



UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Integration: Approaches and Issues

UNRISD Briefing Paper No. 1
World Summit for Social Development

March 1994

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous agency engaging in multi-disciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

A list of the Institute's free and priced publications can be obtained by contacting the Reference Centre, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland; Tel (41 22) 917 3020; Fax (41 22) 917 0650; Telex 41.29.62 UNO CH; e-mail: info@unrisd.org; World Wide Web Site: <http://www.unrisd.org>

Copyright (c) United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Short extracts from this publication may be reproduced unaltered without authorization on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, contact UNRISD.

The designations employed in UNRISD publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNRISD concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them.

Acknowledgements

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara. The collaboration of Dharam Ghai and the comments of participants in internal UNRISD seminars are gratefully acknowledged.

UNRISD work for the Social Summit is being carried out with the support and co-operation of the United Nations Development Programme.

Summary

The General Assembly of the United Nations has defined social integration as one of the three main agenda items structuring the work of the World Summit for Social Development. This is a broad and ambiguous term, open to a number of different interpretations. The following paper therefore explores alternative approaches to the subject and suggests issues of social integration which could be taken up at the Summit.

What is social integration? There are at least three different ways of understanding the concept of social integration. For some, it is an inclusionary goal, implying equal opportunities and rights for all human beings. In this case, becoming more integrated implies improving life chances. To others, however, increasing integration has a negative connotation, conjuring up the image of an unwanted imposition of uniformity. And, to still others, the term does not necessarily imply either a positive or a negative state. It is simply a way of describing the established patterns of human relations in any given society.

Some hidden assumptions. When social integration is used in the first sense listed above, as a goal in itself, certain problems often arise. These problems can be summarized as follows:

- (a) It is intellectually easy and often politically expedient to assume that grave problems of poverty and in justice can be alleviated through including people formerly excluded from certain activities or benefits. Yet in many cases, the existing pattern of development may be economically and ecologically unsustainable, or politically repressive. Therefore it is always necessary to ask inclusion in what and on what terms?
- (b) Social integration can be sought without giving sufficient attention to the need for cultural diversity. □ When this occurs, there can be an imposition of uniformity.
- (c) In all too many cases, international discussion of social development is also phrased in terms of integrating those with nothing into the modern mainstream, as though the groups defined as excluded are surviving in a virtual vacuum. Yet even the most impoverished and apparently disorganized have their own forms of social organization. Ignoring the real world of the disadvantaged is a danger associated with inclusionary rhetoric, and it makes for bad policy.
- (d) Finally, there is a risk that narrow concentration on the normative goal of social integration will make disintegration undesirable by definition. In some cases, however, the disintegration of existing systems of social relations can be essential before progress toward

a more just and equitable society can be made. The demise of slavery provides a case in point.

Anchoring prescriptions in analysis. Problems of this kind can be avoided by basing proposals for change on a solid analysis of existing patterns of social relations in different concrete situations. Examining real networks of relations and institutions which support or undermine the livelihood of people in given times and places, participants in the Summit can distinguish patterns and processes of social integration which may have positive or negative implications for the well-being of different groups. The policy-relevant question for those who look at social integration in these terms is not how to increase integration per se, but how to promote a kind of integration which favours the creation of a more just and equitable society.

Patterns and processes of social integration in the 1990s. A peculiar combination of integrative and disintegrative trends marks the end of the twentieth century. When taken together, these create qualitative changes in the way people are related to each other; and it is of fundamental importance for the success of the Summit that these changes be widely studied and discussed.

- **Globalization and insecurity.** While rapidly expanding boundaries of economic exchange and cultural contact improve the life chances of some groups, the process of globalization proves devastating for many others. New patterns of integration into a world economy are increasing the economic insecurity of most people, as farmers, workers and business people around the globe are thrown into competition for scarce resources in hard times. Trends in science and technology promote longer term structural unemployment, thus compounding inequality, marginality and cultural malaise.
- **Marginalization and identity.** As opportunity is concentrated in certain regions and countries, and in particular economic sectors, people respond in a number of ways. One of the most problematic is migration, whether internally or abroad. Although migratory processes are positive in many respects, the juxtaposition of people who often share neither a common language nor a common religion, and who have very different customs, makes unusual demands on human tolerance and understanding. New arrivals also create unusual strains on existing social services.

