

CHAPTER 6

ADDRESSING THE NORTH/SOUTH DIVIDE

by Jakob Lund

Almost a decade of North/South dialogue (so-called) seems to have reached a point where neither side has any more to say to the other. North and South are like two people in a Harold Pinter play: there they both sit talking right past one another, repeating to themselves and for their own satisfaction the words and phrases they have already used to each other countless times before. *UK economist Susan Strange, mid-1980s*

The Costs of Division

Susan Strange's comment quoted above is almost as valid today as it was in the 1980s: Now, after more than two additional decades of attempts at dialogue on development and other directly or tangentially related political issues, the two contending sides don't seem to have anything new to say to overcome their disagreements on priorities or on fully implementing agreements that have been reached, as is so clearly documented by facts and analyses provided in previous chapters. This ongoing North/South divide not only increases world tension, but also more often than not results in inaction, stalemates and watered down resolutions in the General Assembly, incapable of stemming escalating world crises. As previously noted, a Northern diplomat pointedly encapsulated this conundrum with his remark that: "We do so little when we could do so much."

What is worse, in many ways the divide seems to have deepened over the last years. In *The United Nations System: The Policies of Member States*, Gene Lyons wrote: "The annual session of the General Assembly (...) has been reduced to a meaningless and repetitive debate," adding that: "If East-West tensions have abated, North/South relations in the United Nations have become more complex and tendentious."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Chadwick F. Alger, Gene Martin Lyons, John E. Trent: *The United Nations System: the Policies of Member States*, 1995, United Nations University Press, p. 44

In 2007, Puchala et al wrote that: “Pushing the present status quo into the future will likely polarize world politics further along First World-Third World lines and, thus render the international organizations like the UN even less authoritative and effective (...)”¹⁵⁰ Similarly, in a 2002 article on the North/South divide, Malone and Hagman argued that the divide has hampered action on important issues and even at times put “the relevance of the organization in question.”¹⁵¹ Commenting on the emergence and increasing influence of the G20, a Northern delegate told the Center that with respect to the UN: “there is a reason why the G20 was formed: you can’t get anything done here.”¹⁵²

Despite recent changes in the global political dynamics that provided some of the larger developing countries stronger roles in intergovernmental negotiations and improved access to clubs that were hitherto reserved for developed nations, it is clear that the North/South divide will likely continue to undermine the effectiveness of the UN system, most particularly in the GA.

Based on interviews that were conducted with diplomats from each side, this chapter documents the mistrust and misunderstandings between the North and the South. Furthermore, a number of previous and possible future efforts to address the North/South divide are explored.

Mistrust and Misunderstandings

One thing that becomes clear when talking to Northern delegates is that there is very little genuine understanding about the G-77’s aims and inner workings. There are many grudges, misconceptions and even questionable assumptions on behalf of the North when it comes to the G-77. For instance, delegates from the North have told the Center that it is often unclear to them when the members of the

¹⁵⁰ Puchala et al, p. 194

¹⁵¹ Malone & Hagman, 2002, p.1 The authors argue in this article that the event of 9/11 contributed to the North/South divide fading somewhat.

¹⁵² It should be noted that in the Second Committee, the division mostly refers to the G-77/EU debate, although that is oftentimes a proxy for a wider North/South line of division. In the Third Committee, partly because the G-77 does not act as cohesively as a bloc, the line is drawn with a broader pencil.

G-77 are speaking for the group and when they are speaking for their individual countries. One delegate speculated that the group may at times encourage its members to make individual statements in order to slow down the process.

Other delegates have said that some proposals, while not having an official G-77 stamp on them, in effect seem to be G-77 brainchildren.

One Northern European diplomat told the Center that, having spent 18 months at her country's Mission to the UN, she still finds it difficult to understand the G-77. "There is no predictability," this delegate opined, obviously frustrated. "What is it the G-77 wants? I don't know. They mostly say "no" to proposals. But what is their ideal scenario? I don't know." Another delegate acknowledged that: "There is definitely a big gap between developed and developing countries. But I've never really given much thought on how to bridge that gap." Unfortunately, this may be the most prevalent attitude amongst delegates.

One of the most frequent complaints from the North is that many of the developed countries have productive and constructive bilateral dialogues with their colleagues from G-77 countries that disappear when dealing with the G-77 as a group. One Scandinavian delegate said: "the weird thing is that at bilateral meetings, we can agree on developmental policies." Another told the Center: "we have a suspicion that 50% of the time, the G-77 doesn't speak with the mandate of and as instructed by their governments. We know, from talking to capitals, that some of these policies are not their national policies." Several Northern diplomats expressed frustration with knowing that many G-77 countries' national policies are actually much closer to general Northern stances than those the G-77 as a whole will accept.

Before delving further into Northern complaints and their perceptions of the G-77, however, it is important to note that rough generalizations and assumptions are not unique to them. The delegates we have spoken to from G-77 countries have made similar type statements about their colleagues from the North. The most oft-used ones contend that the North's primary goals are to impose Western values, to continue their economic dominance, and to avoid providing resources to the South for capacity-building. Furthermore,

the G-77 believes that developed countries are engaged in a mission to split up the G-77 at every opportunity.

A few diplomats from developed countries interviewed by the Center have said that they oftentimes wish they could just call the capital of an individual G-77 country and get a concrete answer about its national policies. But circumventing UN delegates—particularly Ambassadors—is not *comme il faut* at the UN. One Northern delegate told the Center that her country experienced a souring relationship with an African country after attempting this strategy in a negotiation relating to Financing for Development (FFD). Nonetheless, some Northern countries do employ this strategy, and particularly the US has been known to raise certain issues at high-level summits where ministers and Heads of State are present, thus circumventing the regular UN processes. According to one source, the US has also often inundated G-77 capitals with faxes relaying their specific concerns.

