

Richard Jolly

'The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is the economic and social front where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace.'

US Secretary of State, June 1945

'We must make sure that the UN is fruitful, that it is a reality and not a sham, that it is a force for action and not merely a frothing of words, that it is a true temple of peace in which the shields of many nations can some day be hung, and not merely a cockpit in the Tower of Babel.'

Winston Churchill, Fulton, Missouri, 1946

It is conventional to say that the descent of 'the iron curtain' – a much better known phrase of Churchill, also first used in the speech quoted above – held back for 45 years the full flowering of the United Nations, as envisaged by its founding fathers. There is, no doubt, much truth in this. Virtually the whole of international politics and economics, policy making and popular perspectives were conditioned and influenced, and often controlled by and directed to the Cold War and its ramifications. By the late 1980s, world military expenditure has risen to about \$1,000 billion each year – \$800 billion in the industrial countries and some \$200 billion in developing countries. With an average of 5 per cent of the GNP of industrial countries, and rather more of the Third World income, going to military activities, it is hardly surprising that so much of international life was affected.

1 UN ACHIEVEMENT

Given all this, it is also perhaps surprising that the UN has achieved so much. Consider, for instance, the UN's achievements in:

- presiding over a widespread and historically unprecedented process of decolonization and trusteeship, under which the empires of Britain, France, Belgium, Netherlands and Portugal were dismantled and well over a 100 countries came to independence and sovereign statehood – taking the UN membership from the original 51 member states in 1945 to 185 in 1995;

- negotiating into existence a wide frame of international conventions on human rights, for the first time in history encouraging all countries to ratify such conventions and creating an international human rights institution and machinery to monitor and report on their implementation;
- institutionalizing the machinery of the security council and the international court of justice, both designed to replace rule by national force with rule by international law and enforcement through collective action;
- through its specialized agencies – notably WHO, UNESCO, ILO and FAO – providing the international machinery for monitoring and analysis of global trends in such vital sectors as health, education, science and culture, employment and wages, and food and agriculture;
- through its funding agencies – UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA and IFAD – supporting and mobilizing activities towards an impressive range of development goals and actions;
- building up an international machinery for response to man-made and natural emergencies and disasters;
- establishing or continuing a core of other inter-governmental agencies – highly specialized technical bodies and secretariats, helping to ensure co-ordination and support for international operations

in key technical areas, such as telecommunications and broadcasting, postal services, shipping and maritime operations, meteorology, civil aviation and atomic energy.

Finally, one must note the Bretton Woods Organizations – and the regional development banks. Though the IMF and World Bank play a much more limited role than envisaged when they were devised and funded and play this role virtually outside of the United Nations, of which they were clearly intended to be a main part, their existence and influence is considerable, in policy and finance, for at least the poorer countries of the world.

In looking at this range of machinery for international governance, several remarks are in order. First, the staff and total cost of the UN's core administration is, relatively speaking, remarkably lightweight. The total numbers and cost of the staff involved is well under that of Seattle – or most other middle sized cities in the main industrial countries. It is, and always has been, a fraction of what the major powers spend each year on their military forces.

Second, the issues covered by the organizations is impressively large and the core budgets of a number of the specialist bodies, typically less than \$100 million a year. Indeed, one often wonders whether those denouncing the irrelevance and waste of the UN's bureaucracy ever realize that the quiet efficiency in the international process of allocating wavelengths, ensuring international standards of air and maritime safety, providing a frame for reciprocal arrangements among postal services all depend on part of the United Nations.

Third, the benefits, when they can be measured, are impressive in terms of what the world now saves each year by some of those achievements which the UN system has brought into being. The most obvious of these achievements is the eradication of smallpox. First proposed by the USSR, smallpox eradication was initially treated as a propaganda gimmick. But by 1966, the World Health Assembly had formally agreed on smallpox eradication as a goal and international effort. By 1977, the last field case was identified in Somalia – and three years later, smallpox eradication was officially certified. The total cost of the global effort was estimated to be \$300 million, just under \$100 million by the international agencies and about \$200 million for national

action. Annual savings were estimated (in the 1980s) to be at least \$1,500 million a year, in terms of the savings on no longer needed vaccinations, surveillance, health controls and certificates for immigrants.

