

The United Nations' triadic role as International  
Organisation in the achievement of selected child-related  
Millennium Development Goals: The case of West  
Africa.

By

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| ACS     | African Centre for Statistics                          |
| ADEA    | Association for the Development of Education in Africa |
| APRM    | Africa Peer Review Mechanism                           |
| AU      | African Union  |
| BREDA   | Regional Bureau for Education in Africa                |
| CIDA    | Canadian International Development Agency              |
| CRC     | Convention on the Rights of the Child                  |
| DACO    | Development Assistance Coordinating Office             |
| DRC     | Democratic Republic of Congo                           |
| ECA     | Economic Commission for Africa                         |
| ECOWAS  | Economic Community of West African States              |
| EFA     | Education For All                                      |
| EFA-FTI | Education For All Fast Track Initiative                |
| ELP     | Essential Learning Package                             |
| EU      | European Union   |
| FDI     | Foreign Direct Investment                              |
| FGM     | Female Genital Mutilation                              |
| GEP     | Girls' Education Programme                             |
| HDI     | Human Development Index                                |
| HHA     | Harmonisation for Health in Africa                     |
| ICRC    | International Committee of the Red Cross               |
| IFI     | International Financial Institution                    |
| IGO     | Inter Governmental Organisation                        |
| IIEP    | International Institute for Educational Planning       |
| ILO     | International Labour Organisation                      |
| IMF     | International Monetary Fund                            |
| INGO    | International Non-Governmental Organisation            |
| IO      | International Organisation                             |
| IOM     | International Organisation for Migration               |

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| IR     | International Relations   |
| IRIN   | Integrated Regional Information Networks                        |
| LDC    | Least Developed Country   |
| MDG    | Millennium Development Goal                                     |
| MIC    | Medium Income Country   |
| MSF    | Médicins sans Frontières  |
| MSWGCA | Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs       |
| NATO   | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation                              |
| NGO    | Non Governmental Organisation                                   |
| ODA    | Official Development Assistance                                 |
| PEGEP  | President's Empowerment of Girls' Education                     |
| PRSP   | Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers                               |
| SADC   | Southern African Development Community                          |
| SFAI   | School Fee Abolition Initiative                                 |
| UN     | United Nations  |
| UNAIDS | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS                      |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme                            |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNFPA  | United Nations Population Fund                                  |
| UNGEI  | United Nations Girls Education Initiative                       |
| UNHCR  | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                   |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children Fund                                    |
| US     | United States   |
| USAID  | United States Agency for International Development              |
| WFP    | World Food Programme  |
| WHO    | World Health Organisation                                       |
| WMD    | Weapons of Mass Destruction                                     |

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## ABSTRACT

The contemporary global system is characterised by the presence of a multitude of International Organisations (IOs) whose relevance is sustained by the roles they play. Among these IOs, the United Nations (UN) is of paramount importance as a result of its universal membership and extensive mandate. Its international role is influenced by its evolving structures, practices and goals. Among its most recent objectives are the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which address the challenge of holistic human development at the global level.

This study aims to assess the UN's role in pursuing the MDGs as they relate to the development of children in West Africa. The first two of the eight goals have been selected for the purpose of focusing the research, namely the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and the elimination of illiteracy by achieving universal primary education. Children, who bear the brunt of global underdevelopment and whose development is a key element in breaking cycles of poverty, are the focus of the study. The general and historical role played by the UN in advancing child development is therefore assessed with regards to the issue-fields indicated by the two selected MDGs. Specific application is then done in the case of West Africa, chosen as case study because the region is the poorest in the world and arguably indicative of most urgent MDG focus.

Clive Archer's analytical outline, which depicts IOs variously as instruments, arenas and actors, is used as a conceptual framework. Archer contends that IOs can be utilised as instruments by other global actors, serve as arenas for dialogue and cooperation among such actors and also assume proactive, independent identities as actors in pursuit of specific objectives. The study concludes that Archer's framework is relevant, but that the existence of all three roles in the same functional space has notable and often contradictory implications. While the UN generally plays its roles as actor and arena in achieving its first two MDGs among West African children with relative ease, its role as instrument is dependent on the agendas and political will of other actors in the global system. Notwithstanding the weakness of its role as instrument, however, the

UN's triad of roles towards the development of children, and specifically children in West Africa, is a key element of the organisation's global relevance.