As described in chapter 3 on the Second Committee, there is an explicit division between developed and developing countries when it comes to FFD. The division, however, seems to go beyond ideological concerns. One European delegate told the Center: “the suspicion we have is that the South will use any opportunity to skew the conversation into ODA, and they are quite often successful at this. Partly because we in the North have a bad conscience about that issue.” A Nordic delegate reflects on the divide within the development negotiations: “We feel they say: ‘make it all happen for us,’ but that’s probably not what they think they say. And we say we want aid effectiveness, but they hear: ‘We don’t want to give you any ODA.’ There are a lot of misunderstandings, I think.”

Several G-77 delegates have conveyed the understanding that the North does what it can to avoid responsibility for FFD. Northern delegates dismiss this claim insisting that they merely want better control of the money that is already being transferred from North to South. As explained by one Northern diplomat: “the big misunderstanding, I think, is that the South thinks we want to cut funds. We don’t want to cut funds: we want the funds in the system to last longer and be spent more effectively.” The G-77 does not buy that explanation, however. One Arab delegate told the Center: “I know everything the North says (regarding the G-77 just wanting

money from the North). But outsiders can't understand our situation of living in poverty. For us, this is reality: people live without food and housing. For them, this is just a theoretical discussion." Aside from the ODA discussions, the South also fears that the North is also attempting to cut other budgets through initiatives such as management reform and system-wide coherence.

The debate about FFD is very contentious and obviously loaded with preconceived notions of what the other side has or has not done. A Northern delegate told the Center: "It just doesn't make sense that so many developing countries are against aid effectiveness, which is all about getting rid of corruption and making fertile ground for private business, when, at the same time, they fail to attract FDI and blame us for it." It is clear that Northern delegates feel great frustration with what they see as the South's failure to "catch up" economically with the developed world and they believe the governments of the developing countries, who have been too slow at implementing good governance reforms, are to blame.

A few G-77 delegates have told the Center that they feel the North—particularly the US—uses diplomats who are too inexperienced and who are given too narrow a mandate and hardly any authority to negotiate meaningfully with the G-77. One African delegate told the Center that, "too many countries send junior diplomats who have to consult with their capitals on everything. That means there's not a lot of trust and no real progress because the negotiations are stalled all the time." The delegate further complained: "there used to be more senior people around for these negotiations." A delegate from an EU country echoed these sentiments, admitting that some Northern countries use diplomats with too little experience. "It's not always that the groups are disagreeing about the substance; sometimes they're simply insecure because they don't understand the others' positions. They know everyone's trying to trick everyone else and when they don't know the subjects well enough, they get insecure and defensive and then the process gets stuck. More senior people can talk more boldly about their countries' positions. If you understand the other one's position, it's easier to propose a compromise," he stated.

A Latin American G-77 delegate specified to the Center: "it obstructs the process when people have to consult with capitals. The

US delegates never have authority to make any decisions—you negotiate for two hours and then they say: well, we have to run it by Washington.” Confronted by this argument, however, a Northern delegate turned it on its head, telling the Center: “Because the G-77 is so big and inflexible, once they’ve finally reached agreement in the group, they can’t change it, which makes negotiations very difficult.”

The Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) also seems to cause a lot of confusion for developed countries. One Northern delegate told the Center that: “The JCC is a strange animal and no one really seems to understand it. For me, the JCC is like NAM taking over the G-77.”

Addressing Mistrust and Misunderstandings and Improving Collaboration

Addressing North/South mistrust and misunderstandings has been extremely difficult, reflecting the long-lasting inability of developed and developing countries to significantly reconcile their opposing positions in a meaningful way. Nonetheless, we believe there are things that can and should be done in order to improve the cooperation between the North and the South by enhancing their mutual understanding of each other’s motivations and goals.

Bridge-builders

Member States, the UN Secretary-General, Chairs of UN conferences, as well as outsiders such as think tanks, NGOs and other experts have thus far tried to build bridges between the North and the South.

Moderate countries in the EU as well as in the G-77 can play the bridge-builder’s role. Several delegates from both the North and the South have told the Center that identifying those individuals that are ready and able to influence their own bloc is a big part of their work. However, what some see as bridge-building may look to others more like attempts to have delegates break ranks with the rest of their group.

Others point out that countries that fall outside the EU and the G-77 can help in the process of bridging the divide. The CANZ countries are brought up as effective intermediaries between the two groups. One Northern delegate said that these countries, because of

their “non-aligned” status, are in a good position to talk to both camps. However, on issues such as human rights and management reform, there is no doubt that the CANZ countries are much more in line with the EU than with the G-77.

Mexico has been heralded as a potential important moderator because it is seen in many ways to have a foot in each camp, reflecting its economic growth as well as geographical location between North and South America. Some delegates, both Northern and Southern, have told the Center they suspect Mexico regrets having left the G-77, but that seemingly does not take away from their status as moderator. In fact, it appears that their possible regret over leaving the group of developing nations may just be what makes Mexico trustworthy to the group. A Secretariat staffer told the Center: “Mexico is a strong bridge-builder because they’re still so close to G-77.”

Switzerland, which joined the UN only recently, also has made efforts to act as moderator and it was hoped that their fresh take on UN negotiations and image of neutrality would be helpful. One expert explained that Switzerland, for instance, has tried to improve the dialogue in the Fifth Committee by organizing retreats, involving Ambassadors, delegates, and relevant UN officials. “It was appreciated,” one source explained, “though any positive effects wore off quickly.”

The Role of Individuals

Aside from the geopolitical credence different countries may have in the bridge-building process, individual delegates play similarly important roles. As described above, there are complaints that some countries use diplomats that are too inexperienced, and this certainly does not ease divisions between the blocs.

One Northern delegate told the Center: “It definitely helps to have good relations with G-77 delegates. It’s a lot about individuals. You have to be able to identify the bridge-builders from the other side and approach them.” Of course, as described above, some Southern diplomats may perceive these “approaches” as arm-twisting or vote-poaching.

