



UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME SR.

— STUDY GUIDE —

Promoting Strategies To Bridge The
Developmental Gap Between The West and
the Global South

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

It is with immense pleasure that we welcome you to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) senior committee at the Annual World Summit 2025. As members of the Executive Board, we are truly delighted to see such a diverse and dynamic set of young minds ready to engage in shaping the future of global development.

We expect enthusiasm, rigour and diligence from you, delegates, in the session. We will be engaging in thrilling debates and discussions over the course of two days. We guarantee you that you will leave with an abundance of knowledge, a newly ignited love for debates, friends, and a myriad of memories.

In the words of Malala Yousafzai, *"When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful."* Let yours be that voice.

Yours faithfully,

The UNDP Executive Board:

Chairperson - Agastya Kar

Vice-Chairperson - Viha Shroff

Moderator - Shravya Desai

Rapporteur - Zaena Lakhani

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Development Programme was established in 1965 by the General Assembly Resolution 2029 (XX) as a merger of two previous programmes, namely the United Nations Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance and the United Nations Special Fund. It took up its work on 1 January 1966. The UNDP is responsible for the coordination of development activities at the country level. It carries out a dual role as a deliverer of programming and country office coordinator. Since the establishment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000, UNDP is also responsible for monitoring and reporting the progress made in achieving the goals on the country level. So far, over 400 national reports have been conducted and published.

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) plays a central role in the development activities of the United Nations and coordinates efforts for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is active in 170 countries where it helps nations to implement democracy and good governance, to reduce poverty, to prevent crises and conflicts, to protect the environment and to fight HIV/AIDS.

The UNDP prioritizes human rights protection, the empowerment of women and minorities, and the inclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable. It publishes the annual Human Development Report, addressing key development issues and offering new measurement tools, analyses, and policy proposals. Helen Clark, the UNDP Administrator, also chairs the United Nations Development Group, which brings together 32 UN entities involved in development. The UNDP plays a role in UN reform and oversees the UN Capital Development Fund, providing grants and loans to spur economic growth in developing countries.

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WHAT DOES THE UNDP DO?

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) serves as the United Nations' global network for development. Established in 1965, it operates in over 170 countries and territories, working to reduce poverty, combat inequality, and promote sustainable development. As the UN's leading development agency, the UNDP plays a pivotal role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and helping nations build resilience against social, economic, and environmental challenges.

The UNDP's work is centered around three key pillars: poverty reduction, democratic governance, and sustainable development. One of its primary objectives is to eradicate extreme poverty and reduce inequalities by creating economic opportunities.

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The organization collaborates with governments and communities to promote job creation and entrepreneurship, strengthen social protection programs for vulnerable populations, improve access to education, healthcare, and financial services, and support gender equality initiatives that empower women and girls in economic activities.

UNDP also plays a crucial role in enhancing governance systems worldwide by strengthening democratic institutions, upholding the rule of law, and advocating for human rights. It assists governments by promoting transparency and accountability in the public sector, supporting free and fair elections, guiding policy development and governance reforms, and reinforcing civil society organizations to foster participatory governance.

UNDP advances climate action, development, reforms, funding, and volunteering.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

In today's world, the growing polarization between nations poses significant challenges to the equal rights of both large and small countries. This divide often leaves smaller nations feeling marginalized and underrepresented, while larger, more powerful countries dominate the conversation.

The Global South, despite its rich resources and vibrant cultures, faces unique hurdles as it navigates a landscape shaped by historical inequalities and current geopolitical tensions.

Meanwhile, Western policies can sometimes prioritize competition over collaboration, making it harder for developing nations to thrive. By exploring these differences in approach and fostering open dialogue, we can work towards a more inclusive global community where all nations have a voice and an opportunity to succeed.

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EROSION OF MULTILATERALISM AND GLOBAL COOPERATION

A key consequence of a polarized world is the erosion of multilateralism and global cooperation. When powerful nations prioritize national interests, international institutions and agreements are weakened, reducing their ability to address global challenges. This often marginalizes the needs of smaller nations in favor of dominant powers. The dominance of Western ideals can conflict with the UN's mission to serve all nations equally. As states selectively follow international laws and norms or withdraw support, institutions suffer from diminished legitimacy and funding, undermining global governance and the collaborative efforts needed to tackle pressing transnational issues (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2016; Global Challenges, 2020).

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DIFFERENTIATED IMPACTS AND UNEVEN DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESS

The polarization and erosion of multilateralism have also led to differentiated impacts and uneven developmental progress. Powerful states often use their economic and political leverage to shape global frameworks and institutions in ways that serve their own interests, even if this comes at the expense of smaller or less developed nations (Özler, 2020).

