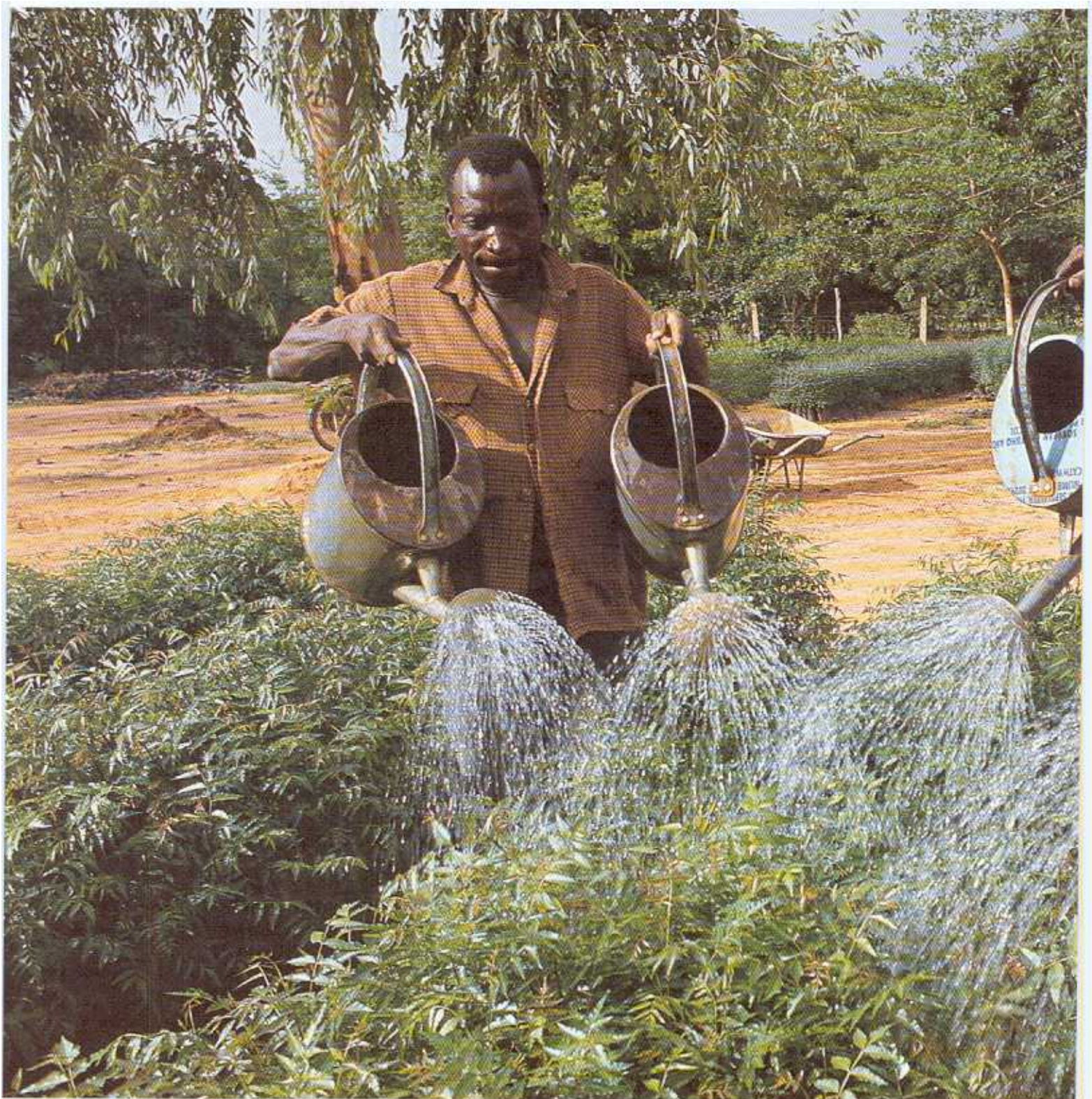


The Social & Economic



Watering a tree nursery in Burkina Faso.

Since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the focus has been on development that does not drain the earth's resources.

Connection ~ the development agencies

- *Battle against poverty*
- *New strategies*
- *Environmental protection*
- *Achievements and constraints*

When the United Nations was created nearly 50 years ago, its original mandate gave equal billing to the prevention of war and to the battle against poverty.

