SEVEN DECADES OF 'DEVELOPMENT', AND NOW WHAT?

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Abstract: Year 2015 is slated as a year of transformation to address unprecedented political, ecological, social, gender and economic inequities. UN negotiations are underway to produce new sustainable development goals (SDGs). The paper argues that ideas matter in the conceptualisation of development agendas, which in turn depend on power constellations within and between the first UN—the member states, the second UN—the UN secretariat and agencies, and the third UN—civil society. The paper tracks past development decades and examines whether the SDGs can and will be as visionary as the UN Charter adopted in 1945, which created moral pressure for institutional and policy change. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Keywords: MDGs; SDGs; development; policies; three UNs

'Important and costly measures are taken after a disaster. There are few exceptions to this rule.' (Emmerij *et al*., 2001: 173)

Genuine shift in policy does not happen unless there is 'a fundamental alteration in global power relations or crises out of which new institutional forms are forged' (Hulme & Wilkinson, 2014: 182)

'The stars are aligned for the world to take historic action to transform lives and protect the planet.' (UN SG, 2014: 7)

The political stakes are high, but so are the opportunities – perhaps once–in–a–generation – for genuine transformation. (Adams & Luchsinger, 2015: 1)

1 SEVEN DECADES OF 'DEVELOPMENT'

Year 2015 is often presented as the year for genuine transformation. But genuine transformation needs considerable pressure, a disaster that shakes the confidence of the

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international community, or a radical shift in power constellations. Could 2015 become the year in which the world community becomes aware of the crisis—or even—disaster facing humanity and the planet in terms of unprecedented political, ecological, social, gender and, last but not least, economic inequities? Are power constellations realigning? Is this a situation similar to the one 70 years ago, when those countries that had voice at the time coalesced to create a more humane international order, establishing the United Nations (UN) in reaction to the social and economic chaos of the Great Depression and the unspeakable horrors of World War II?[1] Or more optimistically, as the UN Secretary General (SG) remarked in a recent report: are 'The stars … aligned for the world to take historic action to transform lives and protect the planet' (UN SG, 2014: 7)? Whether shaken by the disaster of profound inequity, or enlightened by an opportunity for a stellar multilateral commitment, the question is whether a fundamental policy shift will materialise in 2015.

The UN's founding remit was to create peace, well-being and economic stability. The UN Charter, adopted in 1945, has human rights and dignity at its heart and covers all aspects of what then was termed 'social progress and better standards of life'—today generally termed in concepts of human development or well-being. The Charter's article 55 encapsulates a vision of

> 'higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; solutions of international economic, social, health and related problems; and universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion' (UN, 1945).

The goals of the Charter were visionary at a time when many societies were colonies and oppressed, many economies war-ravaged or exploited, and the majority of the world's population was confronted with hunger, poverty, unemployment, a lack of decent housing and restricted access to health and education. The Charter goals created moral pressure for institutional and policy change.

We are now in seventh decade of development agendas launched by the UN system, which all should be measured against those aspirations of the UN Charter. Development agenda setting began with the analyses and early development cooperation activities of the UN in the 1950s. These were followed by four international development decades, two poverty eradication decades (PEDs) and a 15-year millennium development goal (MDG) agenda.

Unfolding currently is a second 15-year development agenda—which for the first time seeks to address the world as a whole and moves away from a developed-developing country schism. As a coincidental result of global conference choreography, six major multilateral processes are underway in 2015. These are the review of the MDGs and the conceptualisation of a new development agenda: a reconfirmation of the Beijing Platform of Action (Beijing plus 20), the climate change negotiations, a commitment to complete the Doha Round of international trade negotiations, the discussions on financing for development and UN reform (Women's Major Group, 2015; Mackie & Williams, 2015).[2] Ideally, these six strands would converge, normatively, conceptually and policy-wise, in the proposed new development

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[1]The creation of the League of Nations in 1919 was a similar, powerful reaction to an immense disaster—World War I.

[2]The UN secretariat and the President of the GA tend to refer to only three of these processes: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), financing for development and climate change. See, for example, http://www.un.org/pga/190115_statement-stocktaking-session-post-2015/

agenda. That would mean that all the bases of sustainable human development in dignity would be covered. But at this moment, it is unclear whether the agenda will be comprehensive and ambitious and meet its transformative remit; it is even unclear, whether it will be adopted in a meaningful form such as a UN general assembly (GA) resolution. That will depend on inter-country dynamics and the constellation among 'the three UNs'—the member states, the UN secretariat and civil society.

Why would a 'good', transformative development agenda even matter? UN resolutions are not binding; they merely mature into soft law if a sufficient number of countries follow the proclaimed principles. The reason this paper looks into development agendas comes from the assumption that ideas do matter, and accordingly, it is important which ideas are put forward in international discussions and which ideas, at least at the aspirational level, guide policy decisions. The UN secretariat has the remit to act on the ideational plane, even if final texts are whittled down as they are negotiated.

The paper concentrates on intent: the conceptual and policy content of the successive development agendas and the goals they have formulated over the past seven decades of development. It finds a remarkable linearity in the development agenda texts, with seemingly piecemeal changes from one decade to the next—that then surprisingly result in a completely different agenda at the end of the line.