Just as individuals can build bridges, they can also tear them down. John Bolton, former US Ambassador to the UN during parts

of George W. Bush's administration, is widely believed to have strengthened the unity within the G-77 as a result of his polarizing stances. The same can be said of the perception held by the North with respect to Sudan's Deputy Permanent Representative, Ambassador Lumumba Stanislaus-Kaw Di-Aping. One European delegate told the Center: "Di-Aping was hated by the North but also considered to be very effective in relaying G-77 positions." His biting remarks at climate change negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009 drew much media attention for G-77 positions, though often they were also considered exaggerated or eccentric—for instance, when he drew links between climate change and the holocaust. In the end, his style hardened the divide between the developed and the developing countries and even caused problems within the G-77. After a briefing to NGOs, for example, he had to apologize to South Africa as he had suggested this country hindered regional consensus.¹⁵³

One individual that was seen as potentially able to bridge this gap of understanding was former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Before Ban Ki-moon took over, Kofi Annan put much effort into improving the cooperation between Member States of the UN. Perhaps his most noteworthy efforts were the summits held in 2000 and 2005, but his other initiatives, such as the creation of expert panels—comprising leaders and experts from both the North and the South—and his support for system-wide coherence, exhibited his desire for genuine and thorough reform of the UN system. However, as indicated in previous chapters, his efforts have not had quite the desired outcome because Member States lack the political will to reach more meaningful compromises and to implement the measures required.

Ban Ki-moon's tenure as Secretary-General has, according to various diplomats and observers, thus far been characterized by a lack of controversy more than anything else, and an image clings to him of having been elected to his post because some superpowers found him to be the least threatening of all candidates. Recently, he may have changed that narrative a bit with his support for an independent investigation into Israel's behavior in the "flotilla

¹⁵³ *Sudanese Ambassador Apologises to South Africa*, by Leonie Joubert, Independent Foreign Service, 14 December 2009

incident” as well as his outspoken criticism of the sinking of a South Korean submarine. Regardless of the past and current Secretary-Generals’ successes or lack thereof, the Secretary-General is one of the few people that ideally should command sufficient respect, influence, and support of most Member States to allow him or her to bring together differing groups of Member States in genuine dialogues that lead to more effective compromise solutions. In this regard, the selection process of the UN Secretary-General should be more transparent and more actively engage all UN Member States.

In addition to outside mediators, key diplomats from both the North and the South could and should help to curb unconstructive negotiations in the GA. The distrust is not just a consequence of a benign lack of understanding between the North and South, but also often results from deliberately vague and misleading approaches to the negotiations by both parties. If the Member States decided to be more transparent in their dealings with one another, the need for outside mediators would be less pronounced. Ideally, influential Ambassadors would agree to more transparency and clarity in the negotiations, to the benefit of everyone, and make sure this approach would trickle down through the system.

Keeping Open Minds - Flexibility

As with interpersonal relationships, interregional negotiations can also suffer at times from preconceived notions and a lack of openness. A Northern diplomat told the Center he often found that the groups do not really talk to each other, but merely exchange statements with one another, all because they presume to know each other’s positions from the get-go. “We often misread each other as groups,” he said. “I think I have come to learn that the G-77 really doesn’t like being told what to do.” Another Northern delegate said: “We should have more dialogue with the G-77; that’s the only way forward. Oftentimes, even just talking to one another and showing respect can make a difference. Especially because many of the smaller states don’t have fixed opinions on many issues.” One observer noted that such dialogues could easily take place in-between sessions.

Acknowledging a certain level of presumption on behalf of the North, Bella Bird, head of the Governance and Social Development

Group of Britain's Department for International Development, told the Inter Press Service (IPS) that, "Sometimes, as international donors, we come in with our own ideas, rather than listen to the needs of the countries, and what we're committing to today is to change that, and be much more focused on what countries themselves say are their priorities." It is not apparent that this sentiment is shared by all Ms. Bird's Northern colleagues, but it is certainly one that is thoroughly appreciated among Southern colleagues. The extent to which the South considers the North to be arrogantly dictating policies based on their own perceptions is illustrated by Timor-Leste's President, Jose Ramos-Horta, who said: "Maybe some donors think they hold the Pope's infallibility virtue (...) Some donors might think, 'We are a bit like the Pope—we are the ones who know what is best.'" ¹⁵⁴

Aside from being ready and open to have frank dialogues with the other side, the issue of openness is also applied to new ways of thinking about the issues. A non-EU European delegate told the Center: "There's a lack of creativity—everyone always brings the same old ideas to the table. The G-77 has several concerns about the Paris Club, for example, but they always just bring the same proposals to the table that they know we won't accept."¹⁵⁵ Another Northern delegate said: "It might be helpful to change the working methods (of the Committees). We always have meetings in the same old forum with prepared statements. The G-77 always puts out the first draft, for example. Perhaps the Secretariat could do that: they're more middle of the road than any of us." Another delegate from the South opined that there are too many knee-jerk reactions and habits in the diplomatic community: "We have all become so accustomed to anticipating what the other one thinks and is going to propose. That makes us defensive and means that we will stick to our positions rather than daring to venture into other positions and being open. We always know, for example, that our partners will add 'good governance' to any proposal we make and so we have a response ready to that even before they bring it up."

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.ipsterraviva.net/UN/currentNew.aspx?new=7438>

¹⁵⁵ The Paris Club, according to their website, is an informal group of official creditors whose role is to find coordinated and sustainable solutions to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor countries (www.clubdeparis.org/en/)

It is interesting to note that the habit of decision-making in blocs seems to be self-reinforcing: the more the EU, the G-77 or other groups each vote as coherent units, the more it legitimizes this behavior for other groups. And when the G-77, for example, knows that the EU will vote as a bloc on an issue, there is little sense for them to do anything differently. This type of group-think is obviously damaging and locks both the developed and developing countries in firm positions that are difficult, if not politically impossible, to deviate from. Renegotiating positions in large blocs takes time, hindering compromise and contributing to gridlock.