Armed with this mandate, the UN has achieved some resounding successes in the social and economic fields. It has spearheaded child survival, population stabilization, disease control, environmental protection and development assistance. But despite these achievements the world still faces a development crisis. The crisis has been aggravated by rising poverty, a sky-rocketing Third World external debt, declining commodity prices, increasing protectionist barriers, a widening gap between rich and poor nations, and the depletion of the world's natural resources. Social and economic crises, in turn, have threatened the political stability of many countries.

The UN, its agencies and its sister institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have to share both the successes and the failures of global, social and economic development over the last 50 years. In the post-Cold War era, however, the UN has found it increasingly difficult to fulfil its economic mandate, primarily because of rising military conflicts, humanitarian emergencies, a shortage of resources and a diversion of funds from development to peacekeeping.

The new challenges facing the UN have resulted in fresh thinking on development strategies for the next 50 years. The two new concepts currently under discussion are 'preventive development' and 'curative development'.



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Based on the theory that all – or most – of the world's conflicts are caused primarily by economic problems, the UN wants to root out the causes of civil wars. The philosophy behind the thinking is that it is far better to take pre-conflict preventive action than to prescribe post-war curative treatment.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali says the objectives of peace and development are inseparable. There can be no lasting development without peace; and there can be no real peace without development. In his new 'Agenda for Development' released in 1994, the Secretary-General admits it is time for the UN to revert to its original mandate giving equal priority to social and economic development and to peace and security.

The inequities

The work of the UN agencies has been hindered not only by declining funds but also by an international economic system riddled with inequities. Since the creation of the UN in 1945, the collective wealth of nations has multiplied more than sevenfold, from three trillion dollars to \$22 trillion. But the significant increase in wealth has not resulted in global prosperity, primarily because the world's riches continue to be inequitably distributed between developing and industrial nations.

The inequity is not just in distribution but also in factors of production. The world's technological resources and capital continue to be the monopoly of a few rich nations. As a result, the UN is also engaged in the formidable task of trying to bridge the widening gap between rich and poor, both in terms of peoples and nations.

The poorer nations argue that most of the world's social and economic problems are caused not by a shortage of resources but by over-consumption. Currently, about 24 per cent of the world's population which lives in the richer North consumes an estimated 75 to 85 per cent of the world's depleting resources.

The world's ecological destruction is triggered mostly by affluence and its by-products: industrial waste and consumer-generated garbage, and pollution of the air and water by industry, automobiles and agricultural chemicals. Currently, industrial nations generate about 90 per cent of the world's hazardous wastes, emit 74 per cent of atmosphere-warming carbon dioxide and produce almost 100 per cent of ozone-damaging chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). But the developing nations are also to blame for increasing global environmental degradation – shrinking forests, eroding soil, overgrazed pastures and overcrowded cities, caused mostly by pressures of poverty. All of these problems have been caused by lop-sided development triggered by over-consumption of the world's finite resources.

At the historic UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the 'Earth Summit', in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, more than 100 political leaders pledged to carry home a new message: sustainable development. No development model is worth pursuing unless resources are used in ways that do not over-exploit the carrying and productive capacity of the earth and do not incur ecological debts that future generations have to repay.