Instead of a globally shared advancement, some regions and nations surge ahead while others lag, increasing existing inequalities (Reuveny & Thompson, 2008). This unevenness isn't just a matter of pace; it reflects fundamental differences in how countries are positioned within the global system and how they're able to benefit from (or are negatively impacted by) global trends (Dunford & Liu, 2016).

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Some theories suggest uneven development is endemic to capitalism (Kiely, 2015). Factors such as access to technology, resources, and political stability all play a role, creating a situation where some nations find it difficult to catch up, further entrenching a North-South divide (Alker, 1981). As the editor document notes, the UNDP strives to address development challenges and reduce poverty, but its work is complicated by this uneven progress and the weakening of international cooperation.

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF UNDP TO REDUCING ECONOMIC DISPARITIES BETWEEN LOW- INCOME AND HIGH-INCOME NATIONS

Amongst the largest challenges of the global development divide is the economic disparity between low-income and high-income nations. The UNDP helps to narrow this gap by fostering inclusive economic development, increasing access to financial assets, and promoting policies that result in sustainable development. The UNDP tries to empower developing nations through a number of initiatives by helping developing nations build stable economies that have minimal dependency on aid and can maintain their development.

One of the key ways that the UNDP combats economic inequality is through structural economic reforms in developing countries.

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In close partnership with international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF, the UNDP offers developing nations equal access to global markets, investment opportunities, and financial assistance without falling into long-term debt traps. Initiatives like Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Finance target reducing economic inequalities, redistributing income, and enhancing financial literacy among disadvantaged communities.

Additionally, UNDP is at the forefront of digital and financial inclusion to close the economic divide. The majority of developing nations are affected by reduced access to banking services, credit, and digital infrastructure, limiting business opportunities. UNDP initiatives such as the Digital Finance Initiative help to enhance mobile banking services, fintech solutions, and access to e-commerce among small businesses and entrepreneurs in developing nations. These initiatives increase financial independence, empower local enterprises, and reduce economic dependency on developed nations.

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Moreover, UNDP promotes equitable social protection policies and good labor practices to prevent exploitation and ensure that economic development is both equitable and sustainable. It cooperates with governments and private sectors to establish minimum wage legislation, labor rights guarantees, and social safety nets, ensuring that economic development benefits all citizens and not just a select few.

Through economic empowerment, financial inclusion, and inclusive and sustainable trade policies, UNDP is leading the narrowing of the gap between high-income and low-income countries to create long-term stability and autonomy in developing countries

UNDP's Contribution to Economic Development in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has registered impressive economic progress over recent decades, transforming from a low-income to a lower-middle-income country.

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has led this transformation through programs that promote inclusive economic growth, financial inclusion, and sustainable development. Among the sectors that have benefited greatly from the UNDP is employment generation and entrepreneurship. The UNDP has provided microfinance support to small business people through programs like the Entrepreneurs Development Programme, particularly to small business people and women in rural areas.

It also offered skills training in agriculture, textiles, and technology to make people more employable and to enhance access to digital platforms through which small businesses can access national and global markets. All this has helped to reduce unemployment, enhance self-reliance, and build a more robust private sector.

Bangladesh has grappled with financial access, especially in rural areas.

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The UNDP has collaborated with banks, fintech operators, and mobile money operators to widen financial services. Some of the key initiatives have been expansions of mobile banking through services like bKash, reaching financial services to millions; microcredit schemes providing small credit to low-income entrepreneurs; and financial literacy courses to empower people and businesses with good financial management practices. These initiatives have enfranchised marginalized communities and reduced dependency on traditional banking systems. Agriculture remains a dominant sector in Bangladesh but is under threat due to climate change. The UNDP has started programs that empower farmers with new green agricultural practices to boost production, improve climate-resilient agriculture to allow farmers to adapt to flooding, droughts, and increasing ocean levels, and encourage green business models, such as organic production and renewable energy enterprises.

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The UNDP has been at the forefront of facilitating gender equality in economic participation through capacity building and vocational training of females in industries like textiles, IT, and handicrafts.

It has also enabled women's access to banking services through specialized banking schemes and fostered women's labor rights and workplace equality with the government and private sector.

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As a result of this initiative, ever-larger numbers of women are entering the workforce, establishing businesses, and fueling economic growth.