But of course, it would be Hegelian, or simply naive, to restrict oneself to the ideational level. Real-world economic and political power functions as a gatekeeper that determines which ideas are presented in the international arena in the first place. This process is a function of interactions and power relations among the three UNs and subsets within these. The defining texts that agreed in the development decades are not simply a result of North–South divides in the first UN. They are shaped by internal dynamics within member states of the North and the South, respectively, constellations within the UN secretariat and power relations within the third UN. Moreover, the interface, relations and power constellations between the first, second and third UNs and their changing sub-components over time influence negotiated outcomes. In other words, they are subject to the internal dynamics of each UN as well as the dynamics among them.

Moreover, real-world politics is what ultimately decides which ideas and policy choices are deemed acceptable, taken to heart and, in some fashion, implemented. The paper therefore also explores the context in which development decades are negotiated and adopted.[3] It looks at the shifting influence of the actors that make up the UN community.

Following Jolly *et al.* (2009), one can distinguish three UNs. The 'first UN' is the member states of the UN, 'an arena in which states pursue their national interests' (Emmerij *et al.*, 2001: 118); the 'second UN' is the UN secretariat and the UN agencies, with their heads of agency and staff. The 'third UN' refers to affiliated but independent players who influence UN thinking as well as decisions—non-governmental organisations (NGOs), external experts, scholars, consultants, independent commissions and other individuals who regularly engage with the UN (Weiss & Jolly 2009; Jolly *et al.*, 2009: 32–37). Increasingly, the business community or private sector is considered as a part of this third UN.[4] The underlying perspective of this paper is that the interface and the power relations between the three UNs, and subsets within these groups, ultimately determine how 'real' an agenda becomes internationally.

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[3]A third level would logically be the outcomes of such decisions. They are, however, beyond the scope of this paper.
[4]This has not gone uncontested.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first looks at the four international development decades, which resembled each other intellectually. The second looks at the 'interlude' of the social summit plan of action and its PEDs and the MDGs, which marked a gradual departure from a Keynesian and 'statist' approach. The third section explores the emerging new development agenda—the SDGs. For each phase, the paper sketches the concepts and underlying economic theories, and the political circumstances that accompanied each. In a closing section, it makes a guess how the current political and economic constellation might play out. Against the background of the long history of development agendas, the paper assesses whether, in 2015, a transformational shift— promised in various statements regarding the next development agenda (High-level Panel Report, HLPR, 2013; UN SG, 2014)—is possible, given the state of play within and among the three UNs.

2   THE FIRST DEVELOPMENT ERA AND ITS CLEAR AGENDA

Conventionally, reviews of development agendas begin in the early 1960s, when the UN announced the development decade, and many development cooperation agencies were created within the UN system and in governments (Köhler, 1996; Stokke, 2009). However, development work had actually already begun in the 1950s. This 'decade zero' derived from the UN Charter, notably its preamble and article 55 mentioned earlier. As early as 1951, the UN Secretariat commissioned a study on 'Measures for the economic development of underdeveloped countries' (UN, 1951; Emmerij *et al.*, 2001: 175; Jolly, 2005). Its starting point was the immense unemployment and underemployment in developing countries, and its object the government policies needed to reduce these. The publication addressed the concentration of land ownership and placed a focus on the need for public finance to fund education, health and other public services. Economic growth, productivity and technology were identified as keys to development, leading to a call for increases in savings and capital formation (Emmerij *et al.*, 2001: 32–34). Easily recognisable, the analysis is based in the Keynesian approach, which was the unrivalled economic theory of the era. It informed policies pursued at that time in and by the major powers, the US and UK, in the re-emerging post-fascist countries, such as Germany or Japan, and in the newly independent countries of the South. In the Soviet Union, arguing from a Marxist background, there was a similar statist and capital formation orientation. Because of the pre-eminence of Keynesian thinking, there was a certain degree of convergence among 'first' and 'second' UN and the intellectuals of the 'third UN' in the 1950s, and differences were around theoretical nuances, not about policy applications. Thus, despite some controversies over theory within the UN secretariat and among reviewers (Toye & Toye, 2004), the then predominance of the UN as an intellectual leader enabled the report's rapid dissemination.

This and related publications also set the analytical stage for all of the subsequent, development decades, which, however, over time whittled down the core objectives of employment and economic development.

By the late 1950s, early 1960s, the international policymaking context had changed. The dynamics of anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist movements created a set of newly independent countries with strong cohesion politically and common economic interests. They also benefited tactically from the East–West tensions. Numerically, UN membership

doubled from 51 countries in 1945 to 100 in 1960. The new nations coalesced economically and politically around the Bandung agreement, and governments were driven by a commitment to 'development'. In the industrialised countries, there was a mixture of guilt over the effects of colonialism and a self-interest in preparing and opening new markets. Thus, there was a compulsion from both from the South and the North to pay attention to development.

As a result of these dynamics, the development decade, adopted by the UN GA in 1961, was led by the UN secretariat, but in coalition with the US government, which was keen, at that time, to be in control of UN activities. The pertaining resolution was adopted despite the cold war context, thanks to the pressure from the newly established 'developing countries'. The idea of introducing a global framework has been described as 'ahead of its time' (Emmerij *et al.*, 2001: 45; 48; Stokke, 2009: 157ff).