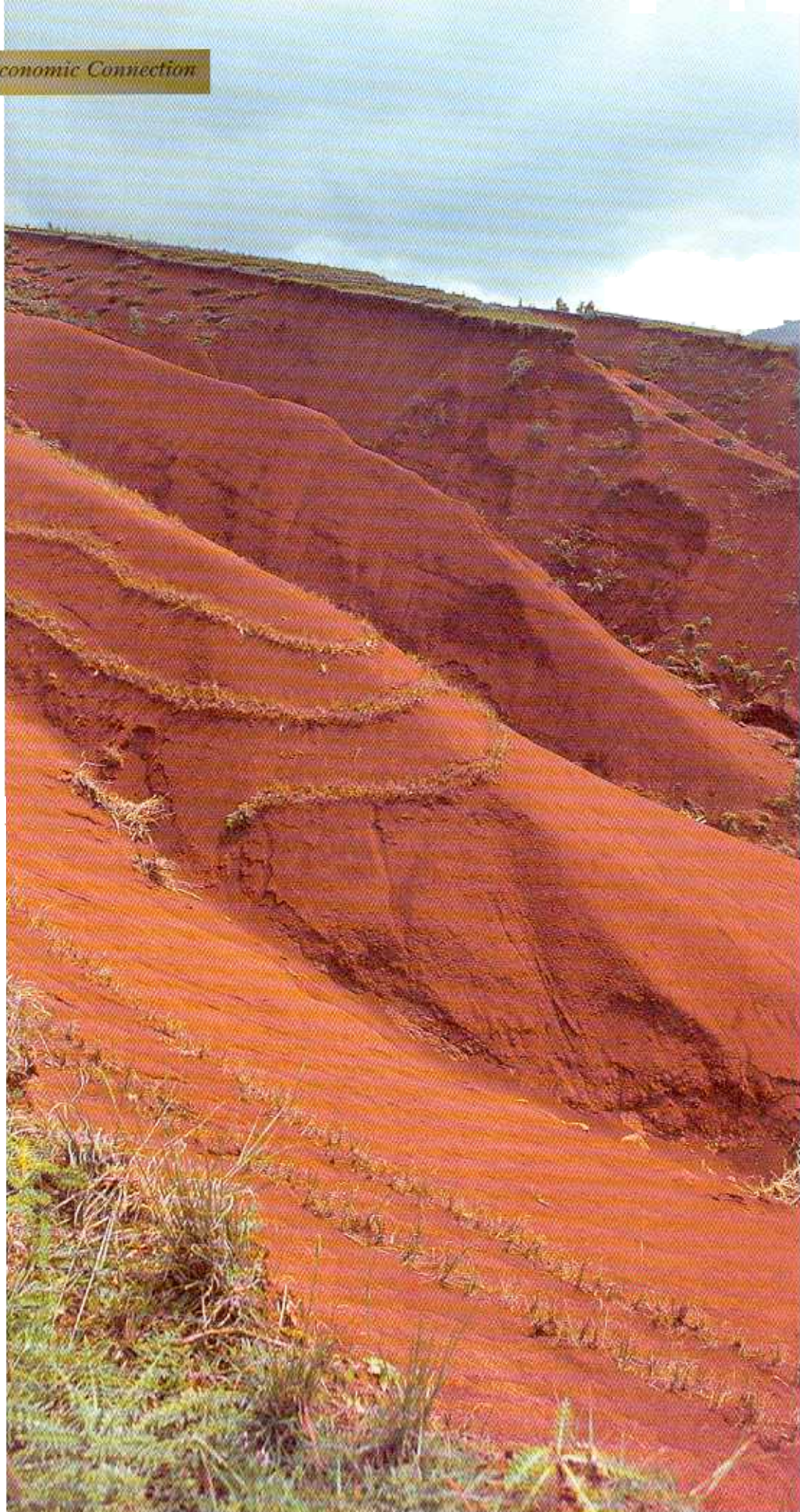
*“an international system
riddled with inequities”*

The successes

While some of the UN's failures may be in politics and peacekeeping, its significant achievements are primarily in the field of social and economic development.

If there were no UN, the international community might still be fighting smallpox and most of the world's workers might have no right to collective bargaining. There might be no safety standards on air and sea travel, while artists, composers and authors might have no protection for their creative works. The UN has been in the forefront of curbing acid rain, containing nuclear accidents, protecting oceans, preventing overfishing, reducing traffic in illegal waste and safeguarding endangered species.

In 1974, only five per cent of children in developing countries were immunized against polio, tetanus, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and tuberculosis. Today, as a result of efforts by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), there is an 80 per cent immunization rate, saving the lives of more than three million children annually.



Poverty is causing deforestation and soil erosion as people are forced to clear land for farming.
Ethiopia's bald hills, stripped of topsoil, played a part in the devastating famine in 1984 that killed half a million people.

The constraints

But the UN's successes in economic and social development are being thwarted by a lack of funds. The UN Development Programme (UNDP), the largest single source of development and technical assistance, is the prime example of a UN agency which raises only about one billion dollars annually from the international community. The amount is infinitesimal compared with the estimated nearly \$800 billion the world spends every year on the military - about 800 times more than the amount it provides to a single UN development agency.

