United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Background Guide

I.   Cultural Preservation in Conflict
II.   Strengthening Partnerships on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Background Guide

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established in 1946 with the aim of increasing education for all people in order to promote a lasting global peace.[1] UNESCO seeks to push the international community to adopt standards and programs that create a freer flow of information, ideas, and knowledge. Through this education, UNESCO pushes for greater scientific and cultural knowledge to strengthen bonds between nations and prevent conflict. With this vast mandate, UNESCO has a massive impact on our world today, particularly as cultural diversity is increasingly under attack, scientific facts are rejected, and threats to the free flow of information endanger peace and human rights.[2] Today, the organization focuses on a variety of issues, including increasing access to school for girls and women, developing new scientific technologies in response to climate change threats, preserving cultural landmarks and practices, and fighting challenges to freedom of the press.

I.   Cultural Preservation in Conflict

Statement of the Issue:

For centuries, destruction of cultural property has been a constant part of conflict and warfare. Cultural heritage is the entire body of material signs handed down from the past over time, whether artistic or symbolic.[3] There are two types of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, that require different approaches to preserve during armed conflict. Tangible cultural heritage is physical artifacts, such as buildings, artwork, clothing, and monuments. On the other hand, intangible cultural heritage is the traditions or living expression of a culture, such as its social practices and rituals, traditional crafts, performing arts, and social practices.[4] It is critical to preserve both types of culture during armed conflict. For those affected by violence, culture

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[1] "UNESCO in brief," About Us, UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/en/brief.
[2] "Our Impact," UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/en/impact.
[3] Johan Brosche et al., "Heritage Under Attack: motives for targeting cultural property during armed conflict," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23, no. 3 (January 2017): 250, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2016.1261918.
[4] "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?" UNESCO, https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003.

can be a vital source of community and resilience, leading towards eventual recovery.[5] On a global scale, preserving diverse cultures allows for greater cultural diversity and understanding, which can prevent violent extremism and create lasting peace. Preservation of culture is a key piece of UNESCO's mission that, despite decades of progress, continues to be a challenge today.

Cultural property may come under attack during different types of conflict, such as interstate conflict and civil wars. Interstate conflict is when violence breaks out between two different states, such as the current war between Russia and Ukraine. Since Russia invaded in February of 2022, it has destroyed or stolen cultural artifacts from Ukraine. By February of 2023, UNESCO had confirmed damage to 240 Ukrainian cultural heritage sites.[6] Satellite imagery, combined with reports from museum employees, have shown members of the Russian military using trucks to transport artifacts taken from Ukrainian museums to Russian-occupied areas, such as Crimea.[7]

In contrast, civil wars occur when a rebel group fights against the ruling government. In Afghanistan, civil war raged in the 1990s until the American-led coalition occupied the country from 2001 until 2021. During the civil war, numerous museums throughout the country were looted and destroyed.[8] In 2003, the Taliban drew international outrage after its destruction of the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. While the Taliban has claimed that it has changed and will preserve the country's cultural properties since it regained control of the country in 2021, many are skeptical of these promises. A civil war has also been ongoing in Yemen since 2014. As of 2022, over 4,000 cultural artifacts had been stolen from Yemen and smuggled to other countries in the West and the Middle East.[9] Museums have come under attack by both sides of the civil war and all three of the country's UNESCO World Heritage Sites have sustained damage. Finally, in Sudan, conflict broke out between two rival generals and their

