

International Organizations and Global Development

Yearbook for the History of Global Development

International Organizations and Global Development

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International Organizations and Global Development



Edited by
Nicholas Ferns and Angela Villani

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International organizations and development

The connection between International Organizations (IOs) and development and its prominence within the global agenda is well-known and self-evident. One simply needs to observe the emphasis that the UN has placed on sustainable development, which occupies a centre-stage position in international debates. The UN has contributed to strengthening the long-standing effort of the international community to shape a global partnership for development by setting ambitious targets – the latest in a series of targets for development set by the UN – for its 2030 agenda.¹ This process has involved a range of actors, including states, international organizations (both intergovernmental and non-governmental), civil society, and the business community, which highlights the crucial role of these actors in shaping global governance on development. This effort, which reflects the concern of the UN as well as the interest of the entire international community, represents the culmination of long-term work on the issue of development that has led to the multifaceted vision of development thinking and practice that now exists. Thus, this volume starts from the assumption that global development and global governance on development in the twenty-first century can be rightly understood through a long-term historical perspective that considers IOs as crucial actors of this process as well as crucial places from which it is meaningful to analyze global issues.²

The contribution of IOs to development has long been the subject of increasing interest amongst historians. The global and transnational turns have brought a major impetus to studies on the history of modernization and development and has gradually opened up new room for research on the role of IOs, thereby demonstrating their importance.³ While the role of states in defining policies and strat-

1 Iris Borowy, “Negotiating international development: The making of the Millennium Development Goals,” *Regions & Cohesion*, 5, no. 3 (Winter 2015): 18–43.

2 Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Sandrine Kott, *Organiser le monde: Un autre histoire de la guerre froide* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2021).

3 Mark Frey, Sönke Kunkel and Corinna R. Unger, *International Organizations and Development, 1945–1990* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 16. Verena Kröss, Corinne A. Pernet and Corinna R. Unger, “International organizations and Development,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development*, ed. Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy and Corinne A. Pernet (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 262. Sandrine Kott, “International Organizations: A Field of research for a Global History,” *Studies in Contemporary History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 446–450.

egies for development is unquestionable, IOs, both governmental and non-governmental, have been central players in shaping the global system of development. By setting agendas, supplying funding for and organizing projects, collecting data, and providing authoritative information on a wide range of topics, IOs have framed ideas and practices regarding development on local, national, regional, and global scales.

IOs have set up centres for research, meeting places for experts from which epistemic communities have arisen. They have contributed to drawing up ideas, concepts, and approaches of development as well as strategies to improve it.⁴ These achievements are the main outcomes of a lively confrontation between people with different views, which has led to an evolution of development discourse at various levels (political, economic, cultural) during the twentieth century and beyond: from the economic growth-development nexus to the basic needs approach, from the rise of neoliberal paradigms to the establishment of the human development concept.

IOs have also facilitated the amplification of new voices in development, such as the countries of the Global South at the UN – whose numbers have increased significantly since the 1960s – or civil society organizations.⁵ Moreover, IOs have also been centres of dissemination on the importance of development at a global level, succeeding in advocating for this concept to governments and public opinion, and thus to public and private stakeholders. Through the various conferences, summits, and campaigns driven by IOs, they have contributed to the spread of the importance of development for shaping global governance and stimulating governments to improve incisive policies through technical and financial aid.⁶

4 Karen Gram-Skjoldager, Haakon Andreas Ikonomou, and Torsten Kahlert, *Organizing the 20th Century World: International Organizations and the Emergence of International Public Administration, 1920s-1960s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalism: A 20th Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, *Internationalism, Imperialism, and the Formation of Contemporary World* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

5 On UN and development see: Richard Jolly, *UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Olav Stokke, *UN and development: From Aid to Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

6 Daniel Maul, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization: The International Labour Organization, 1940–70* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7–8. See also: Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Humanitarianism & Media 1900 to the Present* (London-Oxford: Berghahn, 2019); J. Brendebach, M. Herzer, and H.J.S. Tworek, eds., *International organizations and the media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: exorbitant expectations* (London: Routledge, 2018). On the UN see: G. Scott-Smith, “The UN and public diplomacy: Communicating the post-national message,” in *Wartime Origins and the Future United Nations*, ed. D. Plesch and T. G. Weiss (London-New York: Routledge, 2015), 36–55.