Fourth, actions currently underway, are bringing, and will bring, further impressive benefits. Consider the current effort to eradicate polio by the year 2000, one of the goals of the WHA endorsed at the World Summit for Children in 1990. Already 45 countries are reported as polio free and the whole of the Americas (North, South and Central) are certified as having had no case for three years. The number of cases world wide has fallen from 400,000 a year in the mid 1980s to under 100,000. But the benefits of eradication will be much greater. When this has been achieved, polio immunization will no longer be necessary – saving the United States an estimated \$270 million each year and the European Community \$200 million. The total worldwide savings including the estimated savings from death and disability each year is estimated by WHO to be a further \$1,500 million in current prices.

Is this positive perspective intended as a one sided attempt to show that the UN has nothing but a fine record of achievement? No. The UN has obvious weaknesses and it has failed or proved itself inadequate to many challenges. But it has had, I believe, many more successes than often credited and its first 50 years may well be judged by historians more favourably than present moods and reactions often suggests. Churchill's comment sums up the point, 'Democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms of government that have been tried from time to time'. Moreover, as Richard von Weizsäcker, Germany's former President, recently stated, criticism of the UN bureaucracy is often 'an excuse'. He added, 'reforming the bureaucracy will not change the organization's effectiveness as much as reforming the will of the members – the most important members'.

Indeed, one should ask: what is or what would have been the alternative to the United Nations? Unilateral or bilateral action? Collective action by the industrial countries or by the major military powers? Regional action? International anarchy? In certain areas, each of these has, in fact, been tried – or is *de facto* the main form of international action – or inaction. In the economic arena, the G7 and the OECD are the most obvious manifestations of these alternatives. And it is interesting and most

significant to note that the effectiveness of these partial mechanisms of multilateral governance are also much questioned, even though these groupings make no attempts to cover the range of issues, let alone bridge the range of different interests, which the UN involves.

But in assessing effectiveness, one must also ask some basic questions, obvious in themselves perhaps, but too often forgotten or underplayed, in assessments of the United Nations, especially by the industrial countries.

Who is the UN? Press commentaries contribute daily to a major confusion by referring to 'UN decisions' or 'UN actions', without distinguishing whether they are:

- decisions by governments within the UN, whether within the General Assembly, the Security Council or one of the other subsidiary bodies;
- actions taken by the UN secretariat directed by specific decisions of governments;
- initiatives taken or not taken by the secretariat in relation to situations such as emergencies;
- the effectiveness of different specialized agencies or bodies of the UN.

The mechanisms and responsibilities underlying each of the above are very different. As a start, it would greatly help understanding and perceptions if public statements and press releases made it clear which aspect of the UN was being referred to.

Effectiveness from whose point of view? Most of the strongest criticisms of the UN in recent years come from the industrial countries. Many of the developing countries feel less critical – except perhaps, of the Bretton Woods Organizations, where the relative strength of praise and criticism between the industrial and developing countries is usually reversed. And sample surveys of public opinion often show surprisingly positive views of the UN among the general public.

2 THE UN IN THE 1990s – AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Under the current Secretary-General, Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, innovative efforts have been made

to define the United Nations' mission and policy in several key areas of policy. '**Agenda for Peace**' was perhaps the first and most successful, building on Summit level Security Council meeting of January 1992, and defining four major areas of peace related actions in the post-Cold War world:

- preventive diplomacy;
- peace making;
- peace keeping;
- post conflict peace building – reconstruction and reconciliation and development.

The different parts of the UN's own machinery and organization have increasingly been involved in all four of these activities, together with forces provided bilaterally from many UN Member States. Expenditure by the UN on peace keeping activities has risen from US\$230 million in 1988 to \$3.6 billion in 1994, while the number of disputes and conflicts in which the UN is involved each year has risen from 11 in 1988 to 28 in 1994. Since Member States are committed to contribute their share of expenditure, once the Security Council has approved the intervention, these expenditures have gradually added to the financial obligations of Member States and, in parallel, to the amounts owed but unpaid to the UN, in respect of their obligations.

With respect to economic and social development, the evolution of thinking, debate commitments and action, has followed a different pattern. Although the Secretary-General has proposed a parallel policy document, **Agenda for Development**, the process has proved more complicated and much more controversial. The first draft of the **Agenda** identified five dimensions of development: peace as the foundation; the economy as the engine of progress; the environment as a basis for sustainability; justice as a pillar of society; democracy as good governance.

But going beyond generalities to the specifics of international action has proved more difficult. It is arguable that such difficulties are inevitable, especially if the task is seen as defining a global agenda for development which is intellectually pioneering, operationally useful, applicable to all regions of the World and which commands consensus. And identifying roles and actions to be taken by the different parts of the UN system is inevitably

challenging to vested interests within and outside the UN system.

