

UNITED NATIONS

Centre for Human Rights

Global Consultation on the Realization of the  
Right to Development as a Human Right

Geneva, 8 - 12 January 1990

"Human rights, human resources, and the international  
development strategy for the 1990s"

Paper prepared by Mr. Lawrence Barsh

Global Consultation on the Right to Development  
Geneva, 8-12 January 1989

HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMAN RESOURCES, AND THE  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE 1990s

Russel Lawrence Barsh

In this period of financial austerity for the United Nations system as well as national governments, the need for coordination has fast become a point of consensus. Recent U.N. coordination efforts have concentrated on the field of development assistance, with the aim of making it more accessible at lower administrative cost to recipients—and possibly also with greater regard for the environment.!!/ At the same time, U.N. aid agencies are shifting emphasis from production or export-led growth, to what is being called a "people-centred" (or "putting people first") strategy. "Human resources development" has been advanced as a priority theme for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade by the Committee for Development Planning, the ACC, ECOSOC, the ECA, and ESCAP.

Unfortunately, these important developments on the economic (or Second Committee) side of the U.N. system take no account of relevant policies and instruments on the social and humanitarian (Third Committee) side, such as the International Bill of Human Rights, or the Declaration on the Right to Development. Like any large organisation, the United Nations system has a tendency to evolve parallel, and sometimes contradictory policies among its many branches. The aim of this presentation will be to identify latent contradictions in the Second and Third Committee work of

the united Nations, and suggest a way of reconciling them through the formulation, this year, of the U.N. International Development Strategy for the 1990s (IDS-90).

### Human resources

The idea that human resources development (or "human capital formation") is a basic condition for economic growth is not new. The central issue among European economists in the 18th century was between the old-guard of "mercantilist" theorists, who were preoccupied with the accumulation of commodities through trade, and a new generation of thinkers, including Adam Smith, who felt that the accumulation of skilled labour was at least as critical a factor. Indeed, Smith's advocacy of free markets was, in the historical context of his day, based on the idea of stimulating human initiative and productive capacity, as opposed to planning the national economy around commodity targets.

This question is essentially dialectical, and can easily be resolved by accepting the interdependence of physical and human capital. A debate over priorities recurs periodically, however, because it reflects an underlying social and political conflict between the owners of capital and the owners of labour, and not because of its theoretical complexity. This certainly seems to characterize the most recent cycles of argumentation within the the united Nations system. Commodity-led development thinking was strongest in the 1950s before decolonisation. Human capital thinking re-emerged in the 1960s, with the rising influence of newly-decolonised nations—in the international context, owners

of labour. The debt crisis strengthened the industrial powers, and restored commodity or export-based strategies. In the wake of "structural adjustment," developing countries are responding with renewed insistence on people-centred development.

Despite its long history within the United Nations system, "human resources development" still lacks a clearcut definition. The term itself (as opposed to the older and still widely-used phrase, "human capital") is borrowed from the field of personnel management, where it denotes a system of improving and retaining the relevant skills of employees, *i.e.*, their "capacity to create wealth."<sup>2/</sup> A much broader notion has been advanced by Harvard philosopher Amartya Sen, in which the aim is to increase human "capabilities," or freedom to choose one's own way of life.<sup>2/</sup> Between these two notions of relevant work skills and maximum liberty fall the current views of U.N. agencies on the role of human resources in global development strategy.

Two recent reports by the Committee for Development Planning identified human resources broadly with economic productivity, in the sense of anything making it possible for people to work more, harder, better or longer.<sup>47</sup> This view, which seems to be gaining wide acceptance in New York, leads logically to the conclusion that human resources development should focus on improvements in the amenities most demonstrably related to a people's lifetime economic productivity: nutrition, health and education.<sup>5/</sup> This in turn justifies de-emphasizing other kinds of social amenities, include equity.<sup>6/</sup>

