



DEVELOPMENT AS END OF POVERTY: REFORM OR REINVENTION?

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Research Summary

Many people have written about the successes and failures of the Millennium Development Goals without examining the crises and controversies that surrounded their origins. They overlook the geopolitical changes of the 1990s that gave rise to these goals. The end of the Cold War ushered in a historical moment in international relations. In spite of the “end of history” narratives, by the mid-1990s, crises in international institutions loomed large. As foreign aid was declining, the United Nations found itself mired in controversies of wars in Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda. Simultaneously, civil society groups joined the Fifty Years is Enough campaign to protest the socially destructive structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the IMF. The growing consensus was that these organizations were not “fit for purpose” and needed reform.



UN photo by Eskinder Debebe: Secretary General Participates in OXFAM End Poverty Campaign

The World Bank and the United Nations and its agencies found themselves reflecting on their relevancy in a world that differed from the one that had given rise to them. In this moment of reflection and soul searching, poverty was deployed as a strategic response to demonstrate the relevance of these institutions.

For the World Bank, poverty alleviation projects could regain both public sympathy and donors’ funds. Yet, rather than overhauling the ideology that gave rise to flawed policies, the Bank opted for short-term fixes that focused on the role of the state. The UN also acknowledged that substantive reforms were required to make it fit for the 21st century and responded by linking peace and security with development. Development coordination required collaboration with the World Bank. Soon, the two organizations joined forces to end extreme poverty.

While the member states of the UN and the World Bank decide on the post-2015 development agenda, they are taking stock of the lessons from the past.

Yet, the broader question of institutional reform in the existing global governance structures, commensurate with shifting power dynamics, continues to be largely missing from the debate.

For Consideration:

- ▶ *What have been some of the practical implications of international organizations' convergence on poverty reduction?*
- ▶ *How can we reform existing global governance structures to better reflect changing realities on the ground?*
- ▶ *What would alternative means of governing global development look like?*



Top photo: UN photo by Kibae Park : Children in Developing Countries



Top photo: UN photo by Evan Schneider : Rural Women Sell Mango and Potato Jam

- ▶ *How can we democratize international economic and political decision-making?*
- ▶ *How can we translate global goals into national policies? What have been some of the lessons from the MDGs?*

Author Bio:

Dr. Elham Seyedsayamdost received her Ph.D. in Political Science at Columbia University this past May. Prior to her doctoral studies, she worked on development policy at UNDP and the World Bank. Dr. Seyedsayamdost holds a Master of International Affairs from Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs and a B.A. in international and comparative politics from The American University of Paris.

Discussant Bio:

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr is a development economist interested in human development and capabilities and the broad question of national and international policy strategies. She is currently a Professor at The New School, where she chairs the Development Concentration in the International Affairs Program. She is the vice-chair of the UN Committee for Development Policy. From 1995 to 2004, she was lead author and director of the UNDP Human Development Reports. Previously, she worked at the World Bank and UNDP on agriculture, aid coordination in Africa, and capacity development.

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