

The question whether developing countries are developing or not has to be affirmed. The terms themselves preclude any different outcome. In addition, all countries are developing, as no country has ever reached a certain threshold of development and remained idle afterwards, even though this would appear advisable, as happiness-studies show no significant increases after a certain threshold of material wealth has been crossed (Oswald). Development is not by itself defined as any certain movement or change, but just as the term "developing countries" has been connected with a semantically unobvious meaning, the meaning of "development" is equally constructed and universally interpreted in a positive manner. Nevertheless, a "developing country" it is nowadays relatively equally associated with a country on a lower rung of the common ladder of modern, globalized, economic growth. The attempted direction of movement is upwards.

In 1820, all parts of the world had a roughly comparable starting point, Jeffrey Sachs argues. Therefore, development and underdevelopment, understood as a process that set countries on different paths, is a relatively new phenomenon. From 1820 onwards, all regions of the world developed, but this was not perceived as being so. The terms were not associated with their contemporary meanings. Most modern nations have come to existence in the post-colonial era of 1945 and 1988, when 105 new nations joined the ranks of the United Nations. Newfound political independence triggered off the so-called development era, with the European experience serving as the obvious model form, but not the exclusive one. The subdivision of the world into three geopolitical segments occurred. The capitalist Western (First World) and the communist Soviet (Second World) blocks coexisted with the rising Third World; mostly previously European owned poor countries inhabited by non-Europeans.

The modern concept of underdevelopment began in 1949, when US President Truman suggested a new paradigm for the postwar era, namely the division of humanity's sphere into the "developed" and "underdeveloped" regions, which implied some kind of universal, linear path of development. Therefore, for the remainder of this brief, the term "developing countries" will be exchangeable with the "Third World".

Various development theories and corresponding approaches exist, but in 2000, the world's leaders agreed to frame the concept of "development" within the Millennium Development Goals. The next paragraph will try to answer question whether developing countries are developing positively or not in regard of these goals. Additionally, aid has become an important vehicle for development, as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals requires drastically increased aid budgets. Independent development, as praised by Kenyan neo-liberal James Shikwate ("For God's sake, please stop the aid"; "Africans are taught to be beggars" "aid dampens spirit of entrepreneurship") or Leopold Kohr ("If children are spared the duplication of everything through which the parents had to go, they will grow up faster but suffer even longer from dependence on those who did take the trouble of doing the experiencing and learning themselves"), have not become predominating strategies in contemporary struggles for development. Instead, countries developing encouraging strategies in order to meet the MDG are promised the unconditioned aid to do so. Whether strategies are encouraging or not is measured by the IMF and World Bank. In the 1960s and 70s, development was sought in quite different manners, as the Third World, aware of what has become known as the dependency theory, fought for a New International Economic Order, but was subsequently forced into an "iron cage" by a north, alarmed by the OPEC's muscle flexing. The cage consists of the IMF, World Bank and WTO; institutions used for the "rollback" of the South (Walden Bello). Of course, the concept of the "iron cage" is contested. The globalization of westernized development aims has linked human development to national economic growth and imposed an essentially economic understanding of social life (Philipp McMichael).

But are developing nations developing? There can be no general answer, but the last decade saw the population of developing countries rise from four to five billion, while at the same time per capita income increased by 21%. In addition, 130 million people escaped extreme poverty, contemporarily defined by the World Bank's poverty line of \$ 1.08 of daily income. On the other hand, 18 countries with a combined population of 460 million people had a lower human development index score than in 1990. Almost all categories enshrined within the Millennium Development Goals have seen improvement, albeit not always of a convincing magnitude and evenly spread among poverty-afflicted regions. Most of the development, in total numbers, is driven by advances in India and China, whereas Southeast Asia, East Asia and Sub Saharan Africa are struggling, but nevertheless predominately barely improving. Taking into account the ambitious Millennium Development Goals, development is not happening fast enough, as "the region (Sub-Saharan Africa) is off track to meet every Millennium Development goal" or "(South Asia) remains off track for meeting many of the goals". Overall, "the picture is not encouraging" (World Bank). Nevertheless, not meeting the goals cannot be equated with not developing at all, as only limited areas of the world fail to show any sort of positive development (UN) and a closer analysis lies beyond this paper's scope. If development, as contemporarily framed, is understood as defined by the MDG, slow development is occurring.

Most problematically, individual, country-based poverty reduction strategies, the post-structural-adjustment-era tools of choice by the IMF and World Bank, are not designed with enough rigour to meet Millennium Development Goals (Jeffrey Sachs). They are also nothing but structural adjustment programs in disguise, some argue, as Third World nations "know", after decades of structural adjustment, what to "want" in order to secure insufficient aid (Celine Tan). The main fault lies within the richest members of the First World, as long-standing promises of development aid in the range of 0.7% of GDP are not met. With more aid to utilize, developing countries could develop sufficient poverty reduction strategies; with aid as it is, they have to be "realistic". Few countries have committed themselves to increase their development assistance towards 0.7% (Oxfam). Even though Kofi Annan challenged the world to meet the MDG, the United States restated its long-held position that "if we do the right thing from a policy perspective, the results will speak for themselves" (John Simon, senior director for development, US National Security Council). Past IMF and World Bank programs indicate that this assumption is rather simplistic. In addition, the US has not and will not meet its obligation, formally restated by president's Bush signing the 2002 Monterrey Consensus, at any time in the future (NY Times). Not unfittingly, NY Times columnist Nicholas Kristof therefore welcomed the world's leaders to the current UN summit with the condemning headline of "Meet the fakers", and accused the richest of the rich for turning a blind eye on the ongoing "holocaust" within the impoverished Third World.

In conclusion, most areas of the developing world are developing if measured by progress towards the universally agreed upon Millennium Development Goals. The on-time achievement of many goals, of course varying by region, is unrealistic, as aid promises by the First World are consistently broken. Development is universally linked with economic growth, even though happiness-studies reveal that the development along westernized, neo-liberal strategies does not increase human happiness as infinitely as a country's GDP (Andrew Oswald). An excessive critique of modern development understood as modern economic growth and the achievements of the MDG lies beyond the scope of this brief.