Even if people do not leave their homes, barriers between different cultures are falling under the impact of the revolution in mass communications. Local forms of solidarity are often replaced by new values and ties, which link small groups with access to the global consumer culture to others like themselves across the globe, while increasing the gulf between the global middle class and compatriots who cannot join the group.

Feelings of marginality and the disruption of existing forms of local solidarity are two elements exacerbating ethnic and religious conflict, and encouraging participation in illicit and illegal activities in many settings around the world today.

- **Democracy, representation and accountability.** Rapid economic and social , accompanied by far-reaching cultural change, makes unusual demands on political institutions. Economic uncertainty and fear of marginalization encourage electorates in established democracies to favour immediate remedies over long-term policies; and the same fears immensely complicate the task of creating effective democratic régimes in countries where such systems of government are only now being established.

Furthermore, the global nature of so many of the problems of today reinforces the need for a far more effective system of international governance than that currently available. There is a striking incongruence between patterns of social integration which bind people around the world more closely together than ever before, on the one hand, and the frailty of existing mechanisms for discussing joint problems and promoting joint action, on the other.

Issues of social integration to be addressed at the Social Summit. Six such areas of concern are suggested in the concluding section of this paper: (a) the relation between globalization, economic insecurity and declining social welfare; (b) the crisis of legitimacy and accountability; (c) the dynamics of ethnic and religious conflict; (d) problems of internal and international migration; (e) reasons for the expansion of illicit and illegal activities, and the increase of violence; and (f) reform of the international system.

What Is Social Integration? Alternative Approaches

When heads of state meet in March 1995 at the World Summit for Social Development, they will consider proposals for action under three agenda headings: (a) decreasing poverty, (b) reducing unemployment, and (c) enhancing social integration.

Of these three closely interrelated areas of concern, social integration is perhaps the broadest and most ambiguous. In fact, there is some uncertainty about how this third area should be understood and what kinds of issues should be taken up for discussion under such a rubric.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to focus specifically on the theme of social integration, to suggest alternative ways of approaching it and to explore some of the principal issues which could emerge when this agenda item is taken up at the international conference.

Social integration is a complex idea, which means different things to different people. To some, it is a positive goal, implying equal opportunities and rights for all human beings. In this case, becoming more integrated implies improving life chances. To others, however, increasing integration may conjure up the image of an unwanted imposition of conformity. And, to still others, the term in itself does not necessarily imply a desirable or undesirable state at all. It is simply a way of describing the established patterns of human relations in any given society. Thus, in the latter view, one pattern of social integration may provide a more prosperous, just or humane context for human beings than another; but it is also possible for one pattern of social integration to be markedly different from another without being either better or worse.

Let us begin by considering the widely held view that social integration is a positive goal in itself. This is the way the idea was often presented in discussions within the General Assembly leading up to the calling of the World Summit.

Social Integration as an Inclusionary Goal

Since the General Assembly urged the enhancement of social integration, it is obvious that delegates considered the latter a goal to be attained through various policy means. When the term is used in this way, as is frequently the case in international meetings, it becomes a broad-ranging synonym for greater justice, equality, material well-being and democratic freedom.

Delegates in these sessions recognize that some people or groups in the world already enjoy these precious benefits, while others do not; and they hope that, if adequate policy can be designed,

progress will be made toward lessening these distinctions. In this sense, the opposite of social integration is exclusion.

There is, however, a further concern underlying the call of the General Assembly to promote the enhancement of social integration.

Social Integration as Heightened Solidarity and Mutual Identification

Because our century ends with the collapse of numerous states and the sharpening of ethnic strife around the world, there is particular interest at the moment in searching for ways to create or reinforce common identities which lessen the likelihood of violence and provide a groundwork for co-operation. This is true not only at international and national levels, but also within local societies, where a number of developments are weakening basic bonds of mutual support and accountability and encouraging violent behaviour.