The declared objective of that first development decade was to help low-income countries achieve 'development'—within one decade. Like the publication on measures for economic development, it reflected a Keynesian approach to development, putting much emphasis on economic growth—aspiring to a minimum annual growth rate of 5% in aggregate national income—and introducing interventions to transfer capital from developed to developing ('underdeveloped') countries. It placed the onus of development on the state, with objectives such as the maximum mobilisation of domestic resources; the formulation of development plans for social as well as economic development; the improvement of administrative machinery and incentives for effective implementation; a redirection of science and technology to focus on national problems; an increase of export earnings through the increase of manufactured and semi-manufactured goods; and an increase flow of capital to developing countries (UN GA, 1960; UN Intellectual History Project, 2010). But the decade also noted the importance of 'well-being and happiness not only of the present generation but also of the generations to come' (UN GA, 1970, art 4).

Surprising to a 2015 reader is the implicit assumption conveyed by that first decade's document that 'development' would be achievable within a decade. Indeed, planning for a second development decade began already in the mid-1960s (Stokke, 2009: 155). Economic growth achieved the 5% target in a fair number of low-income countries by the late 1960s but was considered insufficient (Jolly *et al.*, 2009: 259; Stokke 2009: 156f).

The UN GA announced a second international development decade in 1970 (Stokke, 2009: 157 ff). Conceptually, it was similar to but more extensive than the first. It reconfirmed macroeconomic growth targets but at an accelerated rate of 6% per annum and 3.5% per capita. It again made the case for development planning and the improvement of administrative machinery (UN GA, 1970). Like the first decade, it was also about achieving 'well-being and happiness not only of the present generation but also of the generations to come' (UN GA, 1970, art 4). The decade document included 'social' goals—employment, education, health, nutrition and participation. It noted that 'The ultimate objective of development must be to bring about sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and bestow benefits on all' (UN GA, 1970, art 7). Gender equality was a distinct component. Conversely, poverty is mentioned only once.

For the conceptual lineage of development decades, it is useful to note the social policy components of the early development decades, because the MDGs have at times been presented as having been the first to introduce this issue—the MDGs merely paid more

attention to the social dimensions of development, but they did not discover social policy.[5] Similarly, the notion of sustainable development—at times erroneously portrayed as a notion created in the Rio plus 20 Conference in 2012—surfaced in the 1970 development decade, which in turn influenced the UN conference on the human environment in United Nations (1972) (Emmerij *et al.*, 2001).[6] And in 1974, the UN GA adopted the new international economic order (NIEO; UN GA, 1974), which called for a radical readjustment in global trade, investment and capital flows. In effect, it called for equity between nations—albeit using different languages. Fast forwarding to the SDGs, they, after a long silence, echo that concern but without referring to the NIEO.

The third UN development decade (1981–1990; UN GA, 1980) reiterated the demand for a NIEO and institutional and structural changes in international economic relations (UN GA, 1980, art 17; Stokke, 2009: 174f). For the first time, there was an explicit call for the eradication of poverty (art 7) and hunger (art 93), and a commitment to food security (art 86). It raised the issue of a 'fair distribution of benefits' (art 43). As its predecessors, it features an extensive section on policy measures (art 52 to 168), covering international trade, industrialization, food and agriculture, energy, transport, financial resources for development—and, as a new feature—the regulation of transnational corporations. It continues the tradition of quantified goals, such as a 7% average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate; a 7.5% annual rate of expansion of exports; or a gross domestic savings to reach 24% of GDP by 1990 (UN GA, 1980).

The decade text dedicated a section to environmental and ecological soundness and the funding of environmental management (art 156 f). It also called for a rapid increase in official development assistance, citing the 0.7% official development assistance (ODA)/ gross national product goal that had been introduced in 1970. Other goals and objectives

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[5]In fact, similarities between the second development decade and the MDGs are striking, although these never referred to the development decade texts:

(1) Each developing country should formulate its national employment objectives so as to absorb an increasing proportion of its working population in modern-type activities and to reduce significantly unemployment and underemployment.

(2) Particular attention should be paid to achieving enrolment of all children of primary school age, improvement in the quality of education at all levels, a substantial reduction in illiteracy, the reorientation of educational programmes to serve development needs and, as appropriate, the establishment and expansion of scientific and technological institutions.

(3) Each developing country should formulate a coherent health programme for the prevention and treatment of diseases and for raising general levels of health and sanitation.

(4) Levels of nutrition should be improved in terms of the average caloric intake and the protein content, with special emphasis being placed on the needs of vulnerable groups of population.

(5) Housing facilities should be expanded and improved, especially for the low-income groups and with a view to remedying the ills of unplanned urban growth and lagging rural areas.

(6) The well-being of children should be fostered.

(7) The full participation of youth in the development process should be ensured.

(8) The full integration of women in the total development effort should be encouraged.Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 2626 (XXV). International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade http://www.un-documents.net/a25r2626.htm

[6]The 1994 Human Development Report worked with the terms sustainable human development and sustainable development (UNDP, 2014: 13 ff.)

of the strategy were to attain, by the year 2000, full employment, universal primary school enrolment [7] and a life expectancy of 60 years as a minimum, with infant mortality rates no higher than 50 per 1000 live births (UN Encyclopaedia). Conceptually and in its policy recommendations, it was the most elaborate and aggressive of the development decades.

