall' prosperity diminished dramatically, leaving Sub-Saharan Africa the only region in the world with a negative performance. In short, this region has been losing wealth for at least the past two decades.

### **From globalization to regionalization**

The transition to a post-growth system of governance may also replace globalization as the defining feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a new form of regionalism. There are several factors pointing towards this possibility. The first is economic contraction. There is

much evidence that the vicious cycle of debt and consumption, which is supported by the growth approach to economic development, has been one of the main causes (if not singlehandedly the main cause) of the economic collapse in 2007-2008. While GDP-based policies have pushed countries to increase economic interdependence, thus generating an unprecedented level of material wealth, technological innovation and trade volumes, they have also made economic systems vulnerable to systemic shocks. Moreover, while accelerating economic growth at the planetary level, they have also exacerbated inequalities within and across countries. Nowadays, national economies have become unable to tackle socio-economic imbalances, especially when they are caused by global economic dynamics. Because of the economic crisis, we have seen an increase in short-term, short-distance migration as opposed to the long-term intercontinental flows that had dominated previous periods.

The second factor is climate change. Despite the hesitation with which the international community has been pushing the post-Kyoto agenda, it is inevitable that new regulations will be introduced to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases in both industrialized nations and so-called developing countries. Some nations have already introduced carbon taxes, which are likely to become more stringent and punitive in the near future. With the stalemate affecting the Doha round on global trade, the negotiations for a new climate regime have become the actual terrain of confrontation to design the future of the global economy. As the climate change regime supersedes the current world trade system, the exchange of goods and services is likely to experience a slow but steady re-localization, in which 'mileage' will begin to make a difference. Geographical distances will matter ever more in the process of designing a climate-compatible trading system, which means that what can be produced and consumed regionally/locally will become more profitable than what can be shipped across the planet. As natural capital accounting, transport costs and environmental impacts become central in the business paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, production and consumption may become increasingly regional.

The third factor is energy. According to the estimates of the International Energy Agency, the near future will require a fundamental shift from fossil fuels, which are easy to transport, to renewable energy, which travels less easily. It is unlikely that renewable energy will be able to sustain the system of transport and international freight that we have now, as solar, wind and geothermal sources are not amenable to long-distance transportation. By contrast, they will allow local businesses to

produce energy locally and exchange it within a certain degree of proximity. As energy production is diversified and localized, its distribution will follow the geophysical features of each territory. As renewable energy can be produced anywhere on the planet, macro-grids may need to be redesigned into intelligent micro-grids, which reach users within a given area thus reducing the amount of energy dispersion caused by long-distance transportation.

Evidently, these three factors are mutually correlated and reinforce one another. Energy transitions make a business-as-usual economic recovery much less likely. Climate change makes it imperative to switch to less polluting renewable forms of energy. Environmental regulations make globalized markets less likely to stay profitable in the long run, which means that business activities will refocus from the global to the regional/local level to seek new profits. At the same time, such a transition to localized forms of production and consumption does not necessarily mean a resurgence of national protectionism. As this new economy will need to be embedded in the geographic, climatic and ecosystemic conditions of each territory, national borders are likely to stay porous. As a matter of fact, regional cross-border exchanges may very well become more common than they are now.

By exchanging energy locally, contiguous communities across national borders would push for further integration. This drive for regional integration may be particularly strong in large nations, where distances from the periphery to the centre are wider than those between cross-border peripheries. Territorial continuity will matter a great deal, which means that geographically homogenous areas will have an incentive to build common infrastructure, regardless of whether they reside within the same nation or cut across multiple countries. Micro economic regions are therefore likely to mushroom and may easily have spill-over effects also in the political and social field. While nations will remain the key locus of governance, they will most likely transition from being monopolists of regulation to being facilitators of bottom-up integration.

In turn, they will find themselves connected with each other through a web of bio-regions spanning across their borders, in which human and ecosystem connections will be driving development.

The localization of the economy would also shift the way in which business operates nationally. As the global market becomes less profitable, business will have an incentive to trade locally and regionally. In some cases, it will be more profitable to engage in commerce with neighbouring communities in a foreign country than with other far away communities within the same nation. In the current top-down regulatory framework, regional trade has only prevailed in Europe, where a common market has become a daily reality for goods, services and workers. In South America, Asia and especially Africa, by contrast, most trade volumes are directed outside the region. Although regionalization has generated new avenues for intra-region trade, the profitability of global markets has discouraged a serious refocusing of business activities within regions rather than across them. Thus, the prospect of a global contraction of economic activity may very well reinforce business integration at the regional level.

#### **The world after growth**

Would climate change be more of a priority, if the G20 comprised the most sustainable countries rather than the worst polluters? Would global governance structures be more accountable if it was led by countries that promote wellbeing rather than resource extraction? Would a system of interconnected regions, in which local economies are integrated through cross-national networks of cooperation, be better suited to achieve sustainable development and prosperity than the current form of globalization?

Such a global system of economic governance is just a possibility. But with the convergence of economic, social and environmental crises it appears as if business-as-usual is not an option. Abandoning growth to embrace a new idea of progress may very well be the first step towards building a better world for all in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



## Policy recommendations from the UN@70 Seminar

- ❖ The stalemate around UNSC reform can be broken by a more balanced discourse: moving away from efforts by individual countries to advance their national interests towards a more flexible, region-based process of electing countries onto the UNSC.
- ❖ A study into UN regionalization should be conceptualized in terms of an interrelated companion to consolidate under an ECOSOC-UNSC nexus. Key aspects of the UN machinery, especially regarding economic development, stabilization and security capacity-building in strengthening regional and continental economic communities should be considered.
- ❖ The UN's development agenda should draw on alternative paradigms and values around the dynamics between development and the environment. The values of *buen vivir* promotes a vision of harmony with nature and the vindication of the planetary right to life.
- ❖ There is an urgent need for the UN to formulate clear protocols, principles and mechanisms on the implementation and evaluation of the goals and targets set out in its impressive global development framework. This will require a shift away from a debt, conditional foreign direct investment or aid focused discourse, towards sustainable ways of funding development through domestic resources.
- ❖ The global economic system needs to move beyond the current GDP framework if the international community is serious about addressing the increasingly interconnected economic, social and environmental crises. The UN should optimise its strengths in terms of convening states, universality and the capacity to set international norms to push for a more innovative, inclusive and sustainable geoeconomic order.



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