The call for enhancing social integration grows out of a generalized feeling that fundamental institutions of society, like the family and the community, are functioning badly; that children and young people are too often abandoned or brutalized; that criminal activities and corruption are on the increase. It also reflects concern over the weakening of public institutions, and a perceived decline of civility and tolerance in day-to-day social relations.

In this context, enhancing social integration can be understood as promoting harmonious interaction and solidarity at all levels of society. When this dimension of the concept is given priority, it becomes the opposite of a process of disintegration.

Furthering the Goal of Social Integration: Some Hidden Assumptions

Although no one doubts the importance of denouncing the unacceptable trend toward greater polarization, and launching an urgent call for greater solidarity, it is important to point out some of the hidden assumptions which often underlie an exclusive emphasis on social integration as a goal or end in itself.

1. If not carefully thought out, a call for greater inclusion in the benefits of development can be made without questioning the nature of the current process of development itself. It is intellectually easy and often politically expedient to assume that grave problems of poverty and injustice can be alleviated through including people formerly excluded from certain activities or benefits. Yet, in many cases, the existing pattern of development itself may be unviable or unjust.

Would it be advisable, for example, to suppose that all people around the world, who are currently unable to reach the very high levels of consumption characteristic of a few developed countries, can be included in the existing system without placing intolerable strains on the ecosystem of the earth? A more equitable form of inclusion in fact requires fundamental alteration of existing patterns of consumption.

The existing state of affairs may sometimes be not only ecologically unsustainable but also politically repressive. It is useful to remember that strongly authoritarian or totalitarian societies do in fact include everyone in elaborate structures of managed participation. In such cases, the problem of improving the quality of life for most people is not one of exclusion or inclusion, but of reform.

In sum, when promoting the goal of social integration, it is always necessary to ask the additional question: inclusion in what and on what terms?

2. A problem can also arise when social integration is sought without giving sufficient attention to the need for cultural diversity within most societies. The excluded can be included in ways which attempt to promote an unacceptable degree of homogeneity; and, when this occurs, the search for social integration becomes synonymous with the imposition of uniformity.

The issue of how to assure equal rights and opportunities for all, while respecting diversity, is one of the central policy questions of the twentieth century. It is also one of the most complex.

Because this is the case, social integration can be considered a negative goal by some groups.

3. When the goal of social integration is posed in terms of drawing the formerly excluded into national society, there can in fact be a tendency to forget that the latter have their own forms of social organization. In all too many cases, international discussion of social development is phrased in terms of integrating those with nothing into the modern mainstream, as though the groups defined as excluded are surviving in a virtual vacuum. This is simply not true.

Those who are excluded from some areas of modern society - even those who are most impoverished and apparently disorganized - are included in other forms of social organization. Good policy cannot be made if it fails to take the real world of the disadvantaged into account.

4. If social integration is explored exclusively from a prescriptive standpoint, so that emphasis is placed on improving certain indicators of opportunity or consumption (like nutrition, school enrolment, voter registration and so forth), it is possible to encourage some improvement through increased public expenditure without looking further into the structural bases of exclusion. Any improvement in the condition of the least advantaged is of course to be welcomed. But for integration (in the sense of more equal life chances) to be furthered over a longer term, and in a sustainable way, it is necessary to ask why problems of immiseration and polarization have arisen in the first place and why they seem to be growing worse.
5. Finally, there is a risk that narrow concentration on the normative goal of social integration will make disintegration undesirable by definition. In some cases, however, the disintegration of existing systems of social relations is essential before progress toward a more just and equitable society can be made. The demise of slavery during the nineteenth century provides a case in point.

Anchoring Prescriptions in Analysis: The Uses of an Alternative Approach to the Subject of Social Integration

One way to avoid the pitfalls just outlined above, and to orient discussion at the Social Summit toward consideration of central problems of social development in the 1990s, is obviously to base proposals for change on a solid analysis of existing patterns of social relations in different concrete situations. And here an alternative way of approaching the subject of social integration comes into play.