In 1970, the UN General Assembly set a target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP) as Official Development Assistance (ODA) from industrial countries to developing countries. The target was reaffirmed unanimously by all of the political leaders attending the Earth Summit in Brazil in June 1992.

But over a 24-year period, only four of the 24 industrial nations - Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden - have fulfilled their commitments to the world's developing nations.

Since all of the UN's resources for development activities come from voluntary contributions from member states, the obligation to provide funds is essentially moral, not legal. A proposal to fund development activities through assessed contributions from member states has already generated strong opposition from Western nations.

The flow of resources from industrial countries both to the UN and to developing nations has been progressively dwindling for political and economic reasons. The biggest loser is Africa - a continent once considered politically significant primarily because of Soviet-US proxy wars in that region.

The sharp decline in development assistance is also attributed to the recent global economic recession forcing donors to cut back on aid. Japan, the world's largest aid donor, is holding its official development assistance to its lowest level ever at \$10 billion for 1994-95.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has completely restructured its foreign aid programme by cutting from 108 to 50 the number of countries receiving US assistance. There has also been a significant downturn in multilateral development assistance, according to the latest figures released by the UN. The decline in aid is expected to continue into the late 1990s and perhaps into the next century.

The significance of the cuts lies in the fact that development assistance is shrinking at a time when developing nations are desperately in need of an increase, not a decrease, in aid because of growing poverty, rising debts and new trade barriers against their industrial exports.

In 1982, the World Bank estimated Third World debt at \$732 billion. By 1994, it had shot up to more than \$1.6 trillion, \$305 billion of which is owed by African countries that do not have the capacity even to meet their annual interest payments. A UN report released in late 1994 says that more than a decade of complex strategies has failed to alleviate the international debt crisis which continues to plague over 65 developing and transitional economies.

The UN says poverty and inequality appear to be worsening throughout the world. Poverty and destitution do not appear to have been reduced, either in terms of the numbers of people affected or in terms of severity.

Currently about 1.1 billion people, out of a world total of some 5.4 billion, live either on low incomes or on no incomes at all. The greatest number of poor people are in Asia, but in Africa half the population falls below an accepted poverty line. While poverty is most commonly measured by income, it is also a matter of consumption and is reflected in such indicators as nutrition, life expectancy, child mortality, literacy, illness and education. There is wide agreement that the best way to reduce poverty is to ensure that people have opportunities for productive and remunerative employment to support themselves and their families.

The UN's development thrust

The responsibility for helping Third World nations achieve their development goals lies with UN agencies, most of whom have a physical presence in these countries. Leading the pack is UNDP, which has been in existence for 30 years. The New York-based agency is trying to meet four major objectives: poverty elimination, job creation, environmental regeneration and the advancement of women.

The agency spends about one billion dollars annually, mostly on technical assistance and training, as well as the supply of equipment and technology to developing nations. UNDP also hires an army of experts to advise governments on national development strategies. UNDP's new development strategy – and its emphasis on 'sustainable human development' and 'human security' – is viewed by some Third World countries as an intrusion into a sovereign nation's right to choose its own development model.

The intellectual flagship of UNDP is its annual *Human Development Report* with its innovative, but occasionally controversial, ideas aimed at helping countries learn from the failures of others. The authors of the report say that it is political will, not finance, that determines whether national budgets and foreign aid go for education and health, or for arms, corruption and hidden subsidies for the wealthy.

UNDP points out that the UN can no longer acquiesce in the 'deafening silence' that accompanies the current development crisis. It is therefore time for the UN to reclaim its original mandate on the economic and social front. UNDP has also stressed that people should be at the centre of development and that human security should take precedence over military security.

The UN's 'one earth' agency

In a pollution-ridden world increasingly conscious of its environment, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) is saddled with the task of ensuring that the air is clean, the forests and eco-systems are safe and that human health and the quality of life are protected from environmental degradation.

Established in 1972, UNEP's two major landmarks are the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The Stockholm Conference took an important step forward in the concept of 'global commons' when it declared that 'States have the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction'. This concept was further strengthened when, in 1982, the General Assembly adopted a Convention on the Law of the Sea after more than a decade of negotiations.