An illustration of the lack of appetite for dialogue was given by a G-77 delegate who told the Center: “When Sudan took over as Chair, they didn’t understand why the EU called them and asked for appointments. They were told it could be helpful to meet with them and build relationships but they were very hesitant. Perhaps because of other political issues Sudan had with some developed countries.” On the other hand, a representative from the G-77’s Chair’s office said: “There are some things the North doesn’t even want to negotiate because it is a “matter of principle.” Is that how we move ahead? I don’t think so.” This delegate was specifically referring to human rights negotiations, where many in the South feel the North is dogmatic, judgmental and inflexible.

Informal Groups

“Informal” is certainly a concept that is highly valued at the UN. Informal meetings, hearings, and consultative processes abound and it is no surprise that informal groups are formed as well. Furthermore, at the UN there is informal and then there is *informal*. Informal working groups, for example, may be formal enough to have websites or at least openly identified members and regular, scheduled meetings.¹⁵⁶ There are also, however, groups that are so informal that very few outside these groups know about them. Several delegates have told the Center that these groups—both the

¹⁵⁶ For example, see the Informal Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction: www.un.org/Depts/los/biodiversityworkinggroup/biodiversityworkinggroup.htm, and the Informal Working Group on General Issues relating to Sanctions: <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/committees/sanctions/index.html>

informal and the *really* informal—can be very useful in furthering meaningful dialogue between the North and South.

As a Scandinavian delegate told the Center: “Efforts from Groups of Friends are helpful in bringing out people from different groups, who can then go back and lobby their own groups.” A Southern delegate also said: “more interaction in informal settings would be helpful. Places where we can actually hear each other’s thoughts. Groups of Friends, in particular, are helpful.” But another Southern delegate covering the Third Committee told the Center that he had no knowledge of a Group of Friends or a “cheese club.”¹⁵⁷ But, he added: “it sounds like a good idea. At the end of the day we’re all friends.”

However, a non-EU European delegate told the Center that: “cross-regional groups are an interesting way of bringing forth new ideas and unheard voices. But the G-77 doesn’t like these groups because they break their unity.” This presents one of the dilemmas with attempts to bridge the North/South divide: oftentimes bridging the divide will lead to a new divide: within at least one of the blocs. An outside observer questioned the usefulness of the Groups altogether: “Groups of friends can be helpful, but they had one for climate change and look at what happened in Copenhagen...”

One European delegate explained that sometimes it is so contentious for G-77 countries to be seen with Northern delegates that “we meet at our private homes.” She further said: “We can’t make these groups official, because then we’d have to invite the official Chairs (of negotiations) and higher-ranking diplomats.” She added that, nonetheless, these so-called wine and cheese clubs can be official enough to be addressed by the Secretary-General and that the concept is generally, and purposefully, quite vaguely defined.

Somewhere between the high-level initiatives and the informal groups are retreats organized by organizations such as the Stanley Foundation or the International Peace Institute. One delegate said that these retreats are often useful but “sometimes countries just come with prepared statements, which defies the whole purpose.” These retreats most often target Permanent or Deputy Permanent Representatives, which always lends an official air to any event.

¹⁵⁷ Cheese club is used as a pseudonym for informal groups that are so informal that delegates prefer to simply meet under the pretense of having wine and cheese together.

Power

The power dynamics in the General Assembly are complex and can play to the advantage of each of the blocs at different times. When united, the South clearly holds a numerical majority, while the North has the “power of the purse.” This plays out in frustrating maneuvers to block or delay decisions; to prevent real compromise; or to arm-twist or break up the opposing group. Each group seems to believe they they can turn the power battle to its advantage. Commenting on this to the Center, a Northern diplomat said, “In the end, the South needs us more than we need them.” On the other hand, Southern delegates are typically quite confident about their numerical advantage.

Several G-77 delegates have expressed their frustration with what they perceive to be Northern attempts to break up their cohesion. They claim that the North uses every opportunity to drive a wedge between different factions of the G-77 with equal measures of coercion and conniving. The US, they like to point out, is known to keep records of how countries vote at the UN—particularly whether or not they side with the US—and many assert that this list correlates surprisingly well with the amount of financial or military aid countries receive.

The big debate about values, mainly carried out in the Third Committee but also present, to some degree, throughout the UN system, is one that intensely divides the North and South and exposes the disparities in having numerical or financial power. Developed countries do what they can to name and shame certain countries in the South for human rights violations, whereas developing countries perceive the North to lead an agenda of hypocrisy and divisiveness. An Arab delegate told the Center: “There needs to be more understanding of the sensitivity of some of these issues. If you always challenge someone, and if you don’t show them respect, they will end up blocking the negotiations. You can’t just put pressure and threaten them—that is not what negotiation is about.” This quote illuminates one of the main grudges of the South: the power of the purse so obviously is held by the developed countries, particularly through voluntary funding of certain UN bodies and agencies (as discussed in the chapter on the Second Committee).

These claims are countered by developed countries who like to contend that a divided South would be more difficult to deal with than a united G-77. One delegate from a European country told the Center: “We don’t always try to break up the G-77. If the group was broken up, it would make negotiations almost impossible.” Another, when asked if developed countries would prefer the G-77 simply to vanish, responded: “I’m not sure. We would probably be able to agree on some issues that we can’t now, but it would also make negotiations really difficult.” The unity of the G-77, however, does present a huge challenge for the North and it seems that, in essence, developed countries would prefer the group stay together but with less coherence and unity than is currently the case. A Northern delegate told the Center: “Yemen’s priority (as Chair) seems to be to keep the group together, which could make it really difficult for us because they’ll have to unite around a very low common denominator.” Commenting on the issue of the North attempting to break up the G-77, a Secretariat staff member told the Center: “Perhaps if the smaller countries—particularly the poorer ones—were better represented in the G-77, it wouldn’t be so tempting or easy for the North to try to break the group up as often.”