In this view, often held by social scientists, social integration is a vital area of concern for the world conference, not because integration in itself is intrinsically good (some forms of integration may be good and some bad), but because the term invites analysis of the concrete networks of relations and institutions which support or undermine the livelihood of people in given times and places.

No one goes through life alone. All of us are created within, and influenced by, networks of social relations which provide us with our identity and establish a framework for our actions. We survive and pursue our goals within a structure of institutions ranging from our families or households, clans or neighbourhoods or communities (where we seek primary support and protection), to the schools, associations, street gangs or video parlours (in which we are trained); and the small holdings, plantations, factories, sweatshops, stores and offices (in which we work). On a more general level, our opportunities or life chances are affected by larger political and economic structures ranging from tribal councils or municipal governments to the nation state, and from non-monetary exchange relations among friends to the Tokyo stock market. The United Nations system is one of the international elements in determining the options available to an increasing number of people around the world.

Observing this real world of human interaction, we can use the term social integration in several ways:

Patterns of social integration

At any given moment in time, it is possible to take a snapshot of the way a certain society is organized (for example, Wall Street in New York, the squatter settlements of Rio de Janeiro, a peasant village in India, or indeed the emerging world society of the 1990s). What are the values and rules which shape peoples actions in each of these contexts? What kinds of behaviour, within what sets of relations among people, allow them to survive or get ahead? How is power held and exercised, for example, and how is wealth created and distributed? What relations between man and nature are predominant? In each context, there is a pattern of social integration, or network of social relations and institutions, regulated by specific ideas concerning what is right and wrong, which bind people to one another under certain conditions. These, in turn, are intimately related to the way different groups make use of their natural environment.

To understand how very different these arrangements can be, one could compare the pattern of social integration characteristic of feudal England with that to be found on the Amazon frontier in 1990.

Processes of social integration

Moving from static snapshots to dynamic pictures of social change, we can look at the process of social integration and disintegration through which particular values and institutions develop or break down.

Widespread concern at present with social disintegration can be seen as a call to analyse the reasons behind the breakdown of certain institutions (such as states, churches, families or economies) or moral codes and to understand the kinds of social relations which are gaining prominence instead. Like the procession of images in a kaleidoscope, disintegration of one pattern gives way to the integration of another.

It is also possible to move from the level of a larger society to that of a group, and to examine the way particular groups are integrated into broader social units or relations. For instance, how are refugees integrated into host societies and how are the latter changed in consequence? How are subsistence cultivators integrated into regional, national and world markets? Within this perspective, as within the alternative one described at the beginning of this paper, there can be more or less integration. But more, in the context now under review, is not necessarily better.

Increasing integration is simply an indication that the complexity of social relations is greater, that the life chances of people are more bound up with those of others and less amenable to independent determination. Disintegration, in contrast, signifies the unravelling of existing ties.

The policy-relevant question for those who look at social integration in these terms is not how to increase integration per se, but how to promote a kind of integration which favours the creation of a more just and equitable society. Current trends toward expanding interdependence in some aspects of world society may unfortunately be working in the opposite direction. In preparing for the Social Summit, it is therefore useful to identify some of the central tendencies in contemporary social development.

Patterns and Processes of Social Integration in the 1990s

What is there about patterns of interaction among people around the world today which creates the sense of crisis felt by so many on the eve of the Social Summit? Why are problems of violence, exclusion and lack of solidarity so much on the mind of people in both industrialized and developing countries? It is not enough to answer questions like these with statistics. There are no doubt increasing numbers of murders or assaults, and increasing numbers of the poor. But the problem is not simply, or perhaps even primarily, a quantitative one. What we witness at the end of the twentieth century are also qualitative changes in the way people are related to each other; and it is of fundamental importance for the success of the Summit that these changes be widely studied and discussed.