The Stockholm Conference also reinforced the need for gathering and sharing information about the global environment. As a result, UNEP set up the International Information System on the Environment (INFOTERRA), which promotes the exchange of environmental information between national news agencies. At the same time, it also established the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS), linking hundreds of national and international organizations thirsting for knowledge about the environment. A third contribution by UNEP was the creation of an International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC). The register, maintained by UNEP, provides information on the chemical make-up of toxic products, their use, storage and disposal, and regulations applied to them in different countries.

If the Stockholm Conference was the first significant warning about the dangers of a deteriorating environment, the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro was a major turning point in environmental history because it agreed on an elaborate plan of action to prevent the ecological degradation of a future world.

The Summit adopted a blueprint for action called Agenda 21. This comprises 40 chapters which provide guidelines and recommendations to resolve problems in all major areas affecting the relationship between the environment and economic development. The follow-up to the Earth Summit resulted in three major agreements: a Convention on Climate

Change, a Convention on the Protection of Biological Diversity and a Convention to Combat Desertification.

But UNEP has a long hard battle ahead in a world where most countries pay only lip-service to the cause of the environment. The Nairobi-based agency can succeed only if its member states generate the necessary political will to support its environmental cause at a time when, according to the World Conservation Monitoring Organization, around 6,000 of the world's 1.7 million species are under threat of extinction.

The health of nations

WHO is credited with leading a 13-year global effort to wipe out smallpox from the face of the earth. The eradication of smallpox – the first disease ever to be completely rooted out – is among the greatest public health achievements of all time. But WHO's claim to fame does not lie only in a single remarkable achievement.

WHO establishes norms in a variety of fields, including food and pharmaceuticals, sets standards in international nomenclature and helps classify diseases. The agency also generates and transfers around the world current information on health matters. In emergency situations WHO enforces regulations to prevent the spread of disease across borders.

Since prevention is its keyword, WHO leads a global immunization campaign against six communicable diseases afflicting children: diphtheria, measles, poliomyelitis, tetanus, tuberculosis and whooping cough. WHO has also saved seven million children from river blindness and rescued millions of others from dracunculiasis and tropical diseases.



© WWP/ICCE 1988

*“countries pay only lip-service
to the environment”*

The world's rainforests are being cut down at a rate of 9,910 square miles every two months, an area the size of Belgium.



WHO's battle against AIDS has been described as one of its biggest endeavours in the 1990s. The joint programme – the first of its kind – involves six UN organizations based in New York, Geneva, Paris and Washington, DC.

The agency's ultimate goal, however, is reflected in its well-publicized slogan: 'Health for All by the

Year 2000'. Explaining this, WHO says its goal does not mean that by the beginning of the next century disease and disability will no longer exist, or that doctors and nurses will be taking care of everybody. What it does mean is that resources for health will be accessible to everyone, with full community involvement.

The fight for workers' rights

The International Labour Organisation (ILO), which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1994, is the only UN agency which sets international labour standards that member states pledge to enforce in their own countries. Every working person in this world has, at some point or other, benefited from the norms set by ILO through its 174 Conventions and 181 Recommendations adopted to date.

ILO is unique among world organizations in that employers' and workers' representatives have an equal voice with those of governments in shaping policies and programmes. ILO's labour standards cover a vast spectrum of issues – social, economic and political – in the workplace. These standards apply to any work environment, irrespective of whether it is a ramshackle factory in the backstreets of a Third World capital or a multi-billion dollar corporate office on Wall Street, New York.

The agency has been primarily responsible for the creation of a wide range of workers' rights, including collective bargaining, occupational safety and health, social security, the employment of women and children, the abolition of forced labour, the elimination of discrimination, the freedom of association and the right to trade unionism. It has supervisory functions to ensure that labour laws set out such principles and are enforced in practice. It also has a special procedure to investigate complaints of violations of the freedom of association.

The work of ILO has taken on an added importance because the world's active working population is increasing by 43 million people every year. The increase is particularly marked in developing countries at a time when unemployment and underemployment are at their highest levels.