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH THEME

In the sphere of global politics, most entities with legal identity have at least one major role. For instance, the archetypical role of the state is to protect and pursue national interests. Similarly, other actors within the global system play a role which sustains their relevance. International Organisations (IOs) such as the United Nations (UN) are no exception, as their role in the global system has been studied and debated for decades. Arguments by analysts such as Power (2004: 38) cast doubt on the UN's relevance and credibility, based on the assumption that states have consciously kept the organisation's abilities at a minimum. However, this does not signify the absence of a UN role, or an IO role for that matter. In fact, the presence of IOs has increasingly impacted the international system, to the extent that it has, in turn, led to questions surrounding the relevance of the state. Bennet & Oliver (2002: 2) add that IOs' prominence in the modern state system by no means eliminates the importance of states, which have traditionally occupied the foremost position in global politics. However, IOs certainly adjust the structure and dynamics of the global geo-political sphere, and their inclusion takes the global system from being characterised as a mere collection of legal entities in a global system. Instead, the heterogeneous global players — IOs included — perform different roles as is endemic in systems of all types.

The character of the UN as an IO is carved by its structures, practices and goals. In addition to its structures and practices, the UN's stipulated goals inform any analysis of the role the UN plays or attempts to play. One of its self-proclaimed goals of is to foster co-operation in solving international socio-economic, cultural and humanitarian problems (United Nations 2000:5). The attempt to meet this objective has resulted in the use of various mechanisms and structures, each of which serves as a reflection of the capability of the UN to tackle current pressing global crises and harness its image as a relevant international actor in the changing world of today. The major and most recent mechanism which it has made use of in this respect is its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UNICEF 2003: 2).

Initiated by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and formally endorsed by global leaders at the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit, the MDGs address the challenging issue of development by emphasising all aspects of the individual's development and empowerment, not merely the economic sphere (Poku, Renwick & Porto: 2007: 1156). The eight MDGs comprise of issues that are integral to the achievement of sustainable development. They draw into perspective the fact that a combination of problems gravely hampers any efforts made at development, making a comprehensive approach to these problems imperative (UNDP 2005: 148).

The MDGs, as agreed upon by the UN are as follows:

- Goal one: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal two: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal three: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal four: Reduce child mortality
- Goal five: Improve maternal health
- Goal six: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal seven: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal eight: Develop a global partnership for development

MDG one; two; three; four; five and six are explained in chapter three. MDG seven, which aims to ensure environmental sustainability, encourages commitment to a priority which is not traditionally emphasised in IR theory, but which fundamentally impacts on human and global development. The final MDG — developing a global partnership for development between developing and developed states — notes the existence of severe global inequalities within and across states and prescribes the methodology of development through partnership and cooperation (UNDP 2005: 148). For the MDGs to be deemed successful, this UN mechanism must generate sufficient positive results in areas of the world that are in dire need of sustainable development due to the prevalence of poverty.

Such a geographical sub-region is West Africa where most states are not only politically unstable but also heavily indebted and impoverished (UNDP 2004: 14). Combined, these factors fundamentally jeopardise the sub-region's development by inimically eroding all conditions necessary for sustainable growth. The focus on West Africa is justified by the fact that the sub-region has been named the poorest in the world. West African countries constitute the bottom countries of the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). The sub-region finds itself in a peculiar situation with fourteen West African states out of fifteen among the Low Human Development rankings (UNDP 2010c). This makes West Africa a sub-region with a dearth of development and one with the highest proportionate number of undeveloped states worldwide.

This study sets out to investigate how the UN assists West African states in their pursuit of selected child-related MDGs and thereby fulfils its role as an IO in the contemporary international system. The UN's role as an IO is viewed through the lenses of Clive Archer's analytical outline, which depicts IOs as instruments, arenas and actors. The priority accorded to the role of the UN is as a consequence of its universal membership and its salience among IOs, which have become a dominant and permanent feature in world politics (Claude 1971: 6). The analytical framework that will be used to contextualise the theme within the discipline of International Relations (IR), will involve theoretical reflection on the general role of international organisations in the world politics system. The first two of the eight goals have been selected for the purpose of focusing this study (UNDP 2005: 148).

Table I below places West Africa's human development ranking into perspective.

**Table I West Africa's Human Development rankings**

| <b>State</b>                          | <b>Ranking Out of 169</b> |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Medium Human Development Index</b> |                           |
| Cape Verde                            | 118                       |
| <b>Low Human Development Index</b>    |                           |
| Ghana                                 | 130                       |
| Benin                                 | 134                       |
| Togo                                  | 139                       |
| Nigeria                               | 142                       |
| Senegal                               | 144                       |
| Côte D'Ivoire                         | 149                       |
| Gambia                                | 151                       |
| Guinea                                | 156                       |
| Sierra Leone                          | 158                       |
| Mali                                  | 160                       |
| Burkina Faso                          | 161                       |
| Liberia                               | 162                       |
| Guinea Bissau                         | 164                       |
| Niger                                 | 167                       |

Source: UNDP 2010c

Children in any society are usually the most vulnerable and suffer the most in circumstances of economic or political predicament. In the majority of West African states, the plight of children is dismal. Many children reside on the streets, are trafficked and or subjugated to child labour or are plunged into combat in civil wars (Behrendt 2008). The matter is complicated by the fact that children in most of these countries face the intricate combination of regular bouts of chronic but preventable diseases, malnourishment as well as a lack of access to basic education (WFP 2006). Children in the sub-region bear the brunt of political upheaval and displacement. Moreover, endemic

poor socio-economic conditions for these children deteriorate with the existence of political ills.