IOs have been key players in development action: intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), acting as multilateral channels of development cooperation, have provided technical assistance (as the UN has done) or financed development (like the Bretton Woods institutions did), while non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with their bottom-up contribution and direct contact with the field, have helped to build connections with IGOs, following their guidelines but often highlighting their limitations and dysfunctions and helping to shape their approach.⁷ In this multiplicity of roles, IOs have built their legitimacy and achieved authority in the international system.⁸

This third issue of the Yearbook on the History of Global Development is devoted to the role of IOs as relevant actors for global development and contributes to the current debate on this topic. It does this by presenting fresh research that has a direct bearing on present-day challenges, going beyond single analysis providing a forum for a variety of historical perspectives on, and understandings of, development. This issue has three main focuses. Firstly, the role of thinkers and experts working for IOs or who have contributed to the shaping and conveying of the idea of development in a global context. Secondly, UN action in certain areas and regions – Latin America, East Asia, and North Africa – and core issues of development, like trade-aid nexus, population control, promotion of culture and scientific knowledge, food security, and housing. Thirdly, examining the role of some NGOs that could enhance both a wide perspective on philanthropic action, especially in the Global South, and an alternative model of development, dealing with security and post-conflict situations as well as with consistency between political questions – like protection of human rights and respect of the rule of law – and development policies.

New histories of IOs and development

Studies on the role of IOs in the development and modernisation process, especially in the last decade, have underlined how important the contribution of these actors has been to the history of global development and how their perspective has contributed to redrawing the margins of development history in a global perspective. As Joseph Hodge has written, historical scholarship has gone beyond the evident gap between perceptions and achievements, which had marked the more critical essays on the history of development and on the role of International

7 Kröss, Pernet and Unger, “International organizations and Development.”

8 Frey, Kunkel and Unger, *International Organizations and Development*, 4.

Institutions.⁹ They have, rather, worked on a reframing of the periodization, a deeper examination of the role of the actors involved – highlighting the complexity of characters and the multiplicity of connections between local, national, and global¹⁰ – widening the viewpoint beyond the traditional approach, and encouraged looking at development “as a global phenomenon.”¹¹ As far as periodization is concerned, while the institutionalization of development policies by states and IOs unfolded systematically in the post-World War II period, a well-established literature, based on the idea of *longue durée*, has traced continuity between the post-World War II experience and the legacy left by the first half of the twentieth century, at various levels.

This has led to a rethinking of the prevailing narrative on twentieth century international history, particularly the history of modernisation, which looked at the Cold War and decolonisation as moments of discontinuity with the past, identifying them instead as merely phases in the broader discourse on development during the twentieth century.¹² A reconstruction of the history of colonial empires as laboratories of development as well as an opportunity to collect data, elaborate solutions, and test policies has represented a new push to this strand of research. This has driven a reframing of the very phenomenon of decolonisation from a long-term perspective, more linked to the directions and practices implemented by the imperial powers to pursue their project of modernisation. In this perspective, room has been given to works on the role of technicians and experts, many of whom then transitioned from imperial institutions to the IOs, revealing the continuities in their developmental work.¹³

9 Joseph Hodge, “Writing the History of Development, part 2: Longer, Deeper, Wider,” *Humanity* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 148–150. On the same view see: David C. Engerman and Corinna R. Unger, “Towards a Global History of Modernization,” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (2009): 375–385; Glenda Sluga, “The Transnational History of International Institutions,” *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 2 (2011): 219–222.

10 Engerman, Unger, “Towards a Global History of Modernization,” and the whole special issue on “Modernizations as a global project,” which contains several case studies. See also David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark E. Haefele, Michael and E. Latham, eds., *Staging Growth. Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

11 Engerman, Unger, “Towards a Global History of Modernization,” 377.

12 Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9–10 and its bibliographical references; and Sandrine Kott, “Cold War Internationalism,” in *Internationalism: a XXth century History*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 340–362.

13 See, for example: Joseph Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Veronique Dimier, *The invention of a European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Analysis of the legacies of the first half of the twentieth century is abundant and significant, and studies on the contribution of governmental IOs in this regard have been central. In the first half of the twentieth century, growing economic, political, and social interdependence led to a more pronounced trend towards the establishment of IOs, when both regional and universal institutions set up forums for study, discussion, and the elaboration of recipes for peace and progress, marking the link between security and economic-social well-being that constituted the starting point of the international system after 1945.¹⁴ This is demonstrated by literature that has gone “back to the League of Nations”¹⁵ to highlight the continuity of concepts, approaches, and strategies deployed to face the challenges of the early post-war period, especially after the Great Depression, on major economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian issues.

The administration of League of Nations (LoN) mandates, for example, provided the first opportunity for a normative definition of dependent territories, but also for an initial formalisation of the levels of development of single territories and the objectives to be indicated to the colonial powers, linked to improving the living conditions of the subject populations.¹⁶ This latter aspect, which had become the common goal of empires seeking ways to tackle anti-colonialism at its roots, represented the common ground of the other actors who operated, from different disciplinary perspectives, inside and outside the LoN in the early post-war period, sometimes competing with each other, often finding elements of common action, but nevertheless elaborating different possible mindsets on the issue of development.¹⁷

The work of the Economic and Financial Organisation (EFO) of the LoN,¹⁸ for example, proceeded in this direction. Initially limited to data collection and gradually specialising in the development of background documents for the main international economic organisations and conferences, the EFO initiated a close collaboration with the main technical organisations: the League’s Health Organization, whose focus on social medicine expressed the mainstream idea of a network of experts confronting diseases and focusing their efforts to define standards, meth-

¹⁴ See, among all: Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World economy. The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1091–1117.