As it moves into the 21st century, ILO needs to provide some intellectual and political leadership in the quest for solutions to the problems of job creation and poverty alleviation in the changing world context. But the agency is also caught in the middle of a controversial debate between rich and poor nations over the proposed introduction of a 'social clause' in international trade agreements. The developed nations say that goods produced either by child labour or in workplaces that do not have minimum labour standards and wages should be barred from the international market place.

'The defence of values is not a question of conceiving an arsenal of retaliatory measures to be used unilaterally by one country or a group of countries', ILO Director-General Hansenne has argued. 'What is required, in contrast, is a multilateral mechanism created to review systematically member states' efforts to offer their workers a share in the economic benefits resulting from the opening up of exterior markets.' The ILO, he says, seems naturally placed to contribute to the implementation of such a mechanism.

“standards apply to any work environment”

The world's cultural heritage

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) believes that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. The idea for the Paris-based UN agency grew out of the ashes of two devastating wars. The founders who met in London believed that military conflicts could be prevented only through the spread of education and international cooperation.

Established in 1945, UNESCO continues to enjoy a privileged position within the world's intellectual community of academics, scientists and philosophers. The agency has provided assistance and know-how to develop and strengthen communications systems, establish news agencies and support an independent press.

In 1972, UNESCO adopted a convention to protect the world's cultural and natural heritage. The primary objective of the convention is to protect unique natural and cultural property against the ravages of time. The philosophy behind the convention is that certain natural and cultural properties, such as the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, Machu Picchu in Peru and the Great Wall of China, are 'world heritages' whose protection and conservation are the collective responsibility of the international community.

UNESCO works in support of press freedom, pluralism and independence. Affiliated to UNESCO is the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) which has successfully set up several national and regional news agencies. But UNESCO's highest single priority is 'a basic education for all' – a concept defined by the World Conference on Education for All held in Thailand in 1990. The programme aims to give everyone access to quality education that will lead to lifelong learning.

UNESCO, along with UNICEF and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), is sponsoring an unprecedented education drive in which nine developing nations have pledged to universalize education and 'massively' reduce the illiteracy rate in their countries. The nine countries – Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, China, India, Nigeria, Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan – have a combined population of 2.7 billion people and account for half the world's total.



© Sean Sprague/Panos



Pollution, acid rain and deforestation are forcing the UN to focus its attention on the environment.
A Filipino boy plants a tree in Mindanao.

The right to food

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been leading the global campaign to eradicate two of the Third World's major problems: poverty and hunger.

FAO's basic mandate is to help alleviate poverty and hunger by promoting agricultural development, by improving nutrition and by ensuring food security. As the UN's largest autonomous agency with a professional staff of over 2,000, FAO offers direct development assistance, collects, analyses and disseminates information, provides policy and planning advice to governments and acts as an international debating forum on food and agricultural issues.

FAO has discouraged the use of pesticides by Third World farmers and encouraged biological control methods and natural predators, such as spiders and wasps, to stave off pests. The 400,000 Asian rice farmers who follow FAO guidelines have saved an estimated \$10 million every year in reduced pesticide costs, while government bills for pesticide subsidies have declined by over \$150 million annually. FAO has also used state-of-the-art technology to set up a Direct Information Access Network for Africa (DIANA). The network helps signal early warnings of food shortages caused by severe droughts in large parts of eastern and southern Africa.

The food crisis

The stark images of starving children standing naked pleading for food have been splashed across living rooms the world over. The World Food Programme (WFP) is one of the UN agencies responding to the crying pains of the hungry.

In 1993, the WFP provided direct food aid to more than 47 million people worldwide. 'This food aid is not charity', the WFP insists. 'It is a long-term investment in developing countries, so that one day there will be no more emaciated children, no more parents who have lost their children to hunger.'