Globalization and Insecurity

The end of the twentieth century is marked by a peculiar combination of integrating and disintegrating trends. On the one hand, technological change brings virtually every human being on the planet within reach of every other through communications satellites and mass transport.

Computers manage the almost instantaneous flow of information among individuals and groups who pursue common ends without ever having met. These are powerful forces for cultural integration, promoting common interests, values and aspirations among hundreds of millions of people.

Technological innovation has also played a fundamental role in encouraging the remarkable increase in world trade - and the even more remarkable internationalization of finance - over the past few decades. National, subnational and local economies are now linked in extremely complex networks which are as geographically extensive as they are inherently fragile.

The commitment to deregulation evinced by most governments in the 1970s and/or 1980s reinforced the extent of global economic interdependence, as well as its fragility.

Obviously, expanding the boundaries of exchange and cultural contact creates both opportunity and risk.

Human history has been played out against a background of expanding contacts among peoples, in which the life chances of some groups are improved and those of others are devastated. In this sense, growing social and economic integration always gives rise to conflict. But the latter is particularly acute in hard times, when there is relatively little to be distributed.

The Social Summit is likely to take place in just such times. Rapid elimination of cultural and economic barriers among nations and peoples has proceeded for the past 20 years within a context of stubborn and recurrent recession, as well as increasing indebtedness, over a considerable part of the developed and the developing world. In consequence, individuals and firms in both North and South have been forced to develop new strategies of economic survival within a particularly hostile environment, in which much larger numbers of competitors vie for a relatively static - and in some cases a dramatically shrinking - pool of resources.

Pressures on the labour market, the commodity market and the business community are severe under these circumstances. Even in relatively traditional rural areas, for example, small farmers long producing agricultural commodities for export find themselves competing with larger numbers of similar producers in other parts of the world, recently drawn out of subsistence production by their own governments' programmes to encourage exports. Unskilled labourers throughout the Third World must also seek work in a market where the number of available hands increases under the impact of expanding monetary relations and newly induced requirements for consumption. And skilled workers in all countries confront the challenges posed by new forms of organization of industrial production, which increase efficiency through subcontracting and the more flexible use of labour.

Competition for jobs and markets has been dramatically heightened by the collapse of barriers formerly separating the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as China, from the industrialized West. These are vast new pools of cheap and often relatively well-trained labour, entering the world market at a time when competition among enterprises in industrialized and developing countries alike depends to a growing degree upon ensuring that firms have access to a low-cost workforce.

Up to now, the livelihood of workers in the industrialized world, as well as in many newly industrializing countries, has to some extent been protected by labour agreements and broader political pacts hammered out within the boundaries of the nation state. Nevertheless the liberalization of trade, combined with deregulation of finance, has weakened or destroyed barriers once retaining many economic activities within national boundaries. In consequence, employers and investors are now less constrained to bargain with workers within their own countries than was previously the case.

At the same time, national governments have been forced by liberalization and deregulation to strengthen the competitive position of their economies in the global arena, and thus to adopt measures which attract foreign capital and cheapen exports, even when these measures may threaten the standard of living of large numbers of people and the capacity of the government itself to meet its obligations to citizens and to the environment.

In an increasingly unified and unregulated international market for capital, for example, governments must weigh the interests of potential investors carefully when considering whether to increase taxes (which might encourage the redistribution of wealth), or reduce interest rates in the hope of stimulating growth and employment within the local economy. The same considerations

work against taking stringent measures to protect the environment. And they militate against insisting that local businesses make relatively substantial contributions to social security funds or comply with laws protecting the rights of workers. Such steps, which negatively affect the cost structure of the business sector and impede the flexible use of labour, can lead under current conditions of international competition to the flight or closure of firms.

The declining capacity of most national governments to provide social services constitutes an additional element in the progressive disprotection of many groups which could formerly count on certain minimum social benefits. The most dramatic changes in this area have no doubt occurred in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where a sharp decline in levels of living has been associated with the disintegration of the socio-economic and political system. But the sense of growing insecurity is hardly less throughout much of the Third World.