¹⁶ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ Kröss, Pernet, Unger, “International organizations and Development,” 253

¹⁸ Clavin, *Securing the world economy*

ods, and concerted actions to address transnational problems¹⁹; the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which was interested in the question of labor and workers and examined the living conditions of workers in depth, both in the industrial and agricultural sectors, in European and non-European territories²⁰; and the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA), the organization that had been dealing with agriculture since 1905. Notwithstanding the divergences and the competitiveness between the IIA and the LoN, their contributions, along with those of the other agencies – on food, agriculture, and nutrition – contributed to considering food shortage and malnutrition according to a broader, holistic approach that also included social and economic factors, the premise of the Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) post-war work.²¹

What emerged in the early post-war period was essentially a package of solutions based on an unquestioned faith in science and technology. It was motivated by a belief that it was possible to transform societies by modernising them through the transfer of technology and know-how, facilitated by a model in which Western practitioners and political elites were to meet. According to this view, development could only be achieved by broad, top-down, economic, and social intervention, supported by international assistance, capable of securing peace through economic and social improvement of conditions for peoples.²² It dealt with solutions to face the main economic and social challenges, giving multilateral cooperation a more effective, rational prospect as it could guarantee the spreading of liberal capitalism as a tool for stabilizing societies in economic, social, and political terms.

19 Iris Borowy, *Coming to terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organization* (Frankfurt am Main-New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

20 Daniel Maul, "Help Them Move the ILO Way: The International Labor Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (June 2009): 387–404; Daniel Maul, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization*; Amalia Ribí Forclaz, "A New Target for International Social Reform: The International Labour Organisation and Working and Living Conditions in Agriculture in the Inter-War Years," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011): 307–330. Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux, eds., *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond* (London: Palgrave, 2013).

21 On IIA see: Luciano Tosi, *Alle origini della Fao. Le relazioni tra l'Istituto internazionale di agricoltura e la Società delle nazioni* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1989). Luciano Tosi, "The League of Nations, the International Institute of Agriculture and the Food Question," in M. Petricoli and D. Cherubini (éds.), *Pour la paix en Europe. Institutions et société civile dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2007), 117–138. On the legacy of the interwar period see also: Juan Pan-Montojo, "International institutions and agriculture: from the IIA to the FAO," in *Agriculture in capitalist Europe: from food shortages to food surpluses*, ed. C. Martiin et al. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2016), 21–42.

22 Frey, Kunkel, Unger, *International Organizations and Development*, 3–7. On this approach see also: David Ekbladh, *Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

The role of NGOs in development during the twentieth century also forms part of a redefinition of the period. They played a profound role in global affairs, mobilizing people at grassroots level, sometimes in unison with, sometimes in opposition to, official political structures.²³ Although NGOs strengthened in the post-World War II period,²⁴ the origin of their contribution can be found in the idea of humanitarianism and civic engagement that was affirmed in the West between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was fulfilled within the imperial experience.²⁵ That is certainly the case with the large US philanthropic foundations, which operated on the basis of considerable financial resources and implemented modernisation projects, often alongside IGOs, the impact of which has been extensively studied.²⁶ There are also the many religious and charitable organisations, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States,²⁷ which carried out small-scale projects related to basic needs such as health, sanitation, and education, driven by the idea that the transfer of skills and knowledge could improve the standard of living within the colonies.

From the interwar period – the origin of modern international humanitarianism²⁸ and the phase of the LoN’s push for activism on social issues²⁹ – organiza-

23 Kevin O’Sullivan, “NGOs and Development: Small is beautiful?”, in *The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development*, ed. Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy and Corinne A. Pernet (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 234–249 and its references. John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds., *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). See also: Kevin O’Sullivan, “A “Global Nervous System”: the Rise and Rise of European Humanitarian NGOs, 1945–1985,” in *International Organizations and Development, 1945–1990*, ed. Mark Frey, Sönke Kunkel and Corinna R. Unger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 196–219; Heike Wieters, “Of Heartfelt Charity and Billion Dollar Enterprise: From Postwar Relief to Europe to Humanitarian Relief to “Everywhere” – CARE Inc., in search of a New Mission,” in *ibid.*, 220–239.

24 Iriye, *Global Community*, chapter 2.

25 Harald Fisher-Tiné, “Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire: The salvation Army, British Imperialism and the “Pre-History” of NGOs (ca. 1880s-1930s),” in *Competing Visions of Global Order: Global Moments and Movements*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 29–67.