Unfazed by the lack of convincing progress in economic development, as defined in its own terms, and despite the end of the cold war and the complete change in the international political and ideological environment, in 1990, the UN GA adopted the international development strategy for the fourth UN development decade (1991–2000). It appears as the last of the proclaimed development decades. It tenaciously remained overall Keynesian in its policy orientation. The resolution committed

> 'to speed up the pace of economic growth in the developing countries; devise a development process that meets social needs, reduces extreme poverty significantly, develops and uses people's capacity and skills, and is environmentally sound and sustainable; improve the international systems of money, finance, and trade; strengthen and stabilize the world economy and establish sound macroeconomic management practices, nationally and internationally' (UN GA, 1990).

It called for the eradication of poverty, hunger, adult illiteracy and lack of basic education for women and addressed 'runaway population growth' in developing countries. It again contained the notion of 'sustainable' development and noted the catastrophic deterioration of the environment by short-sighted development projects (UN Encyclopaedia).

Poverty and sustainability became more central to the argument; growth remained the means to achieve this. It argued this would require strenuous efforts to increase domestic savings, raise investment and investment returns, hold down inflation, exercise monetary and fiscal discipline, maintain realistic exchange rates and allocate resources more efficiently. It also recommended that developing countries try to raise their rate of industrialization by 8–10% and increase their annual food production by 4%. All of these are policies addressing the role of the state. Presaging the MDGs, the decade also called for 'outcome-oriented national strategies and programs' and time-bound targets for poverty reduction. It reiterated the ODA target of 0.7% (UN Encyclopaedia).

In sum, the four development decades were largely identical to each other with respect to their underlying economic theory, but poverty and the environment enjoyed increasing attention in their evolution. Did these ideas matter? And what were the power dynamics that underpinned the particular policy stance of these development decades?

In 1970, another 26 countries had achieved political independence, become nation states, and staked their claims in the UN and the GA. They cohered around the need for what today might be termed affirmative action to redress the outcomes of colonialism and imperialism. A Keynesian notion of a strong role for the state, and the need for growth, investment surges, and redistribution matched this requirement well. The industrialised world too had recovered from wartime devastation and destruction, in general with a reliance on Keynesian macroeconomic policies. For them, post-war reconstruction had resulted in economic booms with high investment, innovation surges and good GDP growth rates. Thus, in the early 1970s, the developing countries were at the height of their geopolitical power, while the industrialised world was ready to make political concessions

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[7]The employment goal was watered down substantially in the MDGs and universal primary school enrolment postponed to 2015.

to the 'third world'. It was hence not difficult to adopt progressive aspirations and emphasise the role of government. The Keynesian bent corresponded to mainstream theory applied by most governments.

The tables turned in the course of the 1970s, however (Toye, 1987). The oil price tripled in the early 1970s. There was a global recession and considerable levels of inflation. A debt crisis struck especially the oil importers among the new nations. The least developed countries formed a separate grouping in 1971, highlighting the divergent interests among the countries of the South, in part symbolised by the creation of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. By the 1980s, globalisation driven by the interests of large corporations began to take hold (Jomo, 2006). Income inequality began increasing drastically at this time (Emmerij *et al*., 2001: 173; Piketty, 2014). The 1980s saw the gradual emergence of powerful corporate interests. Corporate globalisation (Roy, 2005) or 'globalisation under hegemony' (Jomo, 2006) shaped the need to dismantle barriers to international trade, foreign direct investment, international finance or intellectual property rights—in short, a new international economic governance emerged (Jomo, 2006) quite contrary to the one envisaged by the NIEO, and not in sync with a Keynesian, statist view on economic development requirements.

As a result of the changes in power relations within the first UN, by the 1990s, neoliberalism in economic and development policy thus became the predominant ideology. In the arena of theories, the economic crises were increasingly attributed to what was now considered misguided Keynesian policy; it was blamed for the debt crisis, inflation and the lack of economic growth. A backlash against government interventionism led to electoral majorities for conservative parties in the US and the UK. Their economic allegiances ushered in the neoliberal counter-revolution (Toye, 1987; Emmerij *et al*., 2001: 120).

Increasingly, over the 1980s, the industrialised countries shifted decisions on economic development, policymaking and financial support to the International financial institutions (IFIs) where they have more direct control, because of capital-based voting structures. The UN system did not receive and does not have the means to provide adequate technical, let alone financial, support to developing countries. The IFIs in turn played a role in 'dramatically promoting economic globalisation' (Jomo, 2006: 17)—at terms which were not *a priori* in the interest of the South.

By the early 1990s, the independence movements in and dissolution of the Soviet Union further tilted international dynamics to the North and to an economically conservative neoliberalism. Politically, there was a further weakening of the developing countries, as the collapse of the Soviet Union reinforced the geopolitical power of the West, removed the East–West bargaining chip, and appeared to justify anti-statist and anti-Keynesian policy positions.

All of these trends gradually led to a weakening of developing country power, combined with a retraction from Keynesian economics. Despite the changing international ideological environment, the UN secretariat—the second UN—and the GA stuck to their Keynesian outlook. This persistence can be considered as a good thing, if one agrees that, without a productivist approach and without placing employment and decent work at the centre of development policy, the income and wealth gaps between rich and poor people within countries, and the productivity gaps among countries, will never be breached (Chang, 2002; Gore, 2013; Montes, 2015 forthcoming). However, the tenacity with which ideas which were no longer mainstream were upheld further removed the second UN from its original ideational leadership. This is because ideas alone, without real-world power backing, do not carry the day.