Although governments have repeatedly asked for further revisions of **Agenda for Development**, the practical purposes for which the **Agenda** is wanted may be better achieved by building on the commitments and follow up actions already agreed at the succession of major global conferences held in the 1990s:

- The World Summit for Children, New York, 1990;
- The International Conference on Environment and Development, the 'Earth Summit', Rio, 1992;
- The World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993;
- The International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994;
- The World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995;
- The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

Each of these conferences has given rise to commitments and to some form of plan or programme of action, identifying responsibilities within the international community and UN systems for follow up action, resource mobilization and monitoring. They provide, therefore, a basis for action on important parts of the development agenda:

- human development, covering health, education, nutrition, water sanitation;
- gender equality and equity, reproductive health, family planning and women's empowerment;
- poverty reduction, especially through income generation among the poorest, employment creation and household food security;
- measures to achieve greater social cohesion; and
- a wide range of basic human rights.

'Agenda 21' of Rio incorporated many of the above, and set them in the context of commitments to sustainable development and environmental

protection covering formal treaties for biological diversity and climate changes. And all the conferences and commitments made reference to the special needs of least developed countries in generally and usually sub-Saharan Africa in particular.

3 INTERNATIONAL AND UN ROLES

The international community, and the United Nations itself, has already been given critical roles to play in supporting the preparation, the implementation and the monitoring of the national programmes of action. Governments must of course take the lead, define all the objectives, the scope and the type of strategy, programme or plan to be followed. But depending on the country, its capacity and resources, the international community can have a major or a minor supporting role. Particularly important in all this, will be the need to consolidate at national level the process and documentation of follow up to the various conferences.

This approach needs to be followed in all the priority areas of action identified above. But it can be illustrated by considering poverty eradication – as a major area for action arising from the recent Copenhagen Summit.

A focus on poverty eradication ought to be made a major – but not exclusive – part of the United Nations mission over the next quarter century. This would help define the UN mandate in human and popular terms in a way which might, in turn, help to rekindle some of the early idealism and vision which typified the United Nations in its first decade. Moreover, steady progress towards the different goals, (and early achievement of some of them such as the eradication of polio by the year 2000) would demonstrate success in international action in human terms, more readily and more convincingly than with the more difficult and inevitably less decisive peace keeping efforts.

A focus on poverty eradication would also help define some of the common goals for UN field operations which are needed to achieve and demonstrate effective coordination. A frame of human development and poverty eradication has already been set out conceptually in recent documents of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. The challenge now is to mobilize the energies and organization of UN field operations in ways which provide practical, consistent and sustained support for countries in

implementing programmes of poverty reduction and poverty eradication.

Figure 1 sets out how this could be done, emphasizing the two main thrusts of poverty reduction – (a) the provision of basic social services for all and (b) the achievement of minimum levels of household incomes and food security for all, with action focused especially on the poorest groups. This was the poverty reducing strategy set out in the World Bank's **World Development Report on Poverty**, issued in 1990.