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[5] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Protecting Culture in Emergencies, CLT-2020/WS/5, p. 3 (2020), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372995#.
[6] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, In the Face of War, a Year of Action in Ukraine, CPE-2023/WS/6 Rev., p. 6 (2023), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384454.
[7] Richard Kurin, "How Ukrainians Are Defending Their Cultural Heritage From Russian Destruction," *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 22, 2023, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/ukrainians-defend-their-cultural-heritage-russian-destruction-180981661/.
[8] Graham Bowley, Tom Mashberg, and Anna Kambhampaty, "Taliban Vows to Protect Afghan Cultural Heritage, but Fears Persist," *New York Times*, August 20, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/20/arts/taliban-afghan-cultural-heritage.html.
[9] Michael Jansen, "Yemen's unique heritage devastated by seven years of war," *Irish Times*, November 29, 2022, https://www.irishtimes.com/world/middle-east/2022/11/29/yemens-unique-heritage-devastated-by-seven-years-of-war/.

forces in April of 2023. While the situation continues to evolve, UNESCO is concerned about attacks on cultural heritage sites, including the Presidential Palace, and is monitoring fighting near those sites closely.[10]

      While there are numerous conventions and agreements that prohibit the destruction of cultural property, attacks still occur. There are four main reasons that actors in a conflict may attack tangible cultural heritage. Firstly, the attack may help the actor reach its goals in the conflict by demonstrating superior power over its enemy.[11] The willingness to destroy cultural heritage can assert the actor's claim to power and legitimacy. In civil wars, rebels may attack the regime's cultural heritage as a form of rejection. Secondly, attacking tangible cultural heritage may help an actor achieve military or strategic goals.[12] Certain cultural sites may be located in strategic locations and provide one side with an advantage if they control the site. Thirdly, an actor may attack cultural sites as a signal of its commitment to a cause and its capabilities.[13] This signal may convince the opponent to make concessions to the attacker. This reason is particularly valuable during civil wars because the symbolism of cultural heritage sites gains a lot of attention for the attacker. Finally, the attack may be motivated by economic or financial incentives.[14] Because security breaks down during a conflict, it is easier to steal artifacts. When they are sold, it can provide a lot of financial support for either side in a conflict.

History:

      The first governmental attempt to protect cultural heritage during armed conflict in the modern era came during the American Civil War when the Lieber Code was implemented in 1863. Following that, other efforts came through in the form of the Brussels Declaration in 1874 and the Oxford Manual in 1880.[15] Based on these guidelines, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 prohibited all parties from the destruction and seizure of cultural property during armed

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[10] "Sudan: UNESCO is deeply concerned and is preparing to support the population," UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/sudan-unesco-deeply-concerned-and-preparing-support-population.

[11] Johan Brosche et al., "Heritage Under Attack: motives for targeting cultural property during armed conflict," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23, no. 3 (January 2017): 251, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2016.1261918.

[12] Ibid, 253.

[13] Ibid, 254.

[14] Ibid, 255.

[15] Sigrid Van der Auwera, "International Law and the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict: Actual Problems and Challenges," *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 43, no. 4 (2013): 176.

conflict. However, the violence targeted at cultural sites during both world wars showed that these provisions were insufficient to protect cultural heritage.

As a result, UNESCO organized a conference on the issue in 1954, where the Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property during Armed Conflict was adopted. This agreement prohibited the seizure and/or destruction of cultural property and its use for military purposes, except when military necessity says otherwise.[16] Additionally, the agreement requires states to prepare ways to protect their cultural property during peacetime and establish provisions to meet the goals of the convention in military training. Armies are also required to have specialized staff to protect cultural property. States are able to mark culturally significant sites with the Blue Shield symbol, indicating that an attack on the site would violate international law and nominate certain important sites to UNESCO for enhanced protection. A protocol to the convention passed the same year banned the export of cultural materials from occupied territories. Another agreement, the 1977 Protocol to the Geneva Conventions also declares attacks on cultural property as a war crime.