Most developing countries dismiss these allegations as mere frustration on behalf of developed countries with the fact that the G-77 has such a vast majority and that they at times use this majority to win important votes. An outside observer told the Center that while the EU is very preoccupied with appearing to be playing a fair game, the G-77 has no such pretensions. This considerably heightens the tensions as the EU finds the G-77 to be opaque, unpredictable, and inflexible. The G-77 will say that the diversity within the group demands thorough discussion and at times results in the group not being able to change its stance without renegotiating with the entire group.

Another frequently mentioned complaint of developed countries is that a few hardliners control the G-77 and that this subgroup blocks any initiative it does not like. One European delegate told the Center: “It seems that some of the troublemakers¹⁵⁸—particularly

¹⁵⁸ a euphemism oftentimes used by developed countries to describe the most influential countries from the G-77, particularly Egypt, Cuba and other ALBA countries, Sudan and a handful other countries.

Cuba—are at times motivated by ideology, but definitely not always.” What this statement illustrates is that developed countries consider the actions of some G-77 countries to be blocking for the sake of blocking. In other words, developing countries abuse their numerical majority to block initiatives they do not like simply because they can, rather than attempting to negotiate a solution that would be acceptable to everyone. A diplomat from a developed country told the Center: “The biggest problem with the G-77 is the silent majority. The group is run by a few countries and the rest is just there.” Another said: “As long as the extremists (another label used by developed countries to describe the group of most influential countries. Another often-heard label is “the radicals”) are able to control the G-77, it’s really difficult to build a bridge.”

Not all delegates from the G-77 necessarily reject these claims off hand. One of them, in an interview with the Center, agreed that the G-77’s groupthink can be counterproductive. He went on to say, however, that: “the EU has become so disciplined that nothing can break them apart.” After some thought, this delegate added: “in fact, it would be interesting to hear more about the divergent views inside the EU, too. Bloc thinking is never good.”

Overcoming the Power Struggle

Part of what fuels the North/South struggle at the General Assembly pertains to the overall structure of the UN and the relative lack of power given to the GA by the UN Charter compared to the Security Council—though some would argue that the GA inherently has sufficient power but fails to use it.¹⁵⁹ The ongoing efforts of reforming the Council, therefore, could alter this dynamic, as might efforts to “revitalize” the GA. The so-called G4¹⁶⁰ proposal for reforming the Security Council would mean that at least four developing countries would get permanent seats in the Council, with two of these for Africa. Similarly, suggested changes of the working methods of the Council as well as improving its relationship with the GA

¹⁵⁹ See for instance, “Decision Making, Authority and Power of the General Assembly: An Interview with H. E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa.” www.centerforunreform.org/node/272

¹⁶⁰ Brazil, Germany, India, Japan

could change the power dynamics between developed and developing countries.¹⁶¹

Civil society organizations could do more to ensure that countries keep their promises and commitments. Many feel, for example, that the North has been let off the hook too easily with regards to most of the Northern countries' continuous promises to dedicate 0.7% of their GNI for ODA. More NGO involvement at the GA from large development organizations could serve as the checks and balances that are in many ways missing at the UN.

Furthermore, as we have seen, several of the people interviewed for this book are under the impression that the South takes advantage of their numerical majority every chance they get to the detriment of the North—and, some would argue, to the detriment of the entire UN system. From the perspective of the South, however, if they felt that their voices really counted at the UN they might be more flexible in their dealings instead of taking advantage of every opportunity they get to block Northern proposals as their only means of exercising power.

Form or Substance?

Aside from differences caused by misperceptions and power dynamics, the North and the South have substantially different priorities, as has been discussed in the Second, Third and Fifth Committee chapters. One Scandinavian Deputy Permanent Representative told the Center: “In the end, I don’t think it [the North/South divide] is about trust or understanding or anything like that. It’s about completely different goals on issues such as human rights and the road to development.”

A “tit-for-tat” reciprocity process is one way of addressing the actual policy disagreements between the blocs. This is, in a way, the implicit idea behind the MDGs: The North must commit to taking their share of the responsibility for financing development, while the South must commit to ensuring transparent and democratic governance. Another reciprocity discussion that could help bridge the gap would be the issue of regional representation. However, with

¹⁶¹ For more on Security Council reform, see www.centerforunreform.org/node/23

respect to this issue, one former G-77 Chair is not hopeful. He stated in an interview with the Center that equitable regional representation of staff would not be an issue high enough on everybody's agenda to make a deal possible regarding management reform, for example. He believes that the UN should be development oriented, not "man-oriented," and that many staffers from the South, especially when educated in the North, do not actually bring a Southern perspective to the Secretariat. When it comes to more favorable decisions for the South in terms of hiring high-level Secretariat staff, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Brazil, and Argentina usually "get the cream."

Seeking Points of Convergence

Throughout the years, numerous efforts have been made to overcome the North/South divide. None of them, to date, have been overly successful in bringing the sides together. Below is a representative sample of initiatives and meetings that have to a large extent been innovative and inspiring, often shaping or even revising the debates on global issues.

The Brandt Commission

The "Independent Commission on International Development Issues," as the Brandt Commission was officially titled, was put forward by Robert McNamara in 1977 when he was President of the World Bank. The Commission was chaired by the former Chancellor of West Germany, Willy Brandt, and was made up equally of representatives from the North and South.¹⁶² The Commission did not, however, include communist countries.