26 Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2012); John Krige and Helke Rausch, eds., *American Foundations and the Coproduction of World Order in the Twentieth Century* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2012); Ekbladh, *Great American Mission*.

27 Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

28 Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011). Silvia Salvatici, *A history of humanitarianism, 1755–1989. In the name of others* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

tions such as Save the Children, YMCA, Red Cross or CARE became organizations dedicated to relief and rehabilitation after World War II,³⁰ passing through a professionalising and highly legitimising experience by associating with the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). As the linking and coordinating body for NGOs working in Europe and Asia, UNRRA became an opportunity to exchange expertise, practices, and approaches, at a time when the category of humanitarian worker was acquiring a more precise and structured definition of both its functions and role and the objectives and principles that inspired its action. Thus, UNRRA's work also further highlighted the continuity of approach and of the people working in it, who had moved from LoN agencies or from working as humanitarian workers in NGOs, then passing to the new organisations that emerged in the post-war period.³¹

Both the post-conflict experience and the imperial background of NGOs were transposed into later post-World War II work, when the focus was placed on post-colonial questions which had become global issues (health, education and training, nutrition, child welfare). They received legitimacy through the recognition of consultative status at the UN, increasing the interconnection with governmental IOs – sometimes in connection, often overlapping or clashing with them – that shaped this well-structured practice of the international system: their visibility increased, the process of internationalisation was strengthened, and many of these actors became transnational actors. However, a complex picture of approaches, models, and organisations did not emerge, and still today there is substantial dependence on major donors, states, and IGOs. Nevertheless, NGOs have taken the opportunity to propose and convey alternative bottom-up models and approaches that have contributed to restoring a human dimension of development, thanks also to the input of economists, thinkers, activists, and politicians from the Global South.³²

In the second half of the twentieth century, the proliferation of new IOs, global interdependence on socio-economic issues,³³ and the substantial continuity with

29 Magaly Rodríguez García, Davide Rodogno and Liat Kozma, eds., *The League of Nations' Work on Social Issues: Visions, Endeavours, and Experiments* (Geneva: UN Publ., 2016).

30 S. Farré, *Colis de guerre. Secours alimentaires et organisations humanitaires (1914–1947)* (Rennes: Press Universitaires de Rennes, 2014); Emily Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022); R.M. McCleary, *Global Compassion: Private Voluntary Organizations and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

31 Silvia Salvatici, "Help the People to Help Themselves': UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (September 2012): 428–451.

32 O'Sullivan, "NGOs and Development. Small is beautiful?", 234–235, 246.

33 Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga. "New Histories of the United Nations," *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 261–265.

the solutions proposed in the past led historians to “taking off the Cold War Lens.”³⁴ This allowed for a reconsideration of the periodization of the history of development (not everything originates from, or relates to, the Cold War), as well as allowing for an analysis of new perspectives. While the continuity and prevalence of the Western approach has also been established in the actions of the IOs³⁵ – an expression of the liberal international order based on US interests and priorities, of the Newdealist principles of state intervention and modernisation from above, of the emphasis on planning according to a Western-centred approach – scholarship over the last twenty years has helped to emphasize the plurality of visions, between and within the two blocs³⁶ and among the receiving countries.³⁷ In the latter case, the UN, for example, while being considered by traditional literature as a forum of the Cold War competition and a definitive tool to convey the Western model towards the Global South, represented rather an opportunity for the Afro-Asian countries. New studies underline their role as actors who influenced the agenda of IOs, especially since the 1960s, to bring out non-Western principles, models, and practices of development and to challenge the universal validity of modernisation theories.³⁸ Recent scholarship on IOs and decolonization has likewise tried to overcome the traditional duality of view – IOs as conveyors of

34 Matthew Connelly, “Taking off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 739–769.

35 Amy L.S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945–1965* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2006); Michele Alacevich, *The Political Economy of the World Bank: The Early Years* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Daniel Maul, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization*; Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

36 On the Western bloc see, for example: Matthieu Leimgruber and Matthias Schmelzer, eds., *The OECD and the International Political Economy Since 1948* (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2017). On Socialist bloc: Sara Lorenzini, “Comecon and the South in the years of *détente*: a study on East–South economic relations,” *European Review of History* 21, no. 2 (2014): 183–199; David C. Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 1 (2011): 183–211.