After the end of the Cold War, conflicts broke out in the Balkans and in the Middle East. These conflicts were notorious for their targeting of cultural property and institutions. As a result, the 1999 Protocol to the Hague Convention was passed to strengthen international humanitarian laws against cultural property destruction.[17] The protocol expanded the scope of protections to include non-international armed conflict and strengthened individual criminal responsibility for destruction. Additionally, it created a committee and dedicated fund to protect cultural property during armed conflict. Finally, Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court designates the intentional destruction of cultural property as a war crime.[18] In 2003, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted, seeking to safeguard and respect intangible cultural heritage, in addition to raising awareness about it and providing international resources for its preservation.[19]

Despite the plethora of international law seeking to prevent destruction of cultural property, there have been numerous failures in the process, most notably during the American-

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid, 177.
[18] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Protecting Culture in Emergencies, CLT-2020/WS/5, p. 10 (2020), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372995#.
[19] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Implementing the Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH, p. 4 (2011), https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/01853-EN.pdf.

led invasion of Iraq in 2003. After the coalition toppled Saddam Hussein, the country's dictator, the security situation rapidly deteriorated.[20] Many people looted government buildings and museums, seeking to gain wealth. Untrained coalition forces stood by and allowed the looting to take place–taking no action to protect the cultural property. There were numerous reasons for the failures that occurred in Iraq. Firstly, the United States and the United Kingdom, the main contributors to the coalition, had not yet ratified the 1954 Hague Convention.[21] Secondly, the military coalition requested advice from experts on cultural property protection too late. By the time that this occurred, troops were already in the ground in Iraq and there had been no discussion of the importance of cultural preservation prior to the invasion. Finally, the advisors that were recruited did not have enough seniority to actually affect policy decisions.

Analysis:

Increasing cultural preservation during armed conflict is a vitally important project for UNESCO. In order to do so, existing standards of international humanitarian law, such as the 1954 Hague Convention and its two protocols, must be improved. This could be addressed by more member states ratifying the convention and the protocols, particularly in areas faced with a lot of armed conflict. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 47.8 percent of member states have ratified the Convention and only 8.7 percent of member states have ratified the 1999 Protocol.[22] Additionally, the Convention contains vague language, which could be clarified and mechanisms modified. Destruction of cultural property is permitted if it is a military necessity, but no concrete definition of "military necessity" is given.[23] This opens the door to potential abuse of this term to avoid accountability for cultural property destruction. Furthermore, cultural properties are nominated by member state governments for protection status within UNESCO. This can actually discriminate against suppressed groups within a country, as their monuments may not be nominated by the dominant group.[24] Finally, new ways of applying existing international standards to non-state actors, such as rebel or terrorist groups, must be considered.

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[20] David Cameron, "Inching Forward," in *From Desolation to Reconstruction: Iraq's Troubled Journey*, ed. Mokhtar Lamani and Bessma Momani (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2010), 38.
[21] Peter Stone, "A four-tier approach to the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict," *Antiquity* 87 no. 335 (March 2013), 169.
[22] Sigrid Van der Auwera, "International Law and the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict: Actual Problems and Challenges," *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 43, no. 4 (2013): 184.
[23] Ibid, 181.
[24] Ibid, 182.

UNESCO also could strive for stronger ability to enforce the provisions of the Convention. Member states are required to submit reports to UNESCO on their progress towards implementing the Convention every four years; however, in 2010, only 40 out of 121 states did so.[25] As a result, UNESCO is missing key information on global progress towards protection of cultural property. Additionally, many states are cheating on parts of the Convention. For example, member states are required to have specialized staff as a part of their militaries to advise on cultural property protection.[26] Many states simply do not have this staff at all, while others claim that existing military personnel of different specialties fulfill this responsibility.

Going forward, UNESCO may also mandate increased cooperation between cultural property preservation experts and the governments of member states. Scholars have proposed four tiers of interaction between these groups: long-term, pre-deployment, during conflict, and post-conflict.[27] In the long-term, training could be focused on awareness of cultural property preservation and integrated into existing military training. Prior to deployment, members of the military could receive specific details about potential artifacts, collections, artwork, and more, in the country to which they are being deployed. During the conflict, interaction should be focused towards preventing damage to cultural property as much as possible. After the conflict, experts and the military must work together to stabilize the country and repair any damage that occurred during the fighting. As soon as possible, control should be handed over back to local authorities to protect cultural property.