The 21 members of the Commission were economists, former Presidents and Ministers—as well as the then publisher of the

¹⁶² Members: Willy Brandt (Chair), Abdlatif Y. Al-Hamad (Kuwait), Rodrigo Botero Montoya (Colombia), Antoine Kipsa Dakoure (Upper Volta), Eduardo Frei Montalva (Chile), Katherine Graham (USA), Edward Heath (UK), Amir H. Jamal (Tanzania), Lakshmi Kant Jha (India), Khatijah Ahmad (Malaysia), Adam Malik (Indonesia), Haruki Mori (Japan), Joe Morris (Canada), Olof Palme (Sweden), Peter G. Peterson (USA), Edgard Pisani (France), Shridath Ramphal (Guyana), Layachi Yaker (Algeria).
Ex-Officio Members: Jan Pronk (Netherlands), Goran Ohlin (Sweden), Dragoslav Avramovic (Yugoslavia).

Washington Post, Katherine Graham. These individuals studied: “(...) the grave and global issues arising from the economic and social disparities of the world community and (...suggested) ways of promoting adequate solutions to the problems involved in development and in attacking absolute poverty.”¹⁶³

They specifically examined the problems plaguing poor countries in an attempt to identify clear corrective measures that could garner international support. For the Commission, global agreement was seen as both “essential and possible,” and it sought to break through the political impasse that then divided—and as we have seen, still divides—the North and the South. As such, the themes and assumptions that guided the Commission’s consequent reports were:

- Cooperation in accelerating development by governments in the North and South is mutually advantageous.
- Individual developing states have the primal role in fostering development, but all States, including in the North and in the Communist bloc share responsibility for promoting it and making changes in the international economic system.
- To achieve accelerated economic development on a global scale, there must be a massive transfer of resources, while official development financing sources should be broadened and provided more automatically.
- A greater voice for developing countries is needed in the international economic system.
- The dangers of economic crises require that swift agreements are made, though policy and institutional reforms should also be pursued with an eye on the long-run.

The Brandt Reports titled, *North/South: A Program for Survival and Common Crisis: North/South Cooperation for World Recovery*, published in 1980 and 1983 respectively, received ample publicity and broad-based acceptance for their proposals on how best to reduce the economic disparity between the North and South. The Commission identified shared interests and articulated various policy options for adoption and “called for a full-scale restructuring of the global economy, along with a new approach to the problems of development, including an emergency program to end poverty in developing nations.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ <http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/8976.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ The Brandt Equation, 21st Century Blueprint for the New Global Economy

In its first report, the Commission came up with, among other things, a five-year Emergency Programme that was to span from 1980-1985. The programme promoted the transfer of resources to developing countries; an international energy strategy; a global food program; and international economic reforms.

- *Transfer of resources to developing countries.* The fundamental need identified by the Brandt Commission was for resources to be transferred to the poorest countries affected by the economic crises of the early 1980's. Furthermore, the financing of debts and deficits of middle-income countries should also be a priority. To achieve this, rich countries should commit to giving 0.7 percent of their GNP by the end of the five-year term. Furthermore, lending by commercial institutions, the World Bank and Regional Development Banks should be increased and other transfer mechanism should also be utilized.
- *International Energy Strategy.* This strategy entailed ensuring supplies of oil, while also increasing conservation efforts, moderating price increases of oil and developing renewable sources of energy. Such a strategy was thought to require an agreement between the states that produced energy, rather than relying solely on the marketplace.
- *Global Food Program.* The goal of this program was to increase the level of production of food, especially in the Third World, thereby assuring a regular and sufficient supply of food. Simultaneously, a push was to be made at establishing a system that would assure long-term global food security. It was estimated to cost \$8 billion in aid each year.
- *International Economic Reforms.* Reforms of the monetary and financial systems were deemed necessary, as was the improvement of developing countries' conditions of trade in commodities and manufactures. Specifically, the Commission recommended that the following be studied:
 - a. Creation of a "World Development Fund."
 - b. Tax on international trade, military expenditures, arms exports and "global commons."
 - c. Broader sharing of power and decision-making in the World Bank and the IMF.
 - d. Increased lending by the World Bank and Regional Development Banks.
 - e. Liberalization of the international trading system.

- f. Sale of IMF gold to subsidize the cost of borrowing by developing nations.

Regretfully, most of the Brandt Commission's recommendations have not been realized, although several are still on the table.

Brundtland Commission - Concept of Sustainable Development

When the 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment was in its planning phase, developing countries expressed concern that decisions to protect the environment would create obstacles in the industrialization of their countries and as a result they were not keen to participate. However in June 1971, a panel of scientists and development experts met in Founex, Switzerland, and its report convincingly made the case that development and environment are not diametrically opposed and that in fact environmental problems could undermine development in the South.¹⁶⁵

The concept of sustainable development was defined by the Brundtland Commission, named after its Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland. Formally called the World Commission on Environment and Development, it was established in 1983 following GA resolution 38/161. In its report, *Our Common Future*, the Commission defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The Brundtland Commission concluded that "critical objectives" following from the concept of sustainable development were:

- reviving growth;
- changing the quality of growth;
- meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water, and sanitation;
- ensuring a sustainable level of population;
- conserving and enhancing the resource base;
- reorienting technology and management risk; and
- merging environment and economics in decision-making.

The concept of sustainable development has become widely accepted and it guided the 1992 *Earth Summit* in Brazil.

¹⁶⁵ See Maria Ivanova, page 29, in *Global Environmental Governance - Perspectives on the Current Debate*, Center for UN Reform Education, 2007

For Norichika Kanie, sustainable development in its broadest sense:

... calls for simultaneous and concerted efforts to deal with pollution, economic development, unequal distribution of economic resources, and poverty reduction. It contends that most social ills are non-decomposable, and that environmental degradation cannot be addressed without confronting those human activities that give rise to it.¹⁶⁶

According to one expert, the G-77 will invoke the concept when environmental issues are discussed but much less so when development is on the agenda.