The civil service, public welfare institutions and industrial sectors of a great many developing countries are currently in crisis. In some cases, this is associated with a process of reform and reorganization which will prove salutary. In others, however, such sectors are simply functioning badly - providing inferior services, producing lesser quality goods, utilizing existing capacity less rationally. Such a course of events delegitimizes the labour of the doctors and nurses, teachers, public servants and workers who see not only their income and status within the community, but also the quality of their work, undermined by a lack of needed resources.

Trends in science and technology introduce a final element of uncertainty in the current context of global economic restructuring, as the nature of production in the modern industrial sector of both older and newer industrialized countries is altered by advancing automation and robotics. Industrial employment is likely to shrink, even if recession gives way to a new period of high growth in the near future. This is a qualitative change of the first order in the structure of opportunity of most societies around the globe, and it will fundamentally affect the pattern of social integration characteristic of the twenty-first century world. For some time to come, we can expect structural unemployment further to compound the problem of growing marginality and cultural malaise with which the Summit will be concerned.

Marginality, Solidarity and Identity

Many would argue that processes of supranational integration, implying the progressive disprotection of national markets and the modernization of relatively backward sectors and regions, need not inevitably create unmanageable threats to local livelihood. They would cite the experience of the European Community to show that it has been possible - through democratic consultation and the gradual creation of supranational institutions - to expand the boundaries of an international community and to improve its competitiveness in ways which have not been unduly disruptive.

In the case of Western European union, the threat that homogenization of markets would promote polarization (and in some cases destitution) within relatively less advantaged communities and sectors has been explicitly addressed through the negotiation of social pacts; and the likelihood that integration would increase disparity of opportunity among countries has been countered through the creation of compensatory funds which specifically provided for the redistribution of wealth from richer to poorer regions of the community. Only time will tell whether such efforts will ultimately be successful.

Over most of the world, however, barriers separating nations and groups from the global marketplace, and from a global culture, have broken down during the past few decades in a rapid, spontaneous and haphazard fashion.

There has been very little planning for change of a kind which might cushion the blows that economic and social reorganization deals to large numbers of groups and individuals. And, in the absence of systematic compensatory effort, global integration seems quite clearly to be intensifying inequality, both within countries and among them.

As opportunity is concentrated in certain regions and countries, and in particular economic sectors, people respond to this development in a number of ways. The most obvious response - and one of the most problematic - to the threat of economic marginalization is to migrate, whether internally or abroad. And over the past few decades this has become a central element in the livelihood strategy of millions.

Although current flows of people in search of a better life may be proportionally no larger than they were at certain times in the nineteenth century, they involve far greater diversity of cultural contact and very large absolute numbers of migrants. The potential for disruption of existing forms of social organization in communities and regions of origin of migrants is sometimes great, particularly when most able-bodied members of households depart, leaving the young and the old to cope as best they can. Women who remain behind when men migrate must assume new roles and add new tasks to those traditionally assigned them.

The potential for improving the level of living of migrants' families is also considerable, as remittances are sent home and invested. Some migrants get ahead, and some find departure from their place of origin a form of liberation from oppressive obligations. In all too many instances, however, migration remains a harsh necessity - a last resort involving privation and not infrequently the danger of physical harm.

In major receiving countries, international migration creates enormous problems of social integration and cultural adaptation which are currently at the centre of the policy debate. The juxtaposition of people who often share neither a common language nor a common religion, and who have very different customs, makes unusual demands on human tolerance and understanding. The arrival of large numbers of foreigners also creates unusual strains on existing social services and local economies.

As global integration quickens at the end of the twentieth century, barriers between different cultures are of course being torn down - and relations between different cultures strained - whether migration occurs or not. Even if people do not leave their homes, local identities may be challenged by what is broadcast on television and radio, or seen on videos. The revolution in mass communication, which encourages the creation of a global culture, has great potential for promoting understanding and solidarity, and enhancing knowledge throughout the world. In its present form, it also has an awesome capacity to exalt consumerism and proffer a highly individualistic definition of a good life.