Finally, protections for intangible cultural heritage are lacking in international law. Again, intangible cultural heritage consists of a cultural group's oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices (rituals, festivals, etc.), communal knowledge, and traditional craftsmanship.[28] The 2003 Convention does not address the specific dangers intangible cultural heritage may face during armed conflict.[29] Intangible cultural heritage and its manifestations can significantly escalate tensions in a conflict. They demonstrate cultural and political differences which can lead to increases in violence. Due to the disruption that armed conflict causes in daily

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[25] Ibid, 185.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Peter Stone, "A four-tier approach to the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict," *Antiquity* 87 no. 335 (March 2013), 173.

[28] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Implementing the Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH, p. 4 (2011), https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/01853-EN.pdf.

[29] Sigrid Van der Auwera, "International Law and the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict: Actual Problems and Challenges," *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 43, no. 4 (2013): 187.

life, aspects of intangible cultural heritage may be lost. In Ukraine, for example, the Russian invasion has limited artistic performances. In response, UNESCO has provided grants for artists to continue creating and is developing community centers for artists to network with cultural professionals, local communities, and NGOs.[30] While these efforts are important, international law does not address intangible cultural heritage during armed conflict.

Conclusion:

Preservation of cultural property, both tangible and intangible, is critical during armed conflict. As a source of community, culture is important for the resilience and recovery of those affected by conflict. While there are provisions in international law that prohibit targeting cultural property, they are both outdated and not fully implemented and thus are largely unsuccessful. Additionally, international law lacks provisions to protect intangible cultural heritage during armed conflict. In order to make progress in preserving culture in the midst of conflict, UNESCO must address these shortcomings.

Questions:

1. Can UNESCO ensure that member states follow international agreements on cultural property protection?
2. What kinds of interactions need to occur between member states and cultural property protection experts and how can UNESCO facilitate that cooperation?
3. What threats does intangible cultural heritage face during armed conflicts and what methods can UNESCO use to combat those threats?

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[30] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, In the Face of War, a Year of Action in Ukraine, CPE-2023/WS/6 Rev., p. 8 (2023), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384454.

Heritage Studies 23, no. 3 (January 2017): 248-260, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2016.1261918.

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II.   Strengthening Partnerships on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Statement of the Issue:

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development centered around 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs. In this landmark agreement, the UN set decisive targets to achieve for global development by the year 2030.[31] The Division for Sustainable Development Goals within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs is the primary office that is responsible for ensuring progress towards the SDGs; however, all UN agencies work towards the goals that are relevant to their areas of expertise.

Numerous SDGs are directly related to the work of UNESCO. At an organizational level, UNESCO as a whole works towards achieving SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG 16: Peace, Justice, & Strong Institutions. Its path to achieving those two SDGs runs through numerous others, such as SDG 2: Zero Hunger, SDG 3: Good Health & Well-Being, SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 6: Clean Water & Sanitation, SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption & Production, and SDG 13: Climate Action.[32] It is impossible for UNESCO to achieve all of these SDGs on its own–it must work with other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Partnerships are the voluntary and collaborative relationships between public or non-public stakeholders based on a common goal or task.[33] A stakeholder is any person or group that has an interest in an issue. The importance of partnership is built into the SDG framework with SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

In order to demonstrate the importance of partnerships to making progress on the SDGs, a few will be examined below. Firstly, UNESCO works as a secondary partner to other United Nations agencies on certain SDGs. For example, on SDG 2: Zero Hunger, UNESCO collaborates with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).[34] The two agencies will work together to develop learning modules, teaching aids, and practical session for schools in agricultural areas about food security and sustainable food systems. Additionally, a joint knowledge-sharing platform on the intersections between food, culture, and peace. This program will be largely promoted in rural areas affected by conflict. SDG 2 falls primarily within the scope of FAO and

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[31] "The 17 Goals," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

[32] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Unpacking Sustainable Development Goal 4: Education 2030, ED-16/ESC-PCR/GD/1 REV. (2016), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246300.