37 See for example: Macekura and Manela, *The Development Century: A global History*; Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development. A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Nelson Lichtenstein and Jill M. Jensen, *The ILO from Geneva to the Pacific Rim: West Meets East* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). On the effects of US foreign aid policy on the Global South in a long-term perspective see also: Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

38 Amrith and Sluga, “New Histories of the United Nations,” 253–254.

neocolonialism and the Western-centred approach as opposed to a location for anti-colonial struggle – and has given room to the complexity of this framework: the range of actors, stances, and tasks which operated within the IOs, as well as to the connections or competing visions among different IOs. As Eva-Maria Muschik argued, “the plurality of chronologies and meanings of global decolonization in the twentieth century (...), cannot be separated from the history of international organizations.”³⁹ Thus, IOs were forums for confronting current ideas, shaping new ideas, and legitimating them toward Newly Independent Countries, or late colonial territories.⁴⁰

In this perspective, studies on IOs and development have helped to shed light on the complexity of the history of global development: they enable us to see this history as a universe made up of voices, approaches, spaces, and institutions and open up non-universal perspectives, helping to enhance local experiences and projects and regional-national-international interconnections.⁴¹

One perspective that follows this indication is that of considering recipients as actors.⁴² Studies that have taken this direction have attempted to fill a historiographical gap concerning the interactions of Newly Independent Countries with IOs and their role in shaping IO priorities and practices. Scholars have questioned whether and to what extent beneficiaries played an active role in shaping development thinking and practices, how they participated in the debate and influenced its evolution.⁴³ For example, scholars have examined the new international eco-

39 Eva-Maria Muschik, “Towards a global history of international organizations and decolonization,” *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 2 (2022): 173–190, who present the more recent review of literature about this topic with useful bibliographical references. On this topic see also: Nicole Eggers, Jessica L. Pearson and Aurora Almada e Santos (eds.), *The United Nations and Decolonization* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Damiano Matasci, *Internationaliser l'éducation. La France, l'Unesco et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945–1961)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2023).

40 Amrith, Sluga, “New Histories of the United Nations,” 265–266.

41 Macekura and Manela, *The Development Century: A global History*, 9–10. Frey, Kunkel and Unger, *International Organizations and Development*, 3. More broadly: Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Post-war History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019). See also the special forum on “Modernizations as a global project,” in *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (June 2009), which focus on some case studies from Africa, Latin America and Asia.

42 Corinna R. Unger, “International Organizations and Rural Development: The FAO Perspective,” *The International History Review* 41, no. 2 (2019): 3–4; A. O'Malley and V. Thakur, “Introduction: Shaping A Global Horizon. New Histories of the Global South and the UN,” *Humanity* 13, no. 1 (June 2022): 55–65; Simon Jackson and Alanna O'Malley, eds., *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations* (London: Routledge, 2018).

43 Some examples are: Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundation of Bretton Woods*; and Patrick A. Sharma, *Robert McNamara's Other War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

conomic order (NIEO) and its legacies.⁴⁴ This research challenges the existing historiography by investigating how recipient countries contributed to international development, by examining how they presented their visions, principles, claims, and expectations within IOs, and how much these efforts conditioned the work of IOs. It may be an issue that needs to be analyzed in depth, especially with reference to the role of those new donors now identified with the BRICS group, who have been challenging the liberal-democratic world order with their alternative development model and set of principles that continues to have such a wide hold on low-income countries.⁴⁵ This perspective could give new room to studies in regionalism and regional organizations, enhancing the role of UN regional commissions⁴⁶ as well as the importance of South-South cooperation and the processes of regional integration to understand more about the role of the Global South in the development discourse.

Overall, the focus of studies on IOs and development has broadened considerably in recent decades, looking at it “as a global phenomenon”⁴⁷ and going in the direction Hodge indicated to help construct a global history of development and modernisation.⁴⁸ This changing perspective means a reappraisal of topics to be investigated, approaches to be followed, and sources to be searched. This volume contributes to this process.

44 Patrick A. Sharma, “Between North and South: The World Bank and the New International Economic Order,” *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (2015): 189–200; see also *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2015), devoted to the NIEO project and its aftermath.

45 Lorella Tosone and Angela Villani, “Traditional and “new” donors in Asia: an introduction,” *Asia Maior*, Special Issue on “Foreign Aid in Asia: Traditional and “New” Donors in a Changing Development Landscape,” no. 1 (2018): 7–18. On the quest for an alternative order see: Philippa Hetherington and Glenda Sluga, “Liberal and Illiberal Internationalisms,” Special Issue, *Journal of World History* 31, no. 1 (March 2020).

46 See, for example: Y. Berthelot (ed.), *Unity and Diversity in Development Ideas. Perspectives from the UN Regional Commissions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). See also: Ikuto Yamaguchi, “The Development and Activities of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), 1947–65,” in *The Transformation of the International Order of Asia: Decolonization, the Cold War, and the Colombo Plan*, ed. Shigeru Akita, Gerold Krozewski and Shoichi Watanabe (New York: Routledge, 2015), 91–108; Margarita Fajardo, *The World That Latin America Created: The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the Development Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022); Daniel Stinsky, *International Cooperation in Cold War Europe. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1947–64* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022). Giovanni Finizio, “Regional Multilateralism in Africa: A System in Search of Rationalization,” in *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* LIV, no. 2 (December 2020): 53–74.