In a survey of U.N. departments, programmes and specialised agencies undertaken last year, the Secretariat found that while more than 30 units were engaged in some form of "human resources development" activity, nearly all were confined to education and training, health and nutrition, housing, and collecting related social indicators. Only three referred to popular participation or institution-building (ILO, UNESCO and UNDP), and only one to "rights" (ILO). UNRWA was alone in considering that "political" factors are essential to human development.<sup>2/</sup> In a more recent position paper, the ECA has gone so far as to include "law and order" as an element of the "enabling environment" together with education and health..<sup>8/</sup>

This approach is basically instrumental. It regards human beings as factors of production, and as the objects or means of development rather than its subjects and ends. Boilerplating of reports with phrases such as, "The development of human resources is at the same time an essential precondition for development and the ultimate aim of development,"<sup>5/</sup> does not counteract this. As long as the selection of inputs to human resources development is based on their correlation with economic production, the ends and the means are clearly commodity accumulation and export.

Of course, this orientation in U.N. reports may be intended chiefly as a selling point to hard-nosed government planners. If investing in schools and sanitation will boost material output as much as investing in factory equipment, how can anyone reasonably object to "adjustment with a human face"? And if, as the CDP has warned, "it would be prudent to assume that the third world will

have to rely largely on its own resources to finance development" in the next decade,<sup>10/</sup> is it not imperative to put a priority on conserving third world human resources?

The problem with this approach is two-fold. As discussed in the next section of this paper, it is inconsistent with existing international instruments in the fields of development and human rights. It is moreover bad economics, unlike cattle or horses, human beings require more than full bellies, a warm bed and some training to be productive. Of course, meeting these "basic needs" is extremely important, but it is insufficient.<sup>11/</sup> Without family and cultural life, personal security and freedom, and a voice in the decisions and activities affecting them, among other things, people are not very happy and not particularly productive. Even the CDP recognises that human well-being involves "dignity and self-respect," and "whether people can control their lives at work," as well as income.<sup>12/</sup>

Many of the world's wealthiest industrialised countries are currently experiencing an overall  $\downarrow$  in the productivity of their labour, which can be attributed to the failure of material prosperity to maintain human motivation indefinitely. Some other industrial countries, which have highly advanced social-security systems, have been responding to overwhelming popular demands for greater participation and more social and political diversity.

From a strictly economic viewpoint, then, a narrow concept of human resources development is inadequate. Prioritizing the amenities required for physical survival is reasonable policy in the short-term, but should not be undertaken at the expense of

other human needs and aspirations, and certainly should never be viewed as sufficient in the long-term once basic human survival has been assured.

The most comprehensive and universally-accepted definition of human aspirations to be found in the International Bill of Human Rights. If the aim of IDS-90 is really to advance beyond the commodity-centred development thinking of the past—and in so doing to achieve more than merely giving the "Basic Human Needs" strategy of the 1970s a new name—it has nowhere else to go for guidance. Nor should we engage in an exercise of selectively adding certain needs or rights to the old BHN list. Trying to renegotiate the scope of the International Bill of Human Rights would be as hopeless politically as it would be destructive of existing standards.

#### Humanrights

If united Nations conventions and declarations are truly to be respected as a system of international law, then they must be equally binding on all parts of the U.N. administrative system. Guidelines for one programme cannot contradict the aims of other programmes; all directives should be read together and, as far as possible, reconciled. Unfortunately, the division of ECOSOC into two largely independent annual sessions, and the committee structure of the General Assembly, have produced a situation in which different U.N. programmes are given directions by different policy organs, and these directions often conflict. This problem has been exacerbated by parallel divisions within the Secretariat

which make it quite possible for programmes to work against each other's Assembly mandates.

The present wide gulf between human rights and development law is a particularly depressing example of this. Human rights and development are both identified as aims of the Organisation in the Charter, and both are implemented through Articles 55 and 56, which relate to international solidarity. Yet there is very little contact between Second and Third Committee delegations in New York, or between the office of the two Directors-General, in New York and Geneva. A single annual discussion of human rights in the ACC is scarcely enough. Earlier this year, the CPC took this question up, and recommended the establishment of an inter-agency task force, and liaison posts, connecting all programmes and specialised agencies with human-rights elements.<sup>1^/</sup> Another important step would be the assignment of a specialist in human rights to the Director-General's staff in New York.