3   THE SECOND DEVELOPMENT ERA AS A STEPPING STONE

The Keynesianist fourth development decade was still in place, nominally, while a second strand began to emerge in international development agenda setting. A series of UN summits during the 1990s marked a return, at the second UN, to a more explicit call for social—as opposed to simply economic—justice and human rights, ideals from the UN Charter, which had been obscured during the decades of the Cold War. But this period also ushered in a gradual move towards a neoliberal approach. Of these summits, the Copenhagen Social Summit of 1995 can be seen as a stepping stone—between the productivist approaches of the development decades and the market-oriented approach of the MDGs.

The Social Summit forcefully argued for the expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment,[8] in addition to a strong and much needed focus on social development, gender equality, environmental concerns and social integration (UN, 1995: 29ff). Human rights and the eradication of poverty became featured elements of the strategy.

But the Summit's plan of action illustrates the turning tide. On the one hand, it posits that

> 'Poverty[9] is inseparably linked to lack of control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. … The eradication of poverty cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone but will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure access for all to resources, opportunities and public services, to undertake policies geared to more equitable distribution of wealth and income, to provide social protection for those who cannot support themselves, and to assist people confronted by unforeseen catastrophe, whether individual or collective, natural, social or technological' (UN, 1995: 42).

It also situates productive work and employment as 'central elements of development as well as decisive elements of human identity… . Adequately and appropriately remunerated employment is an effective method of combating poverty and promoting social integration' (UN, 1995: 57). The action plan, very much like the development decades, conveys a detailed list of policy measures to address income generation, urban and rural poverty.

However, the solutions presented rely on the market, on self-employment and on microlevel measures such as microcredit, as opposed to active labour market policies or the much-needed restructuring of international economic systems. It gives the impression that it accepts globalisation: it is does not seek to fundamentally alter the patterns of dependence, as was the case with the earlier development decades. The document elevates basic social services to a keystone in anti-poverty processes. There is a shift to safety nets [10]

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[8]To understand the 'Copenhagen' position, it is necessary to note that the Summit was initiated and led by the International Labour Organization (ILO), explaining the strong focus on employment. It is also noteworthy that the 1994 UN Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report, which was directed very much at the World Summit on social development, elaborated the notion of sustainable development. The terms human development and the concept of human security, featured also in this UNDP Report, did not make it into the Copenhagen outcome document.

[9]Similar to and broadening the analysis of the early development decades, it described poverty as characterised by a variety of factors: 'lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion … (and) a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life.' (Social Summit 1995: 41).

(UN, 1995: 49; 53; Emmerij *et al.*, 2001: 115). Thus, the World Summit action plan is clearly a stepping stone to the apolitical directions of the MDGs.

Two PEDs[11] followed from the Social Summit.[12] They veer back to the development decades. Employment and the role of the state remain central. In terms of policy proposals, for example, they call for

> '…effective institutions for the provision of public goods to the general population and the productive sector; pro-employment growth for decent work in a fair global economic environment; social protection and integration; and an effective international partnership' (UN SG, 2009).

The second—and currently still ongoing—PED has as its main objective 'full employment and decent work for all'. It commits to poverty eradication by 2017. The time horizon is that of a decade, rather than the 15 years of the MDGs. These are more policy focused and ambitious goals than cutting poverty by half, as was the remit of the subsequent MDGs, or eradicating $1.25 poverty by 2030, as the SDGs are proposing (OWG, 2014). In that respect, the PEDs are in the tradition of the development decades. Perhaps that is why these two decades have not found any mention in the ongoing international discourse on development.

What drove the gradual shift in the 1990s? The PEDs continued to present a Keynesian approach. While, in the first UN, many governments became neoliberal and pro-capitalism, the second UN, by fortuitous circumstances, retained or regained some of its moral positioning. The texts reflect coalitions and voting powers in the UN GA, in the sense that the resolutions were adopted by the member states. However, the decade ideas no longer had much influence on steering policies towards employment or social justice. There was a growing disconnect between real-world policy decisions and development thinking in the UN. While gaining much aplomb in the political human rights sphere through the UN summits, the secretariat had become irrelevant for development policymaking. So the UN—the second UN—needed to recapture the ideational plane. It did this with the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs.

If one counts the PEDs, the Millennium Agenda and the MDGs constituted the sixth development 'decade', overlapping with the first PED. There were multiple strands of thinking in the year 2000—such as those of the PED versus the Copenhagen action plan. As the review of the development decades has perhaps illustrated, the MDGs were by no means entirely new in terms of an interest in the social dimensions of development, nor in the method of listing out goals and targets.[13] The MDGs moreover did not derive only from UN Summits of the 1990s and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation for Development (OECD) list but built also on elements of the early development decades (OECD DAC, 1996).