47 Engerman, Unger, “Towards a Global History of Modernization,” 377.

48 Hodge, “Writing the History of Development, part 2: Longer, Deeper, Wider,” 148–150. On the same view also Sluga, “The transnational history of international institutions,” 219–222.

Contributions to this volume

The chapters of this volume engage with many of the themes that have occupied historians in recent years. Put together, they examine the myriad ways that IOs have engaged with both the concept of development, as well as its implementation, in various parts of the world. The case studies range from Morocco to Honduras to China, and the organisations that are covered include American philanthropic foundations of the early twentieth century, as well as Oxfam and Amnesty International in the 1980s and 1990s. The contributions to this volume also present a varied approach to developmental actors. Some of the contributions explore how large IOs such as the UN dealt with questions of development, while others focus on key individuals, such as Mahbub ul-Haq and Enrique Iglesias. Amidst this variety, a number of common threads emerge: IOs are often at the mercy of the attitudes of their member states and representatives; the Cold War has had a profound effect on the actions of IOs; NGOs are often defined by their relationships with nation-states and IGOs; the legacies of colonialism have profoundly shaped both the personnel and attitudes towards development of IOs; and finally that the regional focus of various programs and IOs has significant developmental consequences. Each contribution offers new insight into the historical understanding of the interaction between IOs and development.

In their chapter, Sabine Selchow and Glenda Sluga conceptualize the relationship between IOs and international development. They present post-Second World War development as a “discourse that shapes international organisations.” From this perspective, Selchow and Sluga call upon scholars to consider new ways of examining the role of both development and IOs in “international economic thinking.” There are four dimensions to how this thinking is imagined: “the social” versus “the economic”; “the technical” versus “the political”; “the public” versus “the private”; and the ongoing negotiation of “the national.” Scholarly analysis of both development and IOs often grapples with some, if not all, of these dimensions, and Selchow and Sluga highlight some of the ways in which this is done. For instance, they explain how women have often been able to find a place to think and work in IOs as opposed to national organisations. Similarly, the chapter explains the power of development as a discourse and how it frames the work of IOs. Drawing upon the work of Daniel Speich Chasse, they interrogate how key post-war concepts in development owe their existence to the very concept of development. The chapter then concludes with a series of provocative questions that is sure to produce more innovative research in this field.

Maha Ali then examines the impact of Mahbub ul-Haq both in terms of his intellectual impact on developmental thought and in his work in both Pakistan and

the World Bank. A key developmental thinker, ul-Haq can be connected to at least two major strands of developmental theory and policy: “basic needs” and “sustainable development.” This has contemporary relevance as these concepts helped to shape the concept of “human development.” Ali examines the institutional context in which ul-Haq operated, explaining how his work with the Pakistani government shaped his thinking while at the World Bank. This chapter also deals with important questions of how individuals operate withing large IOs. Mahbub ul-Haq was not always a popular figure within the World Bank, as he often struggled with the Bank’s global role. Ali suggests that ul-Haq’s thinking aligned quite well with the NIEO, which was not always looked upon favorably by the Bretton Woods institutions. This perhaps reflected ul-Haq’s Global South perspective. Another tension in the field of IOs and development is addressed in this chapter, as Ali examines the role of Islam as a unifying force in international affairs.

Another key individual is given significant attention in Margarita Fajardo’s chapter on ECLA/CEPAL in the 1970s. While not focusing exclusively on Enrique Iglesias, Fajardo examines the work of ECLA, which was under Iglesias’ leadership throughout the 1970s. This chapter examines the evolution of ECLA throughout the tumultuous years of the 1970s and 1980s, as the previously powerful UN agency dealt with the possibility that it would be marginalized in the face of emerging NGOs. Under Iglesias, ECLA was forced to change its approach to Latin American development as a global neoliberal agenda began to emerge. Fajardo traces how ECLA was partly a victim of its own success, given its centrality to developmental thinking and policy throughout the 1960s. The chapter also poses important questions about how IOs are shaped by the changes that take place in their member countries. ECLA, based in Chile, is a clear example of this process, as the political changes in that country – and in Latin America more broadly – forced Iglesias and his colleagues to reconsider ECLA’s role in the development of the region. As with Maha Ali’s chapter, the role of key individuals in shaping the relationship between IOs and development is clear.