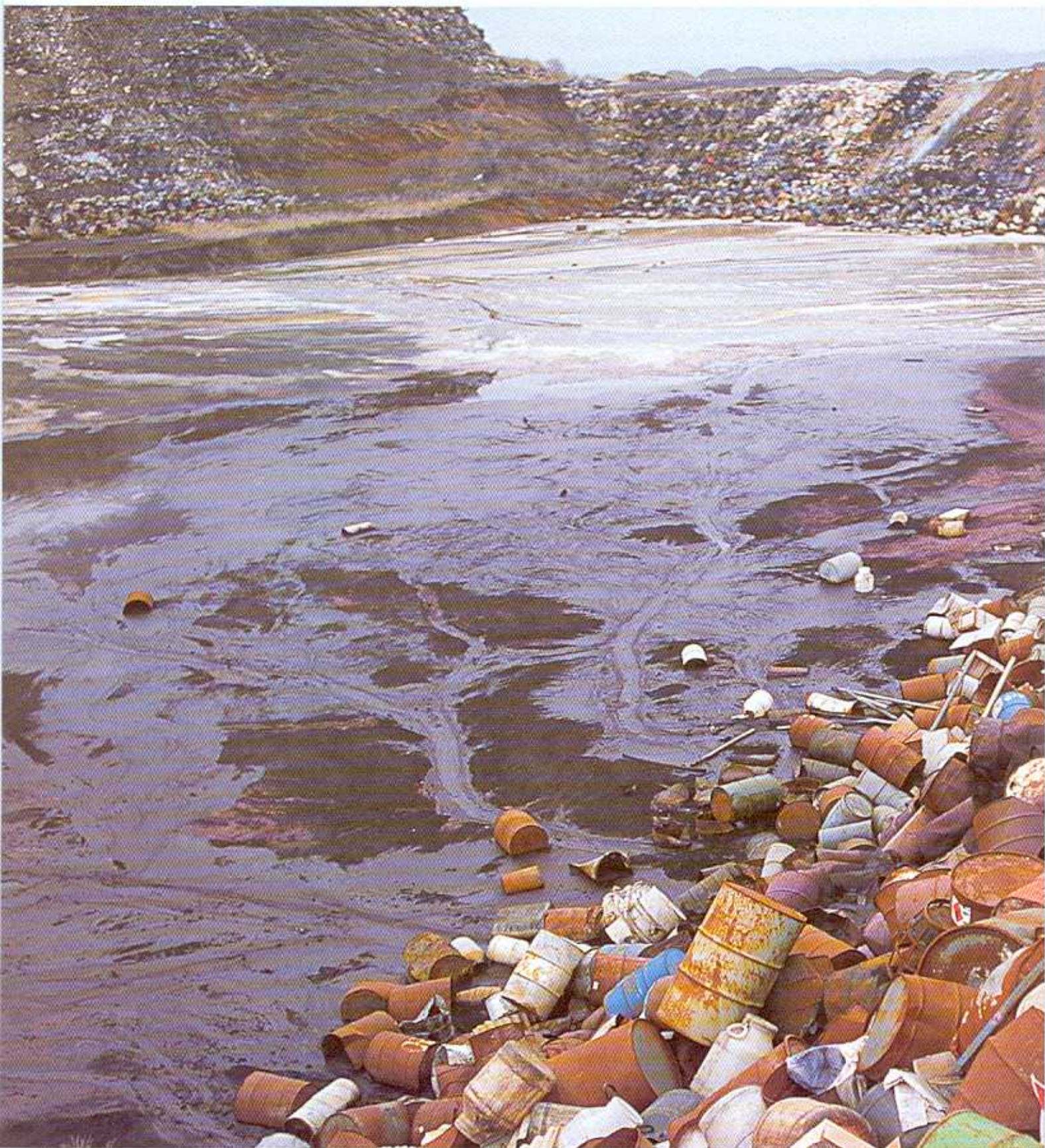
With its headquarters in Rome, the WFP specializes in emergency aid, delivering food to

refugees displaced by war and civil strife and to victims of droughts, earthquakes, storms and other disasters. Although it is being increasingly called upon to provide relief assistance, the WFP was originally set up not only to combat hunger but also to promote economic and social development. Since its inception, the WFP has provided more than five billion dollars in assistance to help developing nations increase their productivity.

“UN food aid is not charity”

With that objective, the WFP has built coastal dykes to protect farmland from salt intrusion, planted trees and created forest belts to prevent soil erosion and helped small farmers to adopt environmentally sound agricultural policies. The WFP stresses the integration of development and environment, generating employment and income and increasing access to food on a sustainable basis. The WFP claims it is now the largest source of grant assistance to developing countries, providing an average of more than \$1.5 billion annually.