[33] "Partnerships and cooperation for water," UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/reports/wwdr/2023/en.

[34] "FAO and UNESCO redouble efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals," FAO, https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1143982/icode/.

is a large focus of the organization's work; however, it connects to many of UNESCO's areas of expertise. As a result, a partnership between the two agencies will enable them both to make progress towards SDG 2 and other goals.

Partnerships also take place with other stakeholders outside of UN agencies as well. There are three main types of partnership with non-UN stakeholders: intra-sectoral, cross-sectoral, and extra-sectoral.[35] UNESCO utilizes all of these types of partnerships to work towards improving water access for SDG 6. For example, there are intra-sectoral partnerships that occur among stakeholders that have a common and specific type of water-related objective. Cross-sectoral partnerships involve stakeholders with different water-related focal points and multiple objectives, which can sometimes be competing. Finally, extra-sectoral partnerships involve stakeholders from outside of water-related fields where their primary objectives may not be water-related, but water plays an important or determining role.

Completing the SDGs by 2030 is a major challenge for UN agencies and their partners. In order to meet this deadline, a Global Acceleration Framework was adopted for SDG 6, although its points can be applied to the other SDGs as well.[36] This framework seeks to mobilize UN agencies, governments, civil society organizations (e.g., NGOs), private sector entities (e.g., businesses), and other stakeholders through five accelerators: financing, data & information, capacity development, innovation, and governance. In financing, these stakeholders must be able to secure enough funding to carry out projects for the SDG. This funding may come from various sources, including governments and private sector businesses. Data and information are necessary to ascertain what resources are available and to monitor progress moving forward. With capacity development, stakeholders seek to create a well-trained workforce. This will improve service levels and increase job creation and retention. The fourth accelerator, innovation, aims to improve resource management and service delivery through the development of new, smart practices and technologies. Finally, governance is defined by the aim to increase collaboration between various stakeholders on SDG 6-related issues. Not only will these partnerships bring in more diverse viewpoints, but they will also increase the amount of

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[35] "Partnerships and cooperation for water," UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/reports/wwdr/2023/en.
[36] "SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework," UN Water, https://www.unwater.org/our-work/sdg-6-global-acceleration-framework.

resources available to SDG 6-related work and increase the productivity and efficiency of these projects.

One of the SDGs that is most directly related to UNESCO's work is SDG 4: Quality Education. To work towards this SDG, UNESCO provides guidance, technical advice, and assistance to states on their legal and policy frameworks for education.[37] The organization also works to build capacities to improve education access. UNESCO has also promoted social media campaigns to raise awareness on education access issues globally and has conducted studies in various education-related areas, such as pre-primary education, higher education, and digital learning. Given the broad scale of providing quality education, it is impossible for UNESCO to achieve this SDG without assistance. Therefore, the organization has partnered with various UN agencies, such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labor Organization, and NGOs, ranging from advocacy organizations to research thinktanks. UNESCO's work in improving education access also links directly to SDG 5: Gender Equality. Currently, out of the 771 million adults without literacy skills, 2/3 of them are women.[38] Numerous obstacles face women and girls in accessing education, including poverty, geographical isolation, minority status, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence, and tradition attitudes about the status of women.