The UNDP works with the government of Bangladesh to develop policies that drive inclusive and sustainable development. It helped create fair trade policies that enhance Bangladesh's integration with global markets, economic reform policies that bring in investment and industrialization, and SDG-oriented programs to ensure long-term stability. Through such initiatives, the UNDP has reduced poverty, enhanced economic independence, and bridged the gap between socio-economic classes in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is well on its way to being a middle-income country with a more stable and inclusive economy through ongoing efforts.

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UNDP'S CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH

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THE B.R.I.

Among the international programs aimed at reducing the gap between upper-middle-class and low-income nations is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has been active since 2013. This multi-trillion-dollar project's goal is to improve global trade and economic development by increasing investment in infrastructure. Currently, the BRI collaborates with more than 140 nations, most of which are located in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with the hope of promoting economic development through the construction of digital, transportation, and energy infrastructure.

Infrastructure development is the heart of the BRI project. A lot of developing countries do not have adequate highways, sea ports, fire power stations, rail tracks, and electrical power transmission within their borders, which unfortunately excludes them from participating in the global economy. China has provided these countries with the necessary aid to build and increase their infrastructure, so they can further the expansion of their foreign direct investment.

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Besides, the BRI is an important pillar of investment and credit for those countries that find it difficult to obtain financing from Western capitals through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World bank. China assists those countries through the provision of low-interest loans or granting them trade deals to improve their economies and decrease rates of poverty and unemployment. However, the initiative has also faced criticism. Some have argued that the BRI is a mechanism through which China strategically expands its global political influence and power (Komakech & Ombati, 2023).

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THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

Unlike the Belt and Road Initiative, which is spearheaded by a single nation, **the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** represent a truly **worldwide effort** to **reduce global inequalities, eradicate poverty, and ensure sustainable economic development.**

Adopted in **2015 as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the **17 SDGs** are a set of ambitious targets designed to address **economic, social, and environmental challenges** faced by countries worldwide.

At the heart of the SDGs is the mission to **bridge the developmental gap between wealthier and poorer nations** through coordinated global efforts. Goals such as **No Poverty (SDG 1), Quality Education (SDG 4), Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9), and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)** specifically target disparities in **economic opportunities, social mobility, and access to resources.** Unlike development models that focus solely on **economic growth**, the SDGs emphasize a **holistic approach**, ensuring that **technological progress, environmental sustainability, and social welfare** go hand in hand.

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A major strength of the SDGs is their **universality and inclusivity**. Unlike programs limited to specific regions, the SDGs apply to **all countries**, regardless of income level. While **low-income nations** struggle with **poverty, infrastructure deficits, and weak governance**, even **high-income nations** face challenges related to **climate change, gender inequality, and economic sustainability**. This global perspective ensures that **developmental efforts are interconnected**, fostering international cooperation rather than a one-sided transfer of aid. Financing and implementation are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which rely on public-private partnerships and funding from governments, businesses, and international organizations. Unlike direct investment projects like the BRI, the SDGs emphasize collaboration through initiatives like SDG 17, promoting Global North-South cooperation via trade, debt relief, and knowledge-sharing. As a comprehensive framework, the SDGs address inequality, sustainability, and justice, offering a roadmap for a more balanced and inclusive global future.

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CASE STUDY 1: GERMANY – THE EAST- WEST DEVELOPMENT DIVIDE

Germany ranks as one of the most modern industrial countries around the world; however, it has a distinct internal developmental divide even three decades after both halves of the country were reunited. In the current split up, Germany has an East and West side, both characters not connected for a long time, detached to the South and North global Germany. This specific case study showcases how a developed nation still faces profound economic disparity in its own nation, serving as an example of the imbalanced division in the North and South German sphere.

Both halves of Germany were divided by a wall in 1989 as a mark of East Germany's takeover by communist West Germany. Now, the Western part suffers even worse than the former Eastern side, starving for money and resources as the downside of capitalism lingers. The regions on the right suffer exponentially with poor infrastructure, lack of investment and business settlement, and massive employment scarcity.

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Perhaps one of the most notable disadvantages has been high levels of unemployment and lack of skilled workers which in turn makes one more unskilled. There is poor infrastructure as solid structures to support a market economy as seen on one side of the Berlin wall. The Eastern side of the wall is managed and sold, both resulting in deep slashes to earned economy. It is evident even today that many employees from the Eastern cities move to Frankfurt, Munich, and Hamburg, leading to the harsh facing of lower GDP per capita.

To address East-West disparities, Germany introduced the Solidarity Tax and benefited from EU structural funds to boost development in the East. Despite these efforts, economic gaps persist, fueling frustration, political tensions, and regional imbalances. Germany's experience illustrates how historical divisions, unequal investment, and labor migration can cause enduring inequality—even in developed nations. It serves as a key case study for understanding the complexities of closing development gaps, echoing global struggles faced by the Global South.