Lorella Tosone continues the study of the UN and development with her examination of the circumstances that led to the establishment of the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in 1969. The connection between population growth, especially in the Global South, and development attracted significant attention amongst demographers, economists, and policymakers throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Tosone traces the origins of this interest back to the work of scholars in the interwar period, with Princeton University being particularly prominent in the establishment of demography as a field of research. By the beginning of the 1960s, a range of IOs – including the UN, World Bank, and FAO – became interested in the issue of population control, drawing upon the expertise of demographers and economists. This chapter traces the different attitudes amongst member states,

which was shaped by Cold War considerations and religious beliefs. These differences often slowed down efforts to promote population control, which by the 1970s had become less central to the work of IOs. As with many of the contributions to this volume, Tosone provides insight into the negotiations that were ongoing within IOs and explains their connections to efforts to promote development around the world.

Yarong Chen then offers an insight into another area of the UN with an interest in international development: UNESCO. Chen focuses on the drive to get the “S” in UNESCO, following the campaign by scientists such as Joseph Needham. The emphasis on scientific knowledge was seen as a necessary complement to the other objectives of UNESCO, which combined in the post-war period to drive UN efforts in international development. Chen also pays close attention to the place of China in this story, which was severely disrupted by the events of the Chinese Civil War. Chinese representatives played an active role in driving the establishment of UNESCO, and China was also seen as an important recipient of UNESCO assistance. The victory of the Communists in 1949 threatened to derail these efforts, once again showing how the Cold War impacted upon the work of IOs in the field of development. Despite the departure of UNESCO from the People’s Republic of China in the early 1950s, the work done in the late 1940s was influential in the longer-term developmental approach of the organisation.

Ben Clark and Axel Fisher take us to Morocco and its Rural Housing Program from 1968 to 1972. This program, implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP), in conjunction with the UN Development Program and the Moroccan government, was informed by French and Moroccan ideas regarding rural development. The Rural Housing Program reveals the intersections of decolonisation, IOs, and the Cold War, as French, Moroccan, and American officials, working with the WFP, aimed to respond to the challenges experienced by people in the Moroccan countryside. Clark and Fisher provide a thorough explanation of the intellectual context in which the Rural Housing Program was established, followed by an evaluation of its outcomes. Their analysis reveals the ways that countries emerging from colonial rule drew upon the resources of IOs in their developmental policies. This North African case study reveals both the specific challenges faced in that part of the world while also highlighting broader themes that point to the role of IOs in fostering development in newly independent countries.

The final three chapters deal with NGOs that all engage with development in different ways. Maria Cullen examines the work of Oxfam in Honduras in the 1980s to explore the “politicization” of development assistance. As with many other chapters in this collection, the Cold War looms large in the story, with Oxfam forced to navigate the challenges of Central America in the 1980s. Cullen compares the work of Oxfam in Honduras with earlier examples in Tanzania

and Cambodia to highlight the complex relationship between this NGO and its host governments. This chapter suggests that Oxfam in Honduras did not follow the same pattern as the Tanzanian and Cambodian examples, where NGOs facilitated the “depoliticization” of development and human rights. In contrast, Oxfam personnel worked closely with Salvadoran refugees in Honduras to resist some of the pressures from the United States. The result was a series of policies and programs that drew upon the experiences of the refugees, rather than the UN or other governments. Through this examination, Cullen also traces how NGOs interact with both nation-states and IGOs like the UN to carve out their own place in the international development system.

Michelle Carmody also examines the connections between an NGO and IGO, in this case Amnesty International and the World Bank. She traces the attitudes of both organisations towards the evolving phenomenon of human rights throughout the 1980s and 1990s. For Carmody, the World Bank has an “ambivalent” relationship towards human rights, which is a product of its focus on economic rights as well as with its membership structure. Despite this ambivalence, NGOs like Amnesty International ultimately felt compelled to work closely with the World Bank due to their dissatisfaction with the attitude of individual national governments in the field of human rights. This chapter reveals the ways that IGOs and NGOs work together in the development field, sometimes in tandem and sometimes in tension. In analysing these connections, Carmody explains that both Amnesty and the World Bank shared a mutual dependence on one another. Both needed to project an image to the Global South that may not have always fitted with their actions, and both used the other to maintain their relevance in the increasingly competitive field of international development.

In the final chapter, Nick Pozek examines the role of American philanthropic organisations in the Progressive Era, from roughly 1890 to 1920. In doing so, Pozek identifies some of the early connections between IOs and the fledgling field of development. Paying particular attention to the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations and their work in China, Pozek introduces a range of considerations that would shape events in the second half of the twentieth century. Rockefeller and Carnegie (along with the Ford Foundation) were vital to post-war attempts to promote modernisation throughout the Global South. Many of the lessons that they learned in the earlier period informed their later work. Pozek also traces the role of key individuals in the work of these foundations, which connects to the approach provided in the chapters by Maha Ali and Margarita Fajardo.