History:

The Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, were adopted as a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015.[39] The 2030 Agenda built upon years of work by UN agencies that pushed for global partnerships to improve human lives across the world and the environment. In 1992, Agenda 21 was adopted at the Earth Summit in Brazil to achieve this goal. It was followed by the Millennium Declaration in 2000, which set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce extreme poverty by the year 2015. In order to achieve the MDGs, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of

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[37] "What you need to know about the right to education," UNESCO, last modified April 27, 2023, https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education/need-know.
[38] "What you need to know about how UNESCO advances education and gender equality," UNESCO, last modified May 11, 2023, https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education/need-know.
[39] "The 17 Goals," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

Implementation was adopted in 2002 to reaffirm the global commitment to poverty eradication and emphasize the importance of multilateral partnerships to achieve development objectives.

Leading up to the 2015 deadline of the MDGs, the international community wanted to develop more goals to build on the progress that had been made. In June of 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development agreed to launch a process to develop the SDGs and included mandates for future work in development financing.[40] The next year, the General Assembly set up a 30-member working group to develop a proposal for the SDGs. Finally, in September of 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which contained 17 SDGs.

Development, the process of increasing the capacity of humans through new institutions and technologies and continuous change, has been a key part of history. It has been driven by the grand idea of progress, that humans should continue to strive for future improvement and increases in production and wealth. However, development is reliant on the exploitation of raw materials, conflicting with the impact of this demand on the environment.[41] This problem became exacerbated as the Industrial Revolution began in the 19th century, resulting in unprecedented growth in production, consumption, and wealth.[42] After World War II, a long period of economic growth through the 1950s and 1960s led people to expect that growth would always continue. The largest issue in the realm of development is the persistent and growing gap between developed countries and developing countries, sometimes called the Global North and the Global South.[43] Global North, or developed, countries tend to have much higher levels of wealth versus Global South, or developing, countries.

As a result of this gap and the challenges of the 20th century, two main theories of development emerged. The first is modernization theory, which argues that countries in the Global South should follow the example of Global North countries.[44] It is the idea that these countries should adopt a market economy framework like Western countries. The open system, according to modernization theory, will allow the global economy to naturally spread a more affluent way of life to Global South nations. In short, if the global economy grows, it will pull

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Jacobus Du Pisani, "Sustainable development – historical roots of the concept," *Environmental Sciences* 3, no. 2 (April 2006): 85.
[42] Ibid, 87.
[43] Ibid, 88.
[44] Ibid, 88.

Global South economies along with it. The second is dependency theory, which argues that the development of the Global North is dependent on the active under development and exploitation of the Global South. According to this theory, the Global North continues to have control over the Global South, despite the end of traditional colonialism. Developing nations, therefore, should cut ties off with developed nations and pursue their own autonomous and independent path of development.

In the 1970s, ideas of development began to shift to include sustainability. The Industrial Revolution's "progress" was exposed for being propped up by colonial exploitation and environmental destruction.[45] In response to numerous scientific works that raised alarm over emerging environmental problems of the time, the first environmental NGOs were established, such as Greenpeace. Until this point, the ideas of development, which was based on the exploitation of resources, and conservation, or the preservation of resources, had been in direct conflict.[46] Sustainable development emerged in the 1970s as a compromise in which development would continue but with special attention to its impact on the environment. While this new concept was initially disliked, it gained popularity throughout the 1980s.

Analysis:

SDG 17 calls explicitly for greater partnerships to achieve the other 16 SDGs between the UN, state governments, NGOs and other civil society organizations, and the private sector. Gaining private sector support through cross-sectoral partnerships is important for the success of the SDGs. Private sector actors, such as businesses and large corporations, are starting to realize the benefits of partnering with governments and UN agencies on the SDGs.[47] Firms are incorporating SDGs into their corporate strategy and understanding that participating in these projects can help with their environmental, social, and governance rankings. However, for a business to partner on an SDG, the collaborative value must be high enough. "Collaborative value" are the benefits acquired by the firm relative to the costs paid when partnering to work on an SDG. If the benefits do not outweigh the costs, it will be difficult to secure a corporate partnership. UNESCO, and other UN agencies, must be able to demonstrate to corporations that

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[45] Ibid, 89.
[46] Ibid, 91.
[47] Amanda Williams and Lara Anne Blasberg, "SDG Platforms as Strategic Innovation through Partnerships," *Journal of Business Ethics* 180, no. 4 (November 2022): 1043.

the projects they wish to partner on have high collaborative value in order to secure the collaboration.