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CASE STUDY 2: CHINA – ECONOMIC SUPERPOWER OR NEO- COLONIAL PLAYER?

China's rise from a poor country in the 1980s to the second-largest economy in the world is now often cited as a model by some developing countries. Its state-centric model of development has indeed combined state-sponsored industrialization, major investments in infrastructure and a centrally placed hybrid of capitalism and government domination which lifted over 800 million people out of poverty. China's achievement contrasts with the Western-led economic model and demonstrates that other alternative paths to development do not fit within the IMF/World Bank framework.

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Yet its pathways created tensions in other discussions. Skeptics of China often cite its authoritarian, state-led economy, absence of democratic governance, human rights abuses, and lack of transparency and accountability to intermediate market economies as evidence that other developing countries would be better off adopting a different processing framework. In reality, while China can boast much progress in GDP and industrial production output, it is still facing societal and economic pressures that preoccupy the Global South including irresponsible levels of income inequality domestically, censorship, and an aging population crisis. China and the Global South – Helping or Exploiting?

One of the largest international controversies involving China is its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a trillion-dollar infrastructure project that crosses more than 140 nations. The BRI, they say, is a lifesaver for the Third World, putting into place roads, ports, and energy projects that the West has long neglected.

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By the BRI, China has emerged as the greatest investor in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, frequently projecting itself as a "South-South" friend instead of an imperial power.

But China's critics contend that China is indulging in "Debt Trap Diplomacy"—getting leverage through lending to weaker economies. Other nations, including Sri Lanka, Zambia, and Pakistan, have been unable to repay Chinese loans, resulting in cases where China has taken over strategic assets, like the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka. This creates fears that China is not necessarily bridging the development gap but establishing a new economic order where developing countries are still reliant on Chinese funding and infrastructure.

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Geopolitical Tensions – A New Economic Cold War?

China's expanding economic hegemony has also escalated global tensions, especially with the United States and European Union.

The US and its allies consider China an upcoming global threat and blame it for unfair trade, intellectual property theft, and wielding economic power to exert political domination.

The US has tried to push back against China's expansion with efforts such as the Build Back Better World (B3W) program, but they have been significantly less ambitious than China's BRI.

Meanwhile, developing nations get caught up in a geopolitics of influence. Do they partner with China for economic development, with all its risks of debt dependence and strategic manipulation, or do they remain committed to Western-dominated financial institutions, with all their austerity and past failures of IMF-led reform? It's enough to make China's development role the most contentious and complicated issue in global governance.

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QARMA (QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER)

1. What kind of financial tools can be utilized to help poor countries without perpetuating debt dependence, and ought institutions such as the IMF and World Bank be reformed in order to assist developing economies better?
2. How do trade agreements become more balanced in order to avoid economic exploitation and ensure equitable foreign direct investment (FDI) policies as well as inclusion of developing countries into global value chains?

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3. What strategies can foster industrialization and economic diversification in emerging economies, lessening reliance on raw material exports and stimulating local manufacturing and value-added sectors?

4. How can infrastructure development in emerging economies be financed and implemented in a sustainable way, with transparency, less corruption, and regulation of foreign investment initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative?

5. What policies need to be implemented to close the global digital divide, such as compulsory technology transfers, increasing internet penetration, and enhancing cybersecurity in emerging economies?

6. How can education and skills development assist in closing the development gap, avoiding brain drain, promoting academic mobility, and ensuring developed countries contribute to vocational training and skill development?

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7. What strategies would reconcile economic growth with climate resilience, guaranteeing green energy investment, climate adaptation financing, and responsibility for developed countries' past carbon emissions?

8. How would developing countries be able to uphold economic sovereignty while taking foreign aid and investment, promoting transparency, avoiding economic control by world powers, and diminishing reliance on foreign financing?

9. What is the international actors' (UN, WTO, regional blocs) role in implementing equitable development policies, establishing a global regulatory order, and encouraging cooperation rather than geopolitics competition?

10. How can the management of global economic shocks (like pandemics or financial crises) be organized to safeguard vulnerable economies, including the creation of a global emergency fund and measures to enhance the resilience of supply chains?

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11. Long-term economic self-sufficiency, to move from aid-dependent to investment-driven development supporting self-reinforcing growth?
12. What are the steps that must be taken to fight corruption in development work, including possibly creating a worldwide anti-corruption organization and ensuring funds reach their intended recipients instead of being wasted through inefficiency?

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