The Millennium Declaration was adopted by the UN GA (UN GA, 2000), but, unlike the development decades and the PEDs, the MDGs did not have a GA resolution; the

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[10]'Establishing appropriate social safety mechanisms to minimize the adverse effects of structural adjustment, stabilization or reform programmes on the workforce, especially the vulnerable, and for those who lose their jobs, creating conditions for their re-entry through, inter alia, continuing education and retraining. ' Social Summit, 2015: 59

[11]First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997–2006; Res. 50/107; UN GA, 2009; Res. 62/205).

[12]The PEDs are managed by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

[13]Counting from 1960, the UN introduced roughly 50 economic and social goals that are quantified and time-bound, and cover 'four main categories: acceleration of economic growth in developing countries; improvements in human welfare; moves to sustainable and equitable development; and support for these efforts by the expansion of international development assistance.' Weiss and Jolly, 2009. Also see Jolly *et al.*, 2005.

goals were presented to the GA by the UN SG (2001). The MDGs moved from the decade to a 15-year time horizon, with measurement taking the year 1990 as the reference year, so that the period actually covers 25 years—from 1990 to 2015—an entire generation. More importantly, the MDGs confirmed the conceptual shift that had begun, at the UN, with the Social Summit, from employment, productivity and redistribution to poverty alleviation through safety nets. The poverty and hunger goals advanced to the forefront, and employment was added in as an afterthought—perhaps the strongest deviation from the development decades. As is more than well rehearsed (Fukuda-Parr, 2010; Gore, 2013), the seven developmental MDGs are tilted towards the social sectors of health and education, and have a shallow goal on the environment. The eighth goal, meant to guide the North–South cooperation, is fuzzy. Policy was absent from the MDGs (Nayyar, 2011). Hence, they opened the door wide for the neoliberal agenda that was already taking root via the policy prescriptions of the IFIs (Fukuda-Parr, 2010).

The—surprising—momentum with which the Millennium Declaration took off had much to do with shifting dynamics in the second and third UNs. Building on the regained moral authority in the rights-based arenas of discourse, the UN secretariat reconnected with the ideals of the UN Charter (see, for example, UN SG, 2005; also see UN GA, 2005). The third UN—NGOs—by this time had become a vocal force in the multilateral dynamics. And a new player had joined the scene—the private sector. The private sector was initially approached by the UN, in form of the global compact as a code of conduct, and to gain access to private sector funding.[14]

In 2000, this made for a strong UN secretariat. But the progressiveness on human rights and social justice was juxtaposed with a meek, acquiescent position on poverty. Poverty eradication was replaced by poverty reduction. Conceptually, neoliberalism had made its subcutaneous entry into the second UN's discourse: many analysts have criticised the MDG design as neoliberalism under a pretty cover (Fukuda-Parr, 2010). And the MDG outcome has even been decried as a 'lie' or a 'scandal' (Hulme & Wilkinson, 2014; Pogge, 2014), pointing to the huge surge in income and wealth inequalities, which intensified during the MDG era, with MDG activities—inadvertently—obscuring the bigger, darker picture.

In the first UN, the situation has been in flux. Since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, US unilateralism has become highly assertive, transforming international relations (Jomo, 2006: 19). The massive financial crisis of 2007/2008—indeed, a disaster that called for bold measures—briefly weakened the conservative North, strengthened the G77 and, for an interlude, reinstated Keynesianism.[15] This tendency has since been reeled back in most of the industrialised countries. On the other hand, within the first UN, a new South is emerging, comprising middle-income economies that are forming new coalitions (UNDP, 2013). The IBSA coalition (India, Brazil and South Africa) and its extension, the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS; Li & Carey, 2014), are the most pronounced examples. A new radicalism has also been heard at the G77 and China, for instance, in the Santa Cruz Declaration of 2014 that resonates with Keynesian ideas and a call for a radical restructuring of the world economy (G77, 2014).

Looking back at these six and half decades of 'development', what is the assessment? At the conceptual level, the four development decades and the two PEDs adhered to an

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[14]Subsequently, the private sector has been active in 'capturing' the UN. See Zammit; 2003, Zumach, 2015.
[15]Initially, this was in an adulterated form of state responsibility for bank rescues and then in the form of anti-cyclical deficit spending.

internally coherent development paradigm, while each decade integrated or emphasised new elements, such as the focus on poverty or the concern with the environment, with an accent moving from the economic to the social. The decades ushered in incremental change and piecemeal adjustments—as opposed to transformation (Hulme & Wilkinson, 2014: 182). In terms of policy, since the mid-1990s, one observes a shift from a Keynesian approach with a focus on employment and capital formation to a neoliberal discourse around a laissez-faire notion of development. This was a function of the transition of power from the South to the North and from the second UN to the first.

But each era also has undercurrents flowing in a different direction that surface and resurface despite changes in the overall direction of an agenda. One example is the discourse on rights and dignity of the 1990s, which marked a return to the progressive tone of the 1945 Charta, and is now emerging as a strong element in the SDG proposal. Another example is the current recognition of the many facets of development, economic, political and ecological, in a way echoing the first development decade, when the UN SG had acknowledged that 'Development is growth *plus* change; change, in turn, is social and cultural as well as economic, and quantitative as well as qualitative' (UN SG, 1962: 2f.). The current approach also is related to the remit of the 2005 UN Summit, which pulled together economic, political and environmental as well as crisis and governance concerns (UN GA, 2005). Even though earlier agenda positions are generally not referenced, the recurrence of ideas suggests that there are always nuances and fissures in the overall development philosophy projected by the second UN.

