

*The Role of*  
**United Nations in the Development  
of  
Under-Developed Countries<sup>(1)</sup>**

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Of the 2½ billion people of the world 2/3 live in what are known as under-developed countries and only 1/6 in the so called advanced countries. The remaining 1/6 of the world population belong to countries intermediate between the above two categories. The entire continent of Asia with the exception of U.S.S.R. and Japan, the whole of the continent of Africa with the exception of the Union of South Africa and almost the entire South American continent is under-developed. In terms of National Income the countries of these areas have a per capita income less than \$ 100. In terms of actual conditions of life, the vast majority of these people are inadequately fed, housed and clothed. They have a high incidence of disease, ill health and mortality and their expectation of life is less than half of those living in advanced countries. In spite of great technological developments that have occurred during the last 150 years, the techniques of production followed by these people are primitive. Hence their productivity is low. Many of them have meagre natural resources, but even where natural resources exist, due to social, economic and technical factors, such resources have not been properly utilized. Due to low incomes the margin for saving and hence the potential for investment and capital formation is low. Due to general illiteracy and lack of technical institutions, the human factor is more a liability than an asset to the economy. The dominance of custom and tradition has inhibited the emergence of progressive outlook of life. The past political domination by foreign powers further undermined their urges for economic and social growth. In recent years, however, many of these countries are shaking off their old lethargies and are developing a new sense of national dignity accompanied by a strong desire for economic development. They have become aware of the widening gap between their own stagnant standards and progressively increasing standards of the advanced countries. A spirit of discontent is

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abroad and is spreading. Violent and quick methods of change successfully applied in certain other areas, seem to them to be a possible way of relief. The danger is that the slow methods of democracy may be undermined unless a concerted effort is made to lift these people up from the slough of misery and despondency through assistance in every form from the advanced countries of the world. The advanced countries of the world have realized the urgency of this situation and have been offering generous assistance in various forms. The greatest assistance has come from the U.S.A.

But here there is a dilemma while these under-developed countries badly need assistance, they are very suspicious of accepting such assistance from the advanced countries, most of whom were until recently their imperial masters. They are jealous of their new found freedom and would rather starve than accept any aid which might undermine in the least manner their national sovereignty. Even when their governments are rationally convinced of the bonafides of the assisting powers, they are not always free to accept such assistance due to the irrational pressure from the mass opinion, which they cannot ignore if democracy has to be kept alive in these areas. There is little doubt that the advanced nations are really anxious to help in the development of under-developed countries, partly as a safeguard against onslaught from the opposite ideological camp whose methods have a peculiar appeal to downtrodden people, partly for altruistic reasons and partly on account of the dictates of enlightened self-interest. They know that under conditions of modern life prosperity as well as peace is indivisible and that a beggar-thy-neighbour policy of the 19 Century type is hopelessly out of date. The solution of this dilemma lies in the role that United Nations, its institutions and agencies can play in affording assistance to the under-developed countries in the promotion of their economic development. In the ultimate analysis the assistance still comes from the advanced countries and is given to the under-developed countries. Such assistance, however, is not to be given directly so much, as through the channels afforded by the institutions and agencies of the United Nations. Since its inception the United Nations through its major organs like the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have initiated Schemes of all possible kinds which are suggested and implemented mainly through its Specialized Agencies like the F.A.O., the I.L.O., the I.M.F., the I.B.R.D., the U.N.E.S.C.O., etc. Technical assistance has been given in various fields through relevant agencies in the matter of making surveys, training experts of under-developed countries, chalking out, implementing, and appraisal of their development plans, suggesting improvements in administrative machinery at various levels, advising on matters of monetary and fiscal policies, encouraging the establishment of educational, technical, and financial institutions, suggesting, measures of land reforms productivity and reclamation of land etc.

The International Bank has particularly afforded financial and technical help in the implementation of the development plans of many countries. The United Nations has always been anxious to remain neutral regarding the political, social and cultural conditions in the countries to whom help is given. This is the right attitude to adopt under the prevailing circumstances and it is hoped that the United Nations activities in this connection will expand many-fold and that the advanced countries would prefer to channel their assistance through this international organ in order to avoid any chance of misunderstanding, on the part of the recipient nations.

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