To attain this good life is not easy in hard times, whether one lives in a developing or an industrialized society. Competition among those who struggle to be included in global consumer culture creates sharp rifts in virtually all communities, from rural China to midtown New York. Local forms of solidarity are replaced by new values and ties, which link small groups with access to the new style of life in one city or country to others within the region and the world - while increasing the gulf between the latter and the majority of the inhabitants of the planet, who remain excluded from the consumer society they observe from afar.

In a large number of countries, illicit and illegal activities constitute one of the very few avenues currently open to many aspirants for inclusion in the global consumer culture. Particularly in periods of wide-ranging social reorganization, the definition of what is illicit and what is not tends to be somewhat unclear; and activities are tolerated which in previous periods would have been morally unacceptable.

At a time of narrowing economic opportunity across wide areas of the world, participation in the illegal economy furthermore constitutes one of the few realistic options available to many families who simply need to ensure a basic level of subsistence. Illegality makes certain commodities or services unusually profitable.

Thus the drug trade has become one of the central economic activities of the late twentieth century, drawing millions of people - from the peasant villages of Third World countries to the inner cities of the industrialized North - into networks of exchange which provide great wealth for some and a tolerable living for many who have limited alternative sources of income.

Needless to say, both the social dangers and the social opportunities inherent in this period of expanding international integration are heightened by the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet bloc - which is in itself a stunning manifestation of the force of global integration - eliminates one of the central organizing principles of post-war international society and encourages a revival of animosity among peoples of different cultures who were formerly required to live together within multi-ethnic states. Concurrently, it creates new opportunities for peace-making in countries where competition among the great powers long dictated support for antagonists in internal wars.

Ethnic conflict, and the degeneration of ethnic conflict into civil war, is one of the unfortunate hallmarks of the late twentieth century. It rests on reaffirmation of an exclusive form of identity and solidarity among people who share common historical grievances and have defined a common enemy. Although differences of religion and language are often involved, this is not necessarily the case. In fact, personalistic factions can manipulate enmity in ways which create self-sustaining spirals of violence among antagonists.

At present we witness dozens of civil wars across the globe, with hundreds of thousands of casualties. There could be no more telling sign of social malaise than the atrocities committed in these wars, usually against civilians. Yet, while international organizations and groups search for ways to deal with such occurrences, violence is supported and even encouraged by long-standing global institutions, including the arms trade(which makes the instruments of death available) and sectors of the film industry (which both trivialize and glorify sadistic forms of violence).

Democracy, Representation and Accountability

Rapid economic and social reorganization, accompanied by far-reaching cultural change, makes unusual demands on political institutions. Economic uncertainty and fear of marginalization encourage electorates in established democracies to favour immediate remedies over long-term policies; and the same fears immensely complicate the task of creating effective democratic regimes in countries where such systems of government are only now being established.

Furthermore, the global nature of so many of the problems of today reinforces the need for a far more effective system of international governance than that currently available. There is a striking incongruence between patterns of social integration which bind people around the world more

closely together than ever before, on the one hand, and the frailty of existing mechanisms for discussing joint problems and promoting joint action on the other.

Non-governmental organizations have played a major role in bridging this gap over the past several decades, through networking activities which span countries and continents. Environmental and human rights concerns in particular have stimulated co-ordinated action by citizens groups around the world. Nevertheless it would be unrealistic to expect that these organizations can take the place of formal national and international systems which aggregate interests, make policy and distribute resources within a context of institutional accountability for the outcome of their actions.

Issues of Social Integration to be Addressed at the Social Summit

If the preceding description of patterns and processes of social integration at the end of the twentieth century is valid, what are some of the most important issues deserving attention at the Social Summit? Six areas of concern can be suggested below.

Economic Insecurity and Social Welfare

The relation between globalization and mounting economic insecurity must be analysed and discussed.