What does this mean for the next development agenda?

4   THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS—A TRANSFORMATIONAL SWING?

In 2015, what are the prospects that the UN can agree on a new, progressive, egalitarian and rights-based development agenda, which would encompass an effective approach to eradicating poverty, by reinstating the need for a role of the state and space for public goods and services, the need for a productivity policy and a focus on employment? Will the rhetoric of 'five big, transformative shifts' (High-level Panel Report, HLPR, 2013: 7 ff; UN SG, 2014) become real? Is the energy devoted to formulating a new agenda worthwhile, or is it merely distracting from work that could be carried out elsewhere, for instance, within countries and communities, to effect real transformation? And is this a moment with 'a fundamental alteration in global power relations or crises out of which new institutional forms are forged' (Hulme & Wilkinson, 2014: 182)?

The first UN, represented by the Open Working Group comprising 70 countries, proposed and tabled 17 SDGs in mid-2014 (OWG, 2014; Dodds *et al.*, 2014). They were drawn up, in protracted negotiations, using the outcome document of the 2012 Rio plus 20 Summit on sustainable development as the point of departure (UN, 2012). The SDGs are far more comprehensive than the MDGs. Human rights, governance, the environment, and economic and social development are recognised as interconnected, the way they were perhaps intended in the UN Charter (Ivanova & Escobar-Pemberthy, 2015).

There are a number of conceptual improvements in the SDG proposal (OWG, 2014), as compared with the MDGs. Firstly, the social dimensions of development around education and health are cast in a more rights-oriented way, by moving towards a notion of universalizing access. Secondly, there is a broadening of issues beyond social

development, with policy areas that address the importance of industrialization—perhaps better called industrial strategy—and productivity. The SDG draft refers to value chains and the necessity of retaining value added in the producing economies. Peaceful societies, political rights and good governance have their own goal. There are several specific goals on climate change and the environment. The two most striking goals are the call for equality in and among countries, and for sustainable production and consumption. This time, the text presents more than an incremental change—and again, as with the MDGs, it offers an approach that builds on earlier development decades—without acknowledging them. For example, the multidimensional poverty understanding of the PEDs makes a re-appearance. That the SDGs are to apply to all countries is a major accomplishment, as it moves the discourse away from the patronising North–South dichotomy. The development agenda is becoming more explicitly holistic at the conceptual level. So in some respects, there is progress—at the conceptual level.

Conversely, at the policy level, the development agenda is becoming more and more 'pointillist'. It touches all the bases and conveys an image of all the areas that need to be addressed, but it touches them precisely without connecting them. Synergies that would be required for policy to be holistic, and effective, are not made out. Contradictions or conflicts among goals are not discussed.[16]

By contrast, the four development decades and the PEDs had a coherent, Keynesian-inspired policy framework, with reasons for the lack of (economic) development built into the logic. The third development decade in particular was adamant about globally generated inequities and proposed pertaining remedies. The PEDs prioritised employment as the antidote to poverty.

But the proposed SDGs—like the MDG agenda before them—are skirting the question of policies. [17] The question of how—by which policies—'sustainable development' would be achieved has remained outside the perimeters of the discourse.

To understand the SDG design and make informed guesses on its viability again calls for a look into the current international political situation. The first UN, the governments of the world, at this point in time are struggling with the economic, social and political effects of unbridled financial capitalism and a protracted global recession. Some of these effects have weakened governments' effectiveness and their credibility. In 2015, malnutrition continues to affect almost one billion people, and roughly 1.5 billion are multi-dimensionally poor (UNDP, 2014: 19). Income and wealth inequality are at unprecedented extremes (Milanovic, 2011; United Nations, UN, 2012; Cimadamore *et al.*, 2013; Piketty, 2014; OXFAM, 2015). The share of capital and labour in global gross national income has shifted over the past decades to the benefit of capital (Milanovic, 2011; Ortiz *et al.*, 2012). Registered unemployment is expected to rise to above 211 million over the next 5 years (ILO, 2013), and massive youth unemployment affects countries across the globe. Austerity programmes are cutting down social expenditures in many countries (Ortiz & Cummins, 2013). These trends make countries enter a race to the bottom.

Environmental catastrophes, ultimately due to global warming, affect high-income and low-income countries alike and the poor in these countries the most. The appalling

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[16]For example, the goal aspiring to sustainable production and consumption clashes with the economic growth goal, if the latter is not explained in a differentiated manner.
[17]Discussions are very much concentrated on two issues. One is on content: the issue of finance, or means of implementation, which adversarially situates the low-income versus the middle-income and high-income countries. The other is methodological, with many negotiation efforts devoted to monitoring and accounting for progress by creating a viable set of indicators.

situation of global public goods—security threats and the missing resources for public health—points directly to the lack of government capacity (Mackie &Williams, 2015).

Not a single country has achieved the gender equality goals agreed in 1995. Not one of the least developed countries has achieved all the MDGs (UNCTAD, 2014). The BRICS are falling short in the policy domains of employment and environment management. The 'North' is predominantly conservative on economic issues, as a result of energy security interests and world power competition. There is the nivellating effect of a joint European Union (EU) position[18] that requires consensus across the region's 28-member states. Political catastrophes in many countries have increased the number of fragile states.