These chapters offer insights into the wide variety of ways that IOs have both helped to establish the field of international development as well as being shaped by development itself. The post-Second World War focus of almost of the contributions suggests that this is the era in which IOs emerged in the field of development.

Despite this, the majority of the chapters also examine the ways that events and people in the first half of the twentieth century informed events after 1945. Similarly, the legacies of colonialism are clear to see in the work of Ben Clark and Axel Fisher, as well as in Maha Ali, Margarita Fajardo, and Lorella Tosone's chapters. Finally, the Cold War is present throughout the volume, shaping the interactions of IOs and development. While the collection is comprehensive in its geographical, conceptual, and chronological scope, there is still a huge amount of scholarship to be done in exploring the role of IOs in the field of international development.

There is room for a multiplicity of additions to the current historical debate over the connections between IOs and development. These include research into the questions of gender, race, and more broadly the protection of fundamental rights, inequalities, and employment issues. Furthermore, there is scope for more research into sustainability and environmental protection, as well as rural development, also with regard to the emergence of the contradictions that marked the era of the Green Revolution.⁴⁹ Knowledge on the transnational dimension of development could also allow scholars to go beyond the states as well as the IGOs. While literature on Western NGOs has grown, a deeper analysis of Global South NGOs – their origins and evolution, their links to the territories and with the IGOs – is still lacking. Moreover, it would be interesting to more deeply analyze the constant search of the UN from the 1970s for partnerships with non-state actors – not only NGOs but also private corporations (a forerunner of the current practice of public-private partnerships on cooperation issues); or to study the interaction between Western NGOs and the Global South during the 1980s and the 1990s on social justice and human rights. Furthermore, as some scholars have underlined,

⁴⁹ See, for example, the articles on the *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (September 2008), devoted to the “New Histories of the United Nations.” Other examples are: Stephen Macekura, *Of Limits and Growth: The Rise of Global Sustainable Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Iris Borowy, *Defining Sustainable Development for Our Common Future: A History of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission)* (London: Routledge, 2013); Ann E. Egelston, *Sustainable Development: A History* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013); Maria Ivanova, *The Untold Story of the World's Leading Environmental Institution: UNEP at Fifty* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2021); Amalia Ribí Forclaz and Corinna R. Unger, “Progress versus precaution: international organizations and the use of pesticides, 1940s to 1970s,” *Comparativ* 32, no. 6 (2023): 611–628; Corinna R. Unger, “International Organizations and Rural Development: The FAO Perspective,” and more broadly all the further contributions published on the same issue's Themed Section “Confronting a Hungry World: The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization in a Historical Perspective,” *The International History Review* 41, no. 2 (2019). On Green Revolution and its critics see, among the most recent works: Marci Baranski, *The Globalization of Wheat. A Critical History of the Green Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022).

the role of local studies or projects, both pursued by IGOs and NGOs, are considered as case studies that could enlighten the process of development as they can underline the connections among regional, national, and global levels.⁵⁰

More broadly, room should be given to research that fosters a bottom-up approach or is able to intersect the latter with the top-down dimension, restoring value and dignity to both and identifying the interactions and exchange between the two perspectives.⁵¹ This can also be achieved considering the diversity of sources for the history of IOs. This leads us to a last reflection, which concerns the need for new archival research and the attempt, by several historians, to start and improve a multilevel research method.⁵²

This effort is part of a general will to overcome the view that has long prevailed in this strand of studies, where institutional work by officials, diplomats or practitioners working within IOs has prevailed. Moreover, a historical perspective is still lacking in a broad literature on IOs and development, where there is a prevalence of studies by economists, political scientists, and anthropologists.⁵³ Thus, more recent, multi-archival research could paint a clearer picture and help to clarify many aspects of the contribution to development by allowing for the definition of periods, specific analyses, and concepts.⁵⁴

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⁵⁰ On this perspective see: Manela, Macekura, eds., *The Development Century*; and the contributions to the special forum “Modernization as a global project,” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (June 2009).

⁵¹ Iris Borowy, “Introduction” to “Development in World History – Development as World History,” Special Issue of the *Journal of World History* 32, no. 3 (2021): 398.

⁵² G. Sluga, *The transnational history of international institutions*, 220.

⁵³ The most cited example is the series of the UN Intellectual History project, launched in 1999 by the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies of the City University of New York (CUNY). Some important exceptions can be considered the essays written under the auspices of History projects led by some international organizations. See, for example, the essays on ILO’s history under the Century Project (<https://www.ilo.org/century/lang-en/index.htm>).

⁵⁴ Frey, Kunkel and Unger, *International Organizations and Development*, 3. On this perspective see, for example, the reflections concerning the research on FAO’s History by Corinne A. Pernet and Amalia Ribí Forclaz, “Revisiting the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): International Histories of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Development,” *The International History Review* 41, no. 2 (2019): 345–350.

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