The demands made by competition in global markets cannot be allowed to tear basic institutional structures of social solidarity apart. In industrialized market societies where commitment to the principles of the welfare state has been strong, it is necessary to deal with the growing challenge posed by competition from regions with lower welfare costs. The problems of financing posed by demographic shifts are also formidable. In former socialist countries, as in much of the developing world, the problem is one of constructing a system of institutional responsibility for the general welfare along new lines and with new bases of affiliation and support. The rapidly declining availability and quality of basic public services in both North and South must also be reversed.

Here there is a place for considering the best way to cushion the impact of recession and economic restructuring on the most vulnerable segments of society, through the creation of targeted programmes or social safety nets. Nevertheless the larger goal of improving equality of opportunity requires that such approaches be supplemented with others which address more fundamental issues of polarization and destitution.

To the extent that the present-day crisis in social welfare provision is structurally related to the globalization of the economy, any longer term solution to the problem requires hammering out an international strategy which establishes mechanisms for cushioning the effects of international economic forces on national social policy. As this discussion goes forward, however, it is important to remember that standardized, global policy recommendations (like those routinely applied in the design of structural adjustment programmes) are often unsuited to the specific requirements of concrete social settings.

The Crisis of Legitimacy and Accountability

Institutions and organizations at all levels of society (from the international system and the nation state through the transnational and national industrial and financial sectors, political parties, interest groups and non-governmental organizations, down to local communities and informal support networks, and finally to the basic kinship group or family) may confront crises of legitimacy and

responsibility stemming from inability to cope adequately with the process of global restructuring discussed above.

The Summit will need to recognize these crises but combat defeatism, focusing on means of strengthening institutions through democratic participation. Again, it will be helpful to take a critical view of standard prescriptions, meant to be applied globally without regard to the very different local or national circumstances.

The Dynamics of Ethnic and Religious Conflict

The present-day dynamics of ethnic and religious conflict should be carefully considered by Summit participants - some of whom have developed innovative and effective policies for dealing with cultural differences within their own societies.

The Summit can serve as an opportunity for exchanging views on measures which have lessened conflict among groups with different cultural identities, at the neighbourhood and municipal levels as well as within national political systems.

The Problems of Internal and International Migration

The meeting can also give serious attention to problems arising from internal and international migration (whether involving refugees or asylum-seekers, or simply encompassing the large numbers of people who strike out in search of a better life).

This is an issue which stirs hot debate in many societies. The quality of immigration and social welfare policy could benefit markedly from a broad-ranging discussion of the underlying dynamics of population movements in the 1990s, supplemented by comparative analysis of efforts to design humane and sustainable social policy in sending and receiving regions. The peculiar characteristics of remittance economies and societies might also be considered.

The Expansion of Illicit and Illegal Activities, and the Increase in Violence

The Summit provides an opportunity to link the apparent growth of crime, corruption and violence during recent years to a more general analysis of problems of social integration in the 1990s.

Why are we witnessing a rapid expansion in the power and global reach of international criminal organizations? Why have indices of violent crime increased so markedly in many areas of the world? Why have both the public service and private enterprise been marked by what seems to be an unusually high degree of corruption? How are we to understand the growth of violence among the young, as well as the systematic use of violence against children? What is being done to deal with these problems?

Reform of the International System

Finally, the Social Summit must surely take up the difficult questions associated with reform of the international system.

The set of institutions developed in the immediate post-war period to facilitate international trade, regulate the global financial system and provide development assistance are now confronted with fast-changing situations with which they are often ill-equipped to deal. They must not only meet new technical challenges, but also come to terms with increasing demands for enhanced public accountability and openness in policy-making.

At the same time, there must be improvement in the capacity of the international community to deal with challenges of peace-making, peace-keeping and humanitarian relief in the post-Cold War period. This is a truly daunting task, which requires agreement on acceptable structures of authority and administration in highly complex situations of conflict.

In an increasing number of cases, the international system is also being called upon to reconstruct economies and societies in a state of almost complete collapse.

Within such settings, the question of how to promote just and equitable patterns of social integration takes on special meaning; and knowledge of local society, combined with a willingness to engage in wide-ranging dialogue is essential.