Beijing World Conference on Women

As mentioned in the chapter on the Third Committee, the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995 was seen as a victory for women and civil society alike. It was also a victory for those that rooted for North/South cooperation because of the variety of issues they were able to agree on. The outcome of the Conference was accepted by consensus by the 189 governments present and remains the document referred to by the G-77 in all matters pertaining to women's rights. One source stressed that women's caucuses have had an extraordinary influence on international negotiations because "they are so well organized and tenacious."

New Diplomacy - Collaborations between Like-Minded States and NGOs

When the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Campaign to Ban Landmines in 1997, it was similarly seen as an enormous success for civil society. Some, however, also noted that it was a collaborative effort of governments from countries—especially Canada and Norway played pivotal roles—as well as civil society that made the Treaty a reality. The formation of a "coalition of like-minded states"—including countries from both the North and South—was crucial to creating the necessary momentum,¹⁶⁷ Of course, that the

¹⁶⁶ Norichika Kanie, page 69, in *Global Environmental Governance - Perspectives on the Current Debate*, Center for UN Reform Education, 2007

¹⁶⁷ Weiss, p. 156

issue of landmines has never been part of the agenda of the G-77 may explain why there was no bloc voting associated with the acceptance of the Treaty (unless one considers the so-called “P-3”¹⁶⁸ a bloc) and the 39 countries that currently have not ratified the treaty do not follow any traditional North/South divide. It is also noteworthy that the Ottawa Treaty banning the mines was negotiated outside the GA.

The establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is another example of how concerted efforts of like-minded countries and NGOs¹⁶⁹ can bring about meaningful results. The ICC negotiations started in the Sixth Committee of the GA. Against all expectations, the ICC was created by adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998 and entered into force in 2002. The Statute has now been ratified by 113 countries originating from both the North and the South, while an additional 37 countries have signed it but not yet ratified it. The Court can hold individuals accountable for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes when national jurisdictions cannot, or will not, do so.

While some claim that the Court disproportionately targets cases in African countries, the recent 10-year review showed that there is commitment to the Court stemming from all continents. Such widespread support makes it clear that international law is seen as important to both the North and the South. The Northern countries most skeptical of the Court, the US being the most prominent, seem to have softened their stances and the Southern countries most fervently opposed to the Court and its jurisdiction are, to some extent, those whose leaders fear indictment. The divide, therefore, is not along the traditional North/South line. In fact, the ICC has proven to be an institution that has flourished because of cross-continental cooperation. According to one source, when the Assembly of States Parties of the ICC meets at the UN in New York, negotiations are remarkably less polarized than is customary in the GA.

¹⁶⁸ China, Russia, the US

¹⁶⁹ The NGO Coalition for the International Criminal Court combines hundreds of human rights organizations from the North and South.

It is important to note that international law is not on the agenda of the G77, though it is an issue that NAM often addresses.

Monterrey Consensus

The 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, discussed in chapter 3, produced a series of agreements and commitments. The conference attracted the participation of more than fifty Heads of State as well as representatives from the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. This partnership for global development set out to “address the challenges of financing for development around the world, particularly in developing countries.”¹⁷⁰ Their goal was “to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth and promote sustainable development as we advance to a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system.”

The Consensus is remarkable in that it recognized the need for developing countries to take responsibility in reducing poverty as well as the need for developed nations to support this process by doing more to open up trade and to increase financial aid.

The Consensus made a distinction among developing countries with sufficiently trained human capital and infrastructure and those that received ODA. Reflecting the early G-77 agenda, trade was understood to be the “critical engine for growth.” It also drew attention to specific regions of the globe, such as landlocked developing countries and small island developing nations, which required special attention. Lastly, it recognized the need for a significant increase in aid for the developing world in order to achieve the MDGs. As such, donor nations should commit to giving 0.7 percent of their GNI in ODA.¹⁷¹

One European diplomat told the Center that during the Monterrey negotiations there were: “genuine and open discussions about working methods” and added: “we never have that anymore.” Another delegate said: “during the Monterrey Conference, a small group of diplomats who got along could agree on rules and policies.”

¹⁷⁰ Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development. Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002

¹⁷¹ http://siteresources.worldbank.org/KFDLP/Resources/461197-1122319506554/What_is_the_Monterrey_Consensus.pdf

There is almost a sense of longing when delegates talked about the Monterrey Conference and it is clear that, to many, this illustrates the possibility of cooperation and dialogue. The Monterrey Consensus is discussed further in the Second Committee chapter as well as later on in this chapter.

Millennium Development Goals

Perhaps the most expansive and pertinent example of cooperation is the MDGs. (See the previous chapters on the Second and Third Committees.) According to a former G-77 Ambassador, the attitude of the G-77 towards the MDGs has always been rather mixed. Some G-77 members grumble that the goals mostly demand action to be taken by developing countries towards achieving the goals and are insufficiently accompanied by commitments from developed countries. However, there are several interesting aspects to the goals: what is most relevant for this chapter is the fact that a consensus exists across the board at the UN that the MDGs are the number one priority for development. While some developing countries opine that the goals are not the sole answer to the challenges facing their nations, and while some developed countries seem to avoid taking their share of the responsibility seriously, there doesn't appear to be any disagreement on the validity and importance of the goals.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that none of these initiatives were spearheaded by the G-77, they represent genuine cooperation between developed and developing countries. These initiatives prove that even issues that are of great importance to both groups can be negotiated in a civilized manner and that reaching consensus—or near-consensus across the divide—is possible.

2005 World Summit

The 2005 *World Summit*—a follow-up to the Millennium Summit in 2000—is a striking example of how the North and South can create an outcome that incorporates priorities from all sides. The largest gathering of Heads of State ¹⁷² ever convened, it was described as, “a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take bold decisions in the areas

¹⁷² <http://www.un.org/esa/desa/desaNews/desa95.html>

of development, security, human rights and reform of the United Nations.”