Conversely, a number of G77 developing countries are economically strong, having experienced sound GDP growth rates, and some have seen an increase in sovereign wealth funds, partly as a result of high commodity prices during the past decade. A considerable number of non-OECD countries have emerged as development cooperation players. There is the rise of new country groupings, such as IBSA with strong social policy convictions and experiences to share, and the BRICS offering new funding instruments. Politically, leftist governments hold office in several Latin American countries. Some of the large developing country democracies are voicing eloquent opposition to neoliberalism (de Aguiar Patriota, 2015); one observes the advance of an at least notionally rights-based social policy agenda in South Asia (Koehler and Chopra, 2014). This could serve to outweigh conservative trends, but it remains to be seen whether the first UN will actually converge around a trajectory of transformational change.

New constellations, and self-selecting political alliances, have become policy players at the global level. These include the BRICS on the one hand and the G7 on the other; both groups are expected to formulate an SDG policy stance at their respective 2015 summits.[19] The BRICS may offer a bargaining chip in the form of the BRICS Bank that could advance the financing for development agenda in the interest of the low-income countries. The G7 are more likely to defend their political control of financial markets and the IFIs, and their ideological push for austerity, but might also decide to offer more ODA or climate adaptation finance as an act of seeming goodwill. The accession of several OECD countries to the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank suggests reconfigured alliances among the lower-income and higher-income countries. The first UN is in motion (Dodds *et al.*, 2014).

The second UN—which could be a leader in the development agenda process—is fragmented and compartmentalised (Hulme & Wilkinson, 2014; Browne & Weiss, 2014). It has been weakened by the new political blocs—such as the BRICS—and by the unbureaucratic, informal style offered at discourse fora such as the Davos World Economic Forum. The UN Secretariat has chosen to be a turntable for ideas and proposals, as opposed to leading the SDG discussion. In his synthesis report to the GA, for instance, the UN SG throws the responsibility for transformation to the member states. 'I urge Governments and people everywhere to fulfil their political and moral responsibilities' (UN SG, 2014: 7). The UN Secretariat appears to have decided not to be the visionary force shaping the new agenda. [20]

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[18]The EU was formative for the MDGs because of influential progressive development cooperation ministers in several of EU member states in the early 2000s. But the region has since veered to the right, and the EC towards open neo-liberalism. The EU-Presidency in 2015 lies with Latvia and then Luxembourg, suggesting that politically conservative countries will be heading the European consensus building process.

[19]G7 in Germany in June 2015; BRICS in Russia in July 2015. These summits will just precede the Financing for Development Summit in Addis Ababa.

[20]This lack of courage is partly due to conflicts over roles and responsibilities for 'development' within the UN system, such as between the UN Secretariat and its DESA, and UNDP.

In the third UN, the constellation is mixed. Because of public pressure, commitment and effective lobbying,[21] the presence and influence of civil society in multilateral discussions have grown exponentially, from roughly 100 NGOs in the 1970s to 4000 in 2013 (Bissio, 2014: 195f). The nine 'major groups' representing NGOs, local authorities, indigenous peoples, women, youth and children, trade unions, agriculture and business, (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/women) have become acknowledged partners in the negotiating process on the post-2015 agenda. They have been able to gain access to negotiations with the exception of informal sessions where member states are the sole interlocuteurs. [22]

Also in the third UN, however, the large-scale private sector[23] has become an accepted partner and is effectively pushing for its corporate interests (Zumach, 2015: 129ff). It is visibly advocating for public–private partnerships. In light of the concentration of economic wealth and political power in the corporate private sector, there is a risk that their presence overrides the progressive trends of not-for-profit NGOs. If one follows the view that corporate globalisation (Roy, 2005) or hegemonic globalisation (Jomo, 2006) is at its peak, the challenge within the third UN is obvious.

5   CONCLUSION: AFTER SEVEN DECADES OF 'DEVELOPMENT', NOW WHAT?

The second and third UNs have promised a paradigm shift for this new round of development. The first UN—the member states—would need to agree to '(i)mportant and costly measures' (Emmerij *et al*., 2001: 173). If one looks at the might of the super powers, and the dominance of global capitalism, it would be illogical to expect a change.

However, UN member states, the UN secretariat and civil society are not monolithic, there are many different objective interests and there is space for normatively driven alignments. If the systemic lack of decent work, the enormous wealth gaps and the irreversible stress on the environment are recognised as a disaster, perhaps there is a real chance for a fundamental shift. If progressive groups within the first, second and third UNs coalesce effectively, there is a case for optimism. The promise made 70 years ago in the UN Charter could begin to materialise. Ideas might win in the end.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[21]And, one should add, building on a large degree of self-exploitation: the not-for-profit Civil Society Organisations (CSO) sector is systemically underfunded.

[22]Another expression of this is that the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), March 2015, is expecting 1100 NGOs. This is although the CSW decided to forego the Summit that would have been due this year, 20 years after the Beijing Conference. (email Bette Levy).

[23]The private sector also includes small and medium enterprises, which play a different role in their economies and internationally, frequently providing larger employment in relation to investment, and more prone to drawing on local resources. The private sector designation, however, does not distinguish between scale and operations, and large transnationals tend to dominate global discussion in their own interest.

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