

Marking 75 years of peace and development

[Rubina Abu Zeinab-Chahine](#)

The year 2020 marks the 75th commemoration of the United Nations. In 1945, after World War II was over, countries around the globe chose to change the course of history and committed to building an enduring peace. The establishment of UNESCO came weeks after the signing of the UN foundational charter and focused on “building peace in the minds of women and men.” Seventy-five years later, improving people’s prosperity remains one of the main principles of the UN.

However, the global understanding of “development” has been evolving over the years. The first usage of the word “development” was to define the progress of nations from “underdevelopment” to “development” by US President Harry Truman in 1949; it was the first time “underdevelopment” was used in this context. At the time, 2 billion people were living in countries characterized as “underdeveloped.” Truman’s announcement significantly affected the idea of development.

While the United Nations was established to offer humanitarian assistance, foreign aid marked the very beginning of successful international cooperation and solidarity within the post-war period. The Marshall Plan, in 1948, was intended to re-establish the economies of 17 western and southern European states in order to shape stable conditions for law-based foundations to persevere.

In addition to the creation of UNSECO, the Marshall Plan, the first UN development decade, witnessed the creation of the International Monetary Fund and also the Molotov Plan. In 1945, the IMF became an official entity with 29 member countries, having as its initial goal “the reconstruction of the international payments’ system.” Two years later, the Molotov Plan was created in 1947 so as to supply aid to rebuild the countries in Eastern Europe that had been politically and economically affected. The initiatives of the first UN decade birthed a common vision for international cooperation, global development and shared values that continue to impact development to this today.

Development is extremely influential in organizing and shaping human life. In fact, this powerful word shaped a new culture through which experience, existence and relationships are comprehended. At whatever point it is used, it is identified with growth, progress, evolution and maturation.

If development is the right thing, why then is the gap between rich and poor widening? What are the results of the last 70 years of development since Truman’s statement and 75 years after the foundation of the UN?

The psychotherapist Jane Gilbert contended in 2004 that “in 1960 countries of the North were 20 times richer than those of the South and by 1980, 46 times richer. By 2000, the highest fifth of the population had 86 percent of the world’s GDP.” Today, two-thirds of the world’s population still ought to accept themselves as underdeveloped to receive development aid.

The flare-up of the coronavirus pandemic has put a focus on foreign aid. What are donors doing? What is the amount of aid available? Where is the aid going? And is it targeting those most in need? To what extent can the global response adjust to the current realities? Are aid and development finance programmed, dispersed and measured in a transparent and accountable manner?

In spite of the fact that we would not know how this emergency will impact politics, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted a brutal focus on the size of development challenges. Its unfavorable effect on poverty and inequality could, in the long run, lead to increased social instability and impact how citizens see their state. Chatham House, a world-leading policy institute, states in a recent publication that “COVID-19 will shape the relationship between citizens and the state.”

After 75 years, development brings the importance of positive change away from inferior and superior or worse and better. The aspiration today is for perseverance and sustainability. Notwithstanding, progress is hard to sustain in the face of various pressures that reverse many years of development gains.

The world was not even on target for the 2030 goal before COVID-19, and progress was easing back. Today, the crisis is uncovering fragilities, rising inequalities, systemic gender discrimination, inadequate social protection, fragmented health services, food insecurity, social isolation, health emergency, stagnant wages and absence of youth opportunities.

“Can we avoid a lost decade of development?” is a trending question.

People are losing dignity, opportunity and expectation. Working better requires transforming the development model. The decisions the world makes now on its way to recovery will shape the direction of sustainable development for quite a long time to come.

It is fundamental to get the insights and the verifiable experience of 75 years of development policy examination to inform a post-development model that will prevent development from heading off course.

Rubina Abu Zeinab–Chahine is executive director at the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development.