As a result of the current administrative situation, such fundamental instruments as the International Bill of Human Rights do not figure at all in development project design or appraisal. Although the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development makes it a matter of global policy to ensure compatibility of projects with human rights and fundamental freedoms, there exist no impact assessment procedures, and programme manuals do not alert staff or recipients to the potential relevance of human-rights norms. The UNDP and ILO project manuals, for example, simply require a statement of "the development objective" and evidence that the proposed activity is an "efficient" means of achieving it.<sup>!£/</sup>



The ILO's 120-question checklist for project evaluation makes no reference to human rights and indeed only one question refers to evidence of support from workers<sup>1</sup> organisations! Plainly there is a wide gulf between what the General Assembly says and what operational programmes do.

This is manifest in the ~~results~~ of operational programmes. There has been a growing body of assessment literature indicating that multilateral aid has increased inequalities in many cases—not only inequalities between rich and poor generally, but also between men and women, for example,<sup>15/</sup> and among different ethnic or tribal groups.<sup>13/</sup> The most basic legal requirement of the two International Covenants of Human Rights is non-discrimination, of course, whether in the enjoyment of civil and political rights, or the fruits of economic and social programmes. The Declaration on the Right to Development reaffirms this fundamental principle. Projects which aggravate existing inequalities, or redistribute power and wealth from the underprivileged to the privileged, are in violation the Covenants. Of course, the legal issues are even more clearcut if a project entails forced removal, deprivation of subsistence, or suppressing existing forms of popular community organisation. Many projects have.

The General Counsel of the World Bank recently argued that **the Bank** is not bound by the Covenants—indeed, his position is **that the** Bank would be engaging in "political" activity contrary to its own charter, its Relationship Agreement with the United Nations, and the U.N. Charter, if it discussed human rights with borrowers.<sup>11/</sup> While conceding that civil and political rights

are as "basic to human development and happiness" as growth in GDP, he maintains that the Bank can only legally consider purely "economic" aspects of projects. This seems to be splitting one or two conceptual hairs. If the enjoyment of human rights has any relationship with development—and in 1986 the Assembly was quite explicit on this point—how can we accept banishing human rights to the "non-economic" domain? Indeed, the notion of the interdependence and indivisibility of "economic" and "political" rights has been one of the great milestones in the evolution of human rights law since the 1960s. Does it apply only to the work of the Commission on Human Rights and the Third Committee?

As a matter of political credibility (if law and logic are not persuasion enough), the United Nations system cannot go on participating in projects without even assessing their potential impact on the enjoyment of universally-recognized human rights. What this means is a genuine concern for the human consequences of projects—all of them. This would be more "people-centred" than merely targetting resources on activities that make people more productive workers. There has been no reference to human rights thus far in the preparatory documents for IDS-90, however.

### Participation

This argument would not be complete without a few words on the subject of popular participation, which I believe is the key integrating principle in the Declaration on the Right to Development. Through participation, people can and should define their own needs and pursue their own goals, not entirely independently,

of course, but in a dialogue with State and international bodies. The International Bill of Human Rights defines a broad field for appropriate development activity; participation sets priorities, makes qualitative choices, and selects the most appropriate means of implementation. To this extent, participation is power.<sup>11</sup>/

Like "human resource development," participation is not a new idea, but first became popular in the 1910s as part of the trend towards "scientific management." In fact, it was a former U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Robert Valentine, who helped bring participatory management (or "industrial democracy") into vogue.<sup>12</sup>/ Valentine's justification for participation—reducing management errors by improving the flow of information from the shop floor—is echoed among present-day development economists. Project staff "make stupid mistakes and, without training in ways to incorporate beneficiaries and their field knowledge into the decisionmaking process, continue to make stupid mistakes."<sup>20</sup>/ In addition, they point out that participation mobilizes support for projects, and makes it easier to shift costs to beneficiaries.<sup>21</sup>/ The same arguments are now being advanced by the CDP.<sup>22</sup>/

There is nothing wrong with acknowledging these benefits of participation, but the analysis is incomplete and "top-down." It treats people, once again, as means (of improving management) and not as the ultimate end of development. Nor does it address the issue of power, which is fundamental to all human rights.