The agency has spent nearly \$13 billion to provide a total of more than 40 million tons of food to combat hunger and promote economic and social development. 'Food aid has an intrinsic advantage over other forms of aid', says the WFP. 'No other form of assistance transfers such a large level of resources directly to the poor.'



***The fall of Communism exposed an environmental disaster area in Eastern Europe and the former USSR.
A large chemical and toxic waste dump.***



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The agricultural burden

When the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was established in 1977 it had a single-minded mission: to combat hunger and rural poverty in the low income food-deficit countries of the world. A UN agency which reaches out to people in remote parts of the world, IFAD provides assistance to the poorest of the world's poor: small farmers, landless poor, nomadic herdsman and rural women. The Fund has developed a system of providing credit, often in very small amounts, to the poorest and most marginalized groups. The credit provided by IFAD has benefited over 230 million people in about 100 developing nations.

Since its primary interest is in the world's most poverty-stricken countries, IFAD has set up a Special Programme for Africa (SPA) which accounts for 36 of the world's 47 least developed countries. Targeting mostly small farmers, the Fund has been focusing on better utilization of water resources, soil conservation and the promotion of traditional drought-resistant crops. The Fund has spent more than \$282 million, mostly in concessional low-interest loans, to finance these projects. The terms of the loans are more favourable than any offered by the best state-run and commercial banks in these countries.

The success stories cover not only Africa but also Asia, the Middle East and the Caribbean. In 1982, IFAD provided assistance to a project in north China under which 9,000 hectares of saline land were reclaimed and brought under irrigation and an additional 5,000 hectares of waste land were converted into forests and orchards. In the semi-arid deserts of Yemen, the IFAD-assisted Wadi Beihan Agricultural Development Project has virtually tripled the output of cereal, vegetable and citrus products.

“the success stories”

The future goals

As it moves into its next 50 years, the UN has to pursue a new agenda for development, avoiding the mistakes of the past and gearing itself to meet the social and economic needs of the future.

Coordinating all of the UN's development activities in a single body may be one of the answers to the problems that continue to plague the UN. The single most important factor in its field activities, however, is funding.

The question that cries out for an answer is whether the UN really has the clout to set its own development agenda or whether the agenda is set by Western donors who hold the purse-strings. In the post-Cold War period, Western nations have been imposing new conditionalities and restrictions on development assistance. The UN is caught in the middle of a political shooting match between developed and developing nations.

During 1987-94, voluntary military cuts by both developed and developing nations are estimated to have saved about \$935 billion. But no one has succeeded in tracking down this sizeable 'peace dividend'. The vanishing 'peace dividend' is one of the biggest mysteries of the post-Cold War era. UNDP has estimated that an annual reduction of three per cent in global defence spending during the period 1995-2000 could produce another saving of nearly \$460 billion - money that could be diverted from the military to development.

In the late 1990s, the developing world will also continue to grapple with problems such as dumping, new tariff barriers, and social and environmental clauses in trade pacts barring Third World products from industrial nations. With the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), there is apprehension that the poorer developing nations stand to lose in the short run.

The positive results in new trade opportunities are far from commensurate with the additional obligations under new multilateral disciplines such as services, foreign investments and intellectual property rights. A study by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) shows that

short-term benefits will go mostly to industrial nations. The African countries alone are expected to suffer potential losses amounting to about \$2.6 billion annually.

The right to development is a basic human right, with every nation having primary responsibility for its own development strategies. The UN's responsibility is to provide guidance, technical expertise and development assistance to help implement these strategies.

The UN's development agenda continues to cover a wide range of activities, including long-term social and economic development and post-crisis reconstruction and rehabilitation. If it is to succeed, it will also have to be able to deal effectively, and be given the resources needed for the job, with the full range of issues relating to population, the status of women, child survival, the environment, drug control, and housing and urban management. Nevertheless, at the same time that Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali argues that peace and development are inseparable, in reality during the post-Cold War era, the UN has been forced to spend as much money on peacekeeping as on social and economic development.

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Governments are turning to prevention rather than cure in the fight against disease.
A helicopter sprays the breeding site of the oncho fly which causes river blindness.