However, unsurprisingly, the implementation of many of the proposals were far from easy due to the very divisions that were momentarily overcome in the adoption of the World Summit Outcome Document (WSOD). Furthermore, many from both the South and the North see the WSOD as lacking at best. One Southern delegate told the Center: “The North/South divide is getting a lot worse. The 2005 World Summit and [US Ambassador John] Bolton’s presence in general enhanced the division.” Bolton, arrived at the UN after it was felt that consensus had already been achieved and he insisted on many changes, especially in regard to management reform.

One remarkable aspect of the WSOD was that it formally introduced a new way of understanding humanitarian intervention, namely, the emerging norm known as the *Responsibility to Protect*. Unanimously adopted, the WSOD affirms the “primary and continuing legal obligations of states to protect their populations—whether citizens or not.” Paragraph 138 states, “Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it.” However, if the State is unable or unwilling to protect civilians, the responsibility falls upon the international community. If all diplomatic, humanitarian and peaceful means have been exhausted, the Security Council may deem that forceful intervention is necessary under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. World leaders flatly declared, “We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it.”¹⁷³

However, there are some countries in the South who believe that this new norm was never formally negotiated and that there no real mandate exists for it. As a result, these countries object to funding for related UN Secretariat posts, though the G-77 does not seem united in this regard.

¹⁷³http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=398

Another noteworthy endeavour, the WSOD led to the creating of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which seeks to help countries emerging from conflict move forward more effectively in their peacebuilding efforts, including general recovery, reconstruction and development. The Commission is an advisory body that is subsidiary to both the GA and the Security Council and is supported by a Peacebuilding Fund, financed by voluntary contributions. The Fund aims to ensure the immediate availability of resources for peacebuilding activities.

Human rights has been an ongoing area of contention between the North and South, as we have already seen, and even within the G-77 there is not always agreement in this regard. However, general agreement was created to create the Human Rights Council (UNHCR).

Four Nations Initiative

The purpose of the *Four Nations Initiative on Governance and Management of the UN*—formed by Chile, South Africa, Sweden, and Thailand—is to:

contribute to a UN governed and managed in a way that makes it better equipped to respond to tomorrow's challenges. For the UN to truly progress, more of Member States ideas and perspectives are necessary, particularly on governance issues. A continued dialogue is required together with in-depth consultations. An interactive process will contribute to building of trust and of a new compact.¹⁷⁴

The thinking behind this effort was the need for Member States themselves to explore specific new ideas in addition to those provided in reports from the Secretary-General. The 32 proposals formulated by the Initiative, focusing on how to: improve accountability and transparency in regard to the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of UN mandates; rationalize the budgetary process; and ensure that UN staff are hired and evaluated based on fair and transparent principles—were presented to Member States in 2007. The latter issue, in regard to human resources, was not initially part

¹⁷⁴ http://www.the4ni.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=29

of the effort, but was included to accommodate important concerns and priorities from the South.

Most of the issues covered by the proposals were already on the agenda of the Fifth Committee. One observer believes that the countries involved were not all equally committed to the project and added: "The proposals reflected true compromise on issues between the countries participating, but it never gained enough momentum to turn around a big tanker like the G-77." Nonetheless, the Initiative is a strong sign that cross-continental cooperation is possible. It should be taken into account, however, that the three developing countries involved all hold fairly politically and economically liberal views, which may have made their cooperation less groundbreaking than if Sweden had gotten, say, Libya, Myanmar and Venezuela on board for the Initiative.

Taking Stock

Looking back over the years, it becomes clear that most of the efforts described above remain aspirations to be attained rather than significant achievements made by the international community. As reported by the United Nations Development Program, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, the economic gap between the North and most countries in the South has markedly widened since 1980. The number of people suffering from hunger in developing countries rose from 500 to 600 million to 1 billion people. The ODA transferred to developing nations decreased on average from .35% to .21% of donor countries' total GNP, despite the 0.7% recommended, and the debt of developing countries increased from \$700 billion to almost \$300 trillion. Furthermore, at the global level, money and financial markets remained unregulated, causing instability in currencies as well as recessions and financial risk affecting developing countries. One only needs to look at the financial crises of the early 1980's in Latin America and that of the late 1990's in Southeast Asia to see the consequences of inaction in this respect. However, such is the degree and reach of the problem in the global financial system, that even the ultimate Northern powerhouses are not immune to such crises, as evidenced by the recent financial meltdown.

Conclusion

As the negative trends in this book show, there is a very real danger that the UN will become increasingly irrelevant if these trends continue to add to the debilitating divide between the developed and developing worlds. The antagonizing split has paralyzed the General Assembly and halted important decisions.

What is undoubtedly needed is increased cooperation between the blocs. While this is admittedly a difficult challenge, there are ways in which the Member States could work towards a more productive environment in the GA. Some of the previous efforts at enhancing the collaboration described above could and should be employed with more sincerity.

Seemingly, one of the most fruitful endeavors has been to set up the “friends of” groups or informal working groups. As described, the groups vary in terms of secretiveness and participation but the overall benefits are clear: delegates can speak freely without being bound by the positions of their respective blocs and develop personal relationships that may benefit the general negotiation processes. Participation in these groups and forming new ones should be encouraged at governmental and Ambassadorial levels at the UN. Increased use of informal groups could help countries overcome the distrust that is so obviously impeding negotiations at the GA and would provide unorthodox ways of dealing with key differences.

There are systemic and organizational issues that enhance and sustain the power gap between the developed and the developing worlds. The make-up and rules surrounding the Security Council is perhaps the most obvious example of the difference in power allotted to developed and developing countries, but other examples abound. Reform of the UN is and should be an ongoing effort and it has many purposes aside from bridging the North/South divide. Nonetheless, if the blocs could agree on key aspects of management reform as well as broadening the membership of the Security Council and improved participation in the Bretton Woods institutions for developing countries, great strides could be made towards bringing the sides closer. Ironically, the very mistrust that could be overcome by reforms often impedes agreement on reform efforts.