The issue of power cannot be dissociated from development strategy. Development projects are inherently political, since they involve the injection of additional economic resources into

societies already differentiated economically and politically. This creates an opportunity for elaborating central government powers and creating, through government-funded local boards or agencies, a system of cooptation and patronage.<sup>22/</sup> Development activities often focus on "the construction and improvement of government bureaus and parastatal organizations," often in the name of decentralization or participation.<sup>24/</sup> It also creates opportunities for old local elites to strengthen their position, or for new ones to emerge. This is "far from uncommon," an IFAD official recently observed.<sup>25/</sup>

As a result, "the benefits of development are distributed depending on the nature and strength, alliances and conflicts, of different pressure groups" with the results dictated by relative "political strength."<sup>26/</sup> "The strength of contending groups is influenced by the magnitude of foreign resources available to a country, the form in which they are available, and the sectors which receive them."<sup>22/</sup> The choice of institutions to serve as conduits for aid—both at the local and the national levels—is therefore inherently political.

Recent comparative appraisals of development projects agree that participation is strongly correlated with success. What is more important, however, is that this depends to a great extent on the kind of participation involved. Successful projects build on people's past organisational experience, make use of existing grassroots organisations, and offer them genuine ownership and control.<sup>22/</sup> It is not simply a matter of building local boards or committees, which can reflect and perpetuate inequalities just

as much as a strong central bureaucracy, as India's experience over the past few decades appears to illustrate.<sup>21</sup>

Development planners continue to work under the shadow of their roots in "social engineering," however. Many apparently share the view of the World Bank's Michael Cernea that the rural poor suffer critically from "underdevelopment of organizations," such that "investing in organization building is a major form of investment in human capital."<sup>22</sup> No rural society is simply "a homogeneous, unfactionalized mass of cooperative persons who need only an outside motivator to initiate their community development activities."<sup>23</sup> To assume otherwise is to disregard the effect of the project itself in transforming power relationships, often as a direct result of "organizational investments," and often for the worse.

Likewise, development planners appear enamoured today with the human-resources analysis offered by Professor Sen, who argues forcefully for "objective" as opposed to subjective approaches to the identification and prioritization of human needs.<sup>24</sup> In his view, asking the poor is inappropriate, since they are likely to be "resigned" to their fate. With all due respect to Professor Sen, I believe this is a justification of elitist planning and a dismissal of participatory democracy and human rights.

**What, then,** does "participation" denote **when it** appears in **the current IDS-90** discussions? The CDP follows the traditional line that participation is a motivator, **a** source of productivity and **a** means of shifting project costs. It acknowledges, however, **that there** exist "barriers to participation" which include "gross

inequalities in power, wealth and income between different groups and classes in society," as well as restrictions on freedom of association.<sup>33</sup> But is this a recognition that inequalities of power are unacceptable in themselves, or merely a concern for the idling of large sectors of the potential workforce? Is potential for productivity a condition of the entitlement to participate?

With respect to "participation," like "human resources," it seems that some of the language, but little of the substance of human rights law has penetrated development economics—and this notwithstanding the evidence from field studies that power and human rights have a great deal to do with successful projects. Commodity thinking is still quite strong. Yet this demonstrates the important value—indeed, the absolute necessity—of a routine dialogue between economists who are concerned with production, and those of us who are concerned with power relations and the use of the concept of human rights to discipline power.

#### Action on IDS-90

What does all this have to do, then, with IDS-90? Something more, I think, than insisting on the clarification of terms such as "human resources development," or on references being made to international human rights instruments. If the Fourth Decade for Development is to achieve more, in human terms, than the previous three, it will need to include two fundamentally new elements, a strategic element and an administrative one.

The strategic element has to do with international economic relationships and human rights. It is time to admit that wealthy

countries share responsibility, in law as well as fact, for the realization of human rights everywhere. This is not only because inequalities in terms of trade (for example) perpetuate poverty, inequalities and instability in developing countries, but because they often reflect inequalities in the industrialised countries as well. European farmers are better off than tropical farmers, but they are not the principal beneficiaries of the economically unjustifiable exclusion of tropical agriculture from the GATT. Nor are the chronically ill, in North America or South America, the principal beneficiaries of retaliatory intellectual-property policies.