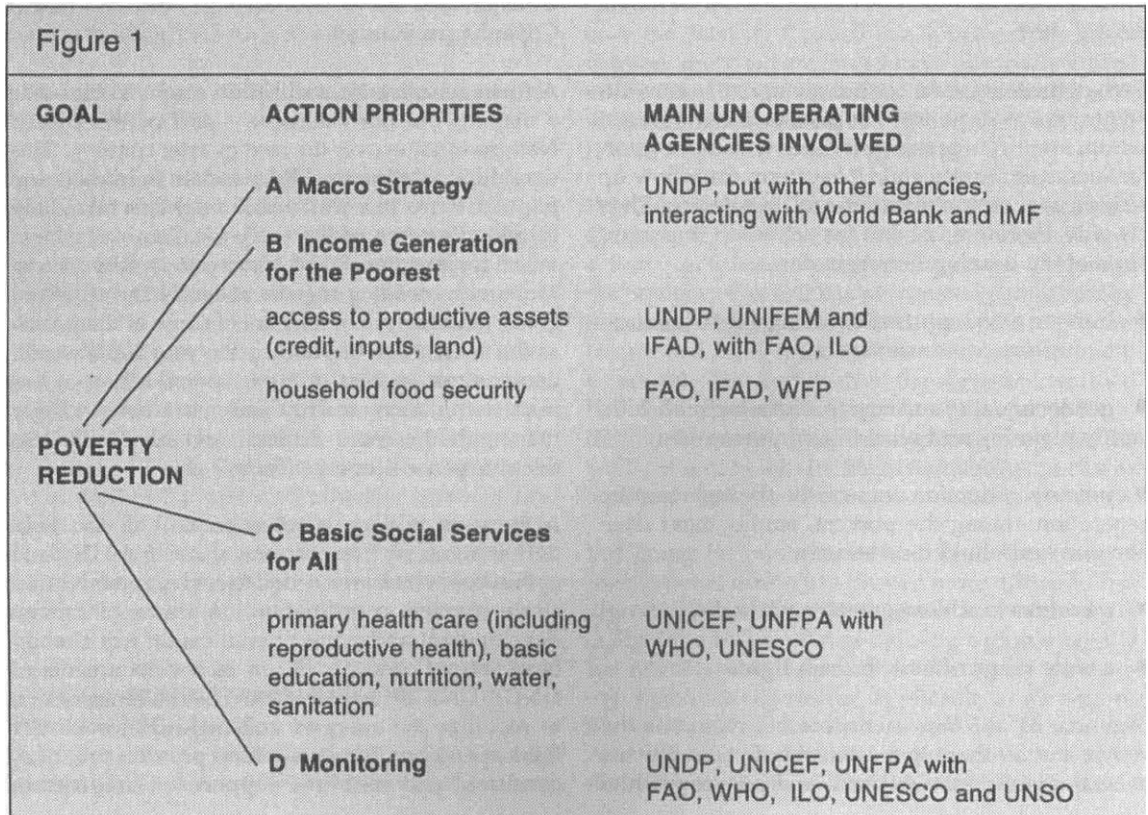
Within the UN and at field level, UNICEF and UNFPA would have major roles in mobilizing support and finance for basic services for all, working closely with WHO and UNESCO, the specialized agencies most directly involved with health and education. In parallel and with complementarity, UNDP, IFAD and UNIFEM would have major roles in ensuring credit, food security and support for income generation for the poorest, working closely with ILO and FAO, the specialized agencies most directly involved with employment generation (in

both the formal and informal sector) and household food security.

Implementation will mostly be a matter of national action but in the least developed countries and in most of sub-Saharan Africa, national programmes will also require special measures of international support.

The UN resident coordinators at country level would have a general coordinating role for these efforts, using the Country Strategy Note as a frame for action whenever governments find this appropriate. Monitoring will be vital and UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF can use field resources to support country level data collection, processing and publication, drawing on specialist expertise within the UN, including of the UN Statistical Office.

The World Bank has its own important part in almost every aspect of poverty eradication strategies and support, derived from its role as a major lender of resources and usually also, as leader and mobilizer of the donor community. Part of the logic



of the above approach, however, is that the total international effort is likely to be stronger the more the UN family can strengthen and coordinate its own efforts before it simply falls into line behind Bretton Woods leadership.

There are good reasons for maintaining this important aspect of independent UN contribution and leadership. On the Bretton Woods side, both the World Bank and the IMF (and probably now the WTO) have made clear that while they welcome cooperation with the UN, they in no way wish to be coordinated by the UN. The UN organizations start historically and structurally with a different and more focused perspective on poverty and human development than either of the Bretton Wood organizations.

The international system as a whole will be stronger (and more democratic) if such differences of perspective and approach are brought out openly in discussion and international debate, rather than made matters of behind-the-scenes compromise with a pretence of organizational coordination. The history of UN-Bretton Woods relationships shows how debate over initial differences has often led to innovation and advance for all. The creation of IDA, the initiation of IMF's compensatory finance facility, actions on debt relief and Adjustment with a Human Face are all examples of how open debate between the UN and the Bretton Woods organizations helped initiate changes of policy and approach within the Bretton Woods institutions. Further advances are needed and could follow with respect to actions to accelerate poverty reduction and human development.

4 GOALS, COORDINATION, ADVOCACY AND ETHICAL COMMITMENT

Against this background, let me draw on UN experience to elaborate a number of the issues of international action – and potential and comparative advantage – which too often get neglected in assessing the present workings of the UN or in making recommendations for reform.

Goals: In the first few decades of the UN, quantified time-bound goals were agreed for a number of areas of national and international action. Perhaps there were too many and certainly many were not taken very seriously by governments in devising or monitoring follow up action. By the late 1970s, the mood

of many countries, especially industrial countries, had swung considerably against goals.

