In this connection the procedure established in 2004 to get reports on the course and results of all UN-related conferences has without doubt strengthened to some degree the control function of the Subcommittee towards the Federal Foreign Office and other Government Departments; but the control effect is relatively small, as effective control could only be achieved if the Subcommittee would get often enough the opportunity to present its findings in a plenary debate of the Bundestag.

It would be advisable – if one compares the way UN policy is handled in Germany with the procedures for example in the USA or Switzerland – to hold at least a general plenary debate on UN policy in the German Bundestag shortly before the parliamentary summer recess, where the Bundestag could submit the Federal Government a catalogue of concepts and goals to be taken into account by the UN delegation of the Federal Government in the general debate of the UN → General Assembly starting annually in September.

The Subcommittee should make use of the opportunity provided by the Bundestag decision of June 2005 to initiate and prepare together with other subcommittees and/or committees of the Bundestag annual public hearings on the UN: that would increase the public awareness of the German UN policy and strengthen also the standing of the Subcommittee.

The Subcommittee should also attempt to develop its working relations with the media – the 2005 public hearings, for example, were almost neglected by the mass media.

If the Subcommittee does not fight for a larger role, it will remain a diligent information collector and focal point for academic researchers and high-level visitors from the UN. That is not enough if it is measured against the justified demand of the Bundestag in its 2005 decision for a transparent and effective parliamentary control of and participation in German UN policy.

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Internet: Homepage of the Subcommittee on the UN: www.bundestag.de/ausschuesse/a03/a03_vn/index.html.

Development Concepts, Development Research

Introduction

Development debates in the → UN system have always reflected a multitude of development perspectives, definitions and theories. The reason is the large number of member states, the growing number of civil-society organizations and business representatives in recent decades, the diversity of and disparities among countries, as well as the fact that governments are not unitary actors and government delegations often have to represent the concerns of various national constituencies.

Moreover, debates within UN system forums are, for the most part, relatively fair. They afford opportunities for an effective voice to all member states and concerned non-state parties. Put differently, they are marked by competitive deliberations, and a pluralism of ideas and priorities. The result is development concepts that mix various analytical and policy approaches but possess a most intriguing and important main property: the search for balance – a balance between the national and the international, private and public, economic and social and environmental, and the short and the longer-term.

This entry will trace UN system debates on development over the past six decades. It will proceed in three stages. I will, first, distinguish and describe in broad-brush strokes five historical periods of development thinking in the UN system. At the second stage, I will discuss to what extent and when the UN system debates have not only reflected
prevalent thinking that existed in the world but been shaped also by new and innovative thinking that emerged from within the organization. At the concluding third stage, I will summarize the main findings and speculate on the question of the future: what might be the next large development topics on which UN system deliberations might focus.

Because of the complexity of the issue I will limit my remarks to a description of the outcomes of various thought and negotiation processes and not attempt an analysis of the precise origin of each input. To the extent that I attempt such an attribution, I will do so at a highly aggregate level, referring to such possible sources as for example, the “developing countries”, “industrial countries”, or “NGOs”. (Supporting references to relevant documents, reports and studies are listed at the end of the article, in the section on ‘Literature’ (= Lit.))

I. UN System Development Concepts: An Historical Overview

The focus of UN system deliberations on development over the past six decades has changed. This change has not, or at least, not so much meant a change in the development concept but rather a broadening of its definition. And this widening of the conceptual lens reflects the growing complexity of the development opportunities and constraints that presented themselves over time. Initially, development was seen as developing countries “catching up” with industrial countries. Then the international context came into focus, notably with the debate on a new international economic order (→ International Economic Relations and New International Economic Order (NIEO)). This debate was subsequently complemented by a renewed emphasis on national level policy initiatives in the economic, social and environmental fields. From there, the debates went back to the international level to explore and emphasize the role of the private sector, including that of integrating markets into development. And finally, in recent times, we see that UN system development debates increasingly recognize the blurring of the divide between the domestic policy spheres and the international context. Policy interdependence among countries and the linked issue of the provision of global public goods such as climate stability, energy security, or controlling communicable diseases are coming to the fore.

In more detail, the conceptual evolution of UN system development debates can be depicted as follows.

1. Development as a Process of the South “Catching Up” with the North

The early discussions about development within the UN system – as well as elsewhere in the world – were primarily about the group of countries that became known as “developing countries”. The defining criterion of these countries was then a population growth rate of above 2%. By now, this criterion has been replaced by that of poverty, notably poverty in income terms.

Consequently, the discussion about development had a strong focus on aid, taking the Marshall Plan, the US programme for the reconstruction of European and other war-torn countries, as a model. It was also in the UN that the proposal for a 0.7% aid target was born. Aid, consisting of the transfer of both financial resources (to close the developing countries’ financial gaps) and technical expertise (to support national capacity building), was then perceived as an initiative that would take as its guiding framework the national policy priorities of the recipient country. In fact, there was a strong emphasis on national policy-making sovereignty. One reason for that was the then emerging East-West confrontation and system rivalry; another was that many recipient countries had just gained their political independence and were jealously guarding that newly-won freedom.

In fact, it was precisely this East-West divide that gave multilateralism, aid dispensed through the UN system, a particular role at that time. Multilateral aid served as a bridge-building device