As a shared responsibility, human rights can only be fully achieved in the kind of national and international environment contemplated by Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This entails a commitment to democratic participation among States, and among people and groups within States. There is a fundamental reciprocity, then, between national development strategy and international solidarity. Protection of inequality or exclusion must be challenged whether it is practised by States against their own citizens, or against other peoples—and whether it takes the form of top-down development projects or resistance to needed international monetary reform.

The administrative element concerns U.N. coordination, which is virtually nil at the present time. Four kinds of changes are needed:

(1) direct liaison in New York between the Centre for Human Rights and United Nations operational and policy organs in the economic field—a basis for ongoing dialogue, policy development, technical assistance, and review;

(2) gradual incorporation of human rights standards into the project approval and appraisal manuals of operational programmes, as factors to be given explicit consideration in project design;

(3) accessibility of U.N. development bodies to grassroots NGOs, as a basis for continuing feedback and assessment of these policies and guidelines;

(4) establishment of a single system-wide monitoring body—possibly an expert working group of the Sub-Commission—to report on progress and problems in realizing human rights through the development process.

What we decidedly do not need is simply another exhortation to governments to respect human rights—or to spend more on aid. All too often, global "themes" simply "arrive"<sup>1</sup> in the form of instructions to enter into a dialogue with a Government on their application, but with no extra resources to make this credible." Governments often view them as simply "another donor diversion" of needed resources to pointless paperwork.<sup>24/</sup> To be meaningful, our report must be specific and administrative, and show plainly how breaking down the wall between human rights and development strategy—within the U.N. system itself—can help both of these U.N. activities become more effective.

#### NOTES

1. "Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities of the United Nations System," A/44/324/Add.2 (25 October 1989).

2. M. M. Mehta, Human Resources Development Planning (Delhi: MacMillan of India, 1976), p. 2-3. See, generally, Jerald Hage, éd., Futures of Organizations. Innovating to Adopt Strategy and Human Resources to Rapid Technological Change (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988).



3. Amartya Sen, "Development as Capability Expansion," Journal of Development Economics 19:41-58 (1989).

4. Human Resources Development: A Neglected Dimension of Development Strategy, ST/ESA/208 (1988); "Report of the Committee for Development Planning on its twenty-fifth session," E/1989/29 (14 June 1989).

5. See, e.g., Ghazi M. Farooq and Ernesto M. Pernia, "Need for and Approaches to Integrated Population, Human Resource and Development Planning," U.N. Population Bulletin 23/24:11-20 (1987), at p. 12.

6. "Report of the Committee for Development Planning on its twenty-fifth session," E/1989/29 (14 June 1989), para. 147; Julian Blackwood, "World Bank Experience with Rural Development," Finance and Development 25:12-15 (December 1988), at p. 13.

7. "Human resources development and the activities of the United Nations system in that field," A/44/229 (17 May 1989).

8. Economic Commission for Africa, "African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation," A/44/315 (21 June 1989).

9. "Human resources development and the activities of the United Nations system in that field," A/44/229 (17 May 1989), para. 4.

10. "Report of the Committee for Development Planning on its twenty-fifth session," E/1989/29 (14 June 1989), para. 138.

11. L.C. Jain, B.V. Krishnamurthi and P.M. Tripathi, Grass Without Roots: Rural Development Under Government Auspices (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1985), p. 220.

12. Human Resources Development, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

13. Committee on Programme and Coordination, "In-depth evaluation of the human rights programme," E/AC.51/1989/2 (21 April 1989), para. 140.

14. Procedures for the Design and Evaluation of ILO Projects: Technical Cooperation (May 1981), pp. 12-13; UNDP, Programme and Projects Manual (February 1988), sec. 30105.2.1.

15. E.g., Leela Gulati, Fisherwomen on the Kerala coast (Geneva: ILO, 1984).

16. Richard Huntington, "Memories of Development: The Rise and Fall of a Participatory Project Among the Dinka, 1977-1981," pp. 85-103 in Donald W. Attwood, Thomas C. Bruneau and John G. Galaty, eds., Power and Poverty: Development and Environment Projects in the Third World (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988).