Notwithstanding the doubts and difficulties, a core of key goals is needed if commitments to achievements and results are to be specific – and not just to be vague aspirations. Moreover, the record of international goal setting is not so bad as often thought: the GNP growth rate target for developing countries of the (First) Development Decade was exceeded, and over the Second Development Decade nearly achieved. Though most aid donors have fallen far short of the 0.7 per cent target for ODA, the target itself has served as a major focus for mobilizing political and NGO support for increasing aid – and at least six aid donors have achieved the target, in a reasonably sustained manner. Goals in other areas such as child mortality reduction, health, education, water, sanitation and nutrition have also provided important mechanisms for mobilizing accelerated national action. Scores of countries have, in fact, achieved many such goals – even over the 'lost decade of the 1980s', when the goals often helped to maintain some human and social priorities during a period of tough minded economic cutbacks and adjustment.

National Action. One reason why global goals become discredited is that too little attention has been given to the process of adopting and adapting global goals to the situations of different countries. This certainly seemed to be a major weakness of the process of follow up to many of the goals and commitments of the series of major international conferences held over the 1970s.

Experience in UNICEF and WHO and UNFPA over the 1980s shows that goals can lead to very positive results, especially when field offices of the UN agencies concentrate their energy, action and their resources in helping individual countries translate global goals into national plans and action.

Global goals were added in the 1980s to UNICEF's country programme approach, focused initially on priority actions like immunization and promotion of oral rehydration therapy, to reduce the major causes of child mortality. The results were impressive. Most countries achieved impressive increases in coverage of these priority health actions and 72 countries achieved the 1990 goal of 80 per cent immunization coverage, resulting (with ORT advance) in an estimated reduction of child

mortality by some four million child deaths each year.

This successful experience spurred the idea of holding a World Summit for Children in the United Nations in September, 1990, to mobilize worldwide action at the highest political level for a further round of goals for children. At the time, the idea of an international conference for Heads of Governments on a social theme was novel, if not somewhat gimmicky. Heads of State normally assembled to discuss weighty matters of politics, not children or social policy, let alone infant mortality and diarrhoea. Sceptics argued that few would come and that the meeting and its deliberations would have little effect. But in the end, 71 Heads of Government and State attended. Counting subsequent signatures by Heads of State and Governments, the Declaration and Plan of Action have now been signed by 164 Government leaders, and most signatures by Heads of State of any document in history.

More impressive, some 100 countries have now prepared National Programme of Action, focused on the goals for the 1990s agreed at the Summit. UNICEF estimates that the majority of developing countries are making substantial progress towards the goals set for the year 2000 – and well over half are likely to achieve half or more of the mid-decade goals set for 1995. UNICEF now presents each year to ECOSOC and the General Assembly a report on progress and produces more popular versions of the report in the form of two widely circulated documents, **The State of the World's Children** report and **Progress of Nations**. All this adds up, in my view, to the type of public accountability on substantive progress and achievement which should be much more common in the international system.

Coordination. Coordination is currently the most emphasized aspect of UN reform in the economic and social arenas. A common view is that the UN's weakness stems from a plethora of different UN agencies, each competing with others for funds or visibility, instead of concentrating on the tasks given by their mandates. Better coordination is seen as an important part of the answer, with full integration of some agencies and abolition of others as essential steps.

Some rationalization would no doubt be useful – but this should follow, not precede, clearer decisions on priorities for action. Moreover, many

actions to achieve more serious and effective co-ordination have been set in motion in the last few years. These embrace measures at country level to strengthen the Resident Coordinator system, including the preparation (under government leadership) of a Country Strategy Note, clearly guidelines on collaboration, harmonized programme cycles, moves to common premises and the establishment of a common training system for senior field level staff.

But experience suggests that collaboration in support of common goals is the most important step to achieve greater effectiveness. In the first place, goals (adapted to the national situation) provide a common focus for action and a common test of achievement. In the second place, goals take one beyond the internal interests of competing bureaucracies – to the contribution each can make to the country concerned. Value added and comparative advantage between agencies are best judged, not in the abstract, but in relation to capacity to work towards defined goals.

Advocacy and Ethical Commitment. The focus on goals and practical achievements is important – but, in the long run, helping to establish a climate of opinion and ethical standards required to underpin an international system in which human rights are respected and the basic needs of all people are met. Building such an ethic and climate of opinion is far from a vague and woolly aspiration or matter of a few feel-good speeches and an appeal to high ideals. As UNICEF experience shows, morality marches hand in hand with capacity. By showing what can be done, expectations of what ought to be done can be changed. The United Nations has a special role and opportunity in this effort – and a number of outstanding leaders within the UN have demonstrated at different times what this can mean. Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General is perhaps the clearest example. But other Secretaries-General and Directors-General of different agencies have also demonstrated the capacity for international leadership and outspokenness in ways which help chance public opinion and establish new standards of expected international conduct.

In a world in which perceptions and values are so influenced by the media, this is perhaps the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for the United Nations today.