However, this focus on securing partnerships between public and private sector entities can be problematic in development. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) may have significant differences in priorities between partners, making it difficult to work together.[48] Private firms have a market focus–they are concerned with generating profit. While helping with the SDGs gives them a good public image, it is ultimately a decision that is made by the firm with profit in mind. Public sector entities, such as UN agencies, governments, or NGOs, have a different focus. Typically, the public sector is worried about achieving the SDGs in order to engage in sustainable development and improve people's lives. Sometimes, these differing priorities do not align, causing issues within the partnership. UNESCO must find a way to ensure that PPPs retain development objectives as their priority rather than corporate profits.

Some analysts argue that the entire structure of the SDGs focuses too much on a market-oriented approach to development. While this committee cannot completely restructure the SDG framework, it can work to mitigate some of its negative effects. In addition to focusing on partnerships with private firms, which leads to a focus on profit, SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals also calls for the SDGs to be achieved in coordination with international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These institutions tend to favor market-based approaches.[49] The World Bank is famous for its Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, which required countries to make significant cuts to public services as a condition to receiving desperately needed loans. Not only did this policy tend to take advantage of the dire economic situations, typically in Global South nations, but it also prioritized the desires of multi-national corporations over the public service needs of developing countries. Using these institutions to finance the SDGs may lead to the same problems. International financial institutions may require harmful, market-oriented policies as a condition for financing, thereby perpetuating neo-colonial hierarchies between the Global North and South.

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[48] Michael Spann, "Politics of Poverty: The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and the Business of Agriculture," *Globalizations* 14, no. 3 (April 2017): 371.
[49] Ibid, 369.

The current SDG framework tends to prioritize large corporations over smaller businesses. In fact, one of the SDGs calls for the incorporation of small businesses into large value chains.[50] For example, in the field of agriculture relating to SDG 2, international financial institutions have labelled small farms as inefficient and has pushed them towards "pathways out of poverty" which encourage them incorporated into large agribusiness corporations. This would take away the autonomy of the farmers who own their small patches of land and put them at the mercy of a large corporation. This power dynamic, on a global scale, would maintain a hierarchy that allows large agricultural corporations, usually from the Global North, to take control of small-scale farms, usually in the Global South.

Finally, progress towards most of the targets within the 17 SDGs is off-track. Within each SDG, there are a number of more specific targets. All of them are meant to be achieved by 2030; however, very few are on-track to be completed by the deadline.[51] The UN has been pushing for its agencies, such as UNESCO, to increase partnerships in order to speed up progress on the SDGs. However, these agencies have been engaging in partnerships since 2015 and are still behind schedule. UNESCO must find a way to speed up its progress towards the SDGs.

Conclusion:

In 2015, the SDGs were adopted by the UN to give the world guidelines to move forward in a sustainable way. However, problems with the timeline and within the framework have caused UN agencies to be behind schedule on achieving the SDGs. The gap between the development of the Global North and the Global South continues to grow and UNESCO must ensure that its PPPs on the SDGs do not exacerbate this divide. In order to achieve the SDGs in a timely and considerate fashion, UNESCO must consider these issues from multilateral viewpoints.

Questions:
1. When working in PPPs with private firms, how can UNESCO ensure that development objectives remain the priority of the partnership instead of corporate profits?

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[50] Ibid, 365.
[51] "Partnerships and cooperation for water," UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/reports/wwdr/2023/en.

2. How can UNESCO mitigate the bias of international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, WTO, and IMF, when partnering with them on the SDGs?

3. How can UNESCO speed up its progress towards the SDGs to meet the 2030 deadline?

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