17. Ibrahim F.I. Shihata, "The World Bank and Human Rights: An Analysis of the Legal Issues and the Record of Achievements," Ejje; Journal of International Law and Policy 17(1) :39-66 (1988).
18. Mohuiddin Alamgir, "Participatory Development: The IFAD Experience," pp. 3-18 in William P. Lineberry, éd., Participatory Development: Rhetoric Versus Reality (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989).
19. E.g., Robert G. Valentine and Ordway Tead, "Work and Pay: A Suggestion for Representative Government in Industry," Quarterly Journal of Economics 31:241-58 (1917). See Mehta, Human Resource Development Planning, op. cit., p. 5, for discussion of the U.S. roots of the idea of "human capital."
20. Allen Jedlicka, Designs for the Twenty-First Century (New York: Praeger, 1987), p. 126.
21. Richard Huntington, "Memories of Development," op. cit., p. 100; Margaret Hardiman, ThS-SQSièl UímeQfÍQn§-Qf-BeXelQ2Bff&; Social Policy and Planning iû iJ3ê Tj3iu3 ii2Xld (London: Gower, rev. ed. 1989), p. 235.
22. HjimâD Eêsj3iLEf5S fieyêlfipmsui/ fip. fífc.# pp. 29-30; "Report of the Committee for Development Planning," fip. c ii., para. 155.
23. David D. Gow and Jerry Van Sant, "Decentralization and Participation: Concepts in Need of Implementation Strategies," pp. 107-47 in Elliott R. Morss and David G. Gow, Implementing fuXâl DejpeJjppiciêni Projects? Lessons fLQM AID àûd ISQîrû BâûJi Experiences (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 110-14; also P.T. Bauer and B.S. Yamey, "The Pearson Report: A Review," pp. 41-76 in T.J. Byres, éd., Foreign Economic Development. I. A Symposium. On ...the Report of the Pearson Commission (London: Frank Cass, 1972), p. 48.
24. John W. Bennett, "The Political Ecology and Economic Development of Migratory Pastoralist Societies in Eastern Africa," pp. 31-60 in Donald W. Attwood, Thomas C. Bruneau and John G. Galaty, eds., Power and Poverty: Development and Development Projects in the Third World (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 52-53.
25. Alamgir, "Participatory Development," fip. cit., pp. 9-10.
26. Attwood, Bruneau and Galaty, eds., Power and Poverty, **op. cit.**, p. 3.
27. Gustav F. Papanek, "Changes in Aid Strategy: A Note to Some Less-Developed Countries and Their Friends," pp. 87-117 in Colin Legum, éd., The First...D.N. Development Decade...and Its Lessons fQ; the 1970's (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 96.

28. Kurt Finsterbusch and Warren A. Van Wicklin III, "Beneficiary Participation in Development Projects: Empirical Tests of Popular Theories," Economic Development and Culture Change. 37(3):573-93 (1989); Michael M. Cernea, "Farmer Organizations and Institution Building for Sustainable Development," Heaiojial Development Dialesüe 8(2):1-19 (1987); Michael Useem, Lou Setti and Kanung Kanchanabucha, "Predictors of Success in a Participatory Village Development Project in Thailand," Public Administration and Development 8:289-303 (1988).

29. Compare Jain et al., Grass Without...Roots, o.p. cit., which is critical of present-day Central planning, with Raghvendra Pratap Singh, Sociology of Rural Development in India (Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1987), pp. 135-58, which is critical of the previous, decentralized Panchayati raj strategy.

30. Cernea, "Farmer Organizations and Institution Building for Sustainable Development," pj. c.if., pp. 9, 14.

31. Linda Stone, "Cultural Crossroads of Community Participation in Development: A Case Study from Nepal," Human Organization 48(3):206-13 (1989), p. 207.

32. Sen, "Development as Capability Expansion," flp. cit., pp. 45, 52; Human Resources Development. sp. fiii., p. 17.

33. Human Resources Development. up. sit., pp. 34-36.

34. "Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities of the United Nations System," A/44/324/Add.2 (25 October 1989), paras. 114-118.