The most vulnerable segments of society in West Africa should experience fundamental improvement for the MDGs to be successful. As a result, for an assessment of the UN's achievement of its MDGs, the development and progress of children in West Africa will be highlighted as a case study measure of progress. Analysing the MDGs in this manner offers a substantial and recent framework within which to evaluate the UN's present role in the international society in the face of human development crises such as extreme poverty and illiteracy within the peripheral regions of the globe (Weiss, Forsythe & Coate 2004: 293).

The challenges of eradicating extreme poverty and achieving universal primary education are two pivotal aspects to development. The following three reasons explain why they should therefore be the starting point to attempts at achieving development goals and why these first two MDGs have been selected as focus measures for this study. First, extreme poverty and hunger are detrimental to human survival and productivity. A decline in the number of poor people would therefore amount to an increase in human development and productivity (Goudie & Ladd 1999: 188). Second, primary education equips children with the tools to become human assets, combat poverty and achieve development themselves, as opposed to being mere consumers of development assistance. However, the poorest 20 percent of the children in a population normally has access to less than 20 percent of educational quality (Mehrotra & Delamonica 2002: 1110). The importance of education in poverty reduction and the evident shortage of access to education in poverty-stricken regions intrinsically draw upon the need to address these two aspects concurrently as the basis for any measure of success in development strategies.

Third, tackling poverty and promoting education solve a multitude of other problems that the undeveloped regions face. For example, the problems of unskilled labour in Africa and the lack of demand for the labour of the poor, which are directly linked to poverty and illiteracy, can be fundamentally improved by focusing on child education and poverty reduction (Hanmer, Pyatt & White 1999: 809). Also, the high population growth

that is prevalent in Africa and its resultant link with poverty can be resolved with education for girls, which encourages family planning and results in the birth of fewer children (Mehrotra & Delamonica 2002: 1106). Putting children first in development is therefore increasingly seen as an investment that can potentially sever the ties that bind people in developing countries to a cycle of poverty, in a single generation as opposed to repeatedly attempting to combat over the course of generations (UNICEF 2003: 11). As a result, the UN's contribution to achieving these two MDGs should be thoroughly assessed.

The importance of the research theme can be considered from a theoretical as well as practical perspective. As mentioned, IOs – and specifically the UN – are a pervasive feature of global politics and their evolving role needs to be monitored continuously within the discipline of IR. By applying this role specifically to child-related MDGs, a further contribution is made to an area that is fast gaining ground in mainstream IR, namely that of development. The traditional tendency of IR scholars has been to focus on 'hard politics' with the result that the multilateral global agenda prioritised issues such as war. The resultant allocation of global resources to these 'critical' aspects happens to the detriment of development, children and humanity at large.

Practical contributions of research on this theme are firstly the possibility of improved implementation of the MDGs by assessing the impediments encountered within the case study area. More broadly, since children's rights constitute human rights, the research will assist with the coordination of policies that are devised to meet human rights objectives (UNICEF 2003: 11). It is foreseen that the research will support attempts, not just by UN agencies, but by those of other organisations involved in the improvement of the developmental status of children in West Africa.

## **1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Comprehensive study of IOs entered IR theory formally only after 1945, when the UN came into existence. However, IR research on this theme gained momentum only during the 1970s due to the increased need to cater for economic and financial globalisation as



well as to tend to the needs of growing political connectivity on the world stage (Archer 1992: 29). According to Koenig-Archibugi (2004: 149) the most extensive ground that has been covered relates to the origins of IOs, drawing on the assumption that they are permanent structures and instruments of cooperation between states. Roberts & Kingsbury (1993: 14 & 58) reveal problematic attempts within the field of IR to establish a role for this relatively new phenomenon in international society. The available literature is mostly dominated by criticism of IOs' failure to achieve their stated goals, and there is thus opportunity within the discipline to expand on the role of IOs, in order to keep abreast with changing world politics.

A seminal academic enquiry into the role of IOs is Clive Archer's "International Organisation". IOs, according to Archer (1992: 68), fulfil three major roles: as instruments, arenas and actors. The conceptualisation of IOs as instruments implies that in functioning as a device for member states, they fall subject to member states' domestic and foreign policy ends. In other words, IOs serve as an internationally legitimate but manoeuvrable mechanism used for achieving particular purposes. Archer additionally notes that IOs serve as arenas. This represents a modification in the previously mentioned instrumental role in that the role of IOs is extended from being tools dependent on the will of their controller(s), to also being a forum. In explaining Archer's classification, the metaphor of a drama production can be used to explain IOs' classification: Their role as arena indicates that they perform the function of a stage on which these organisations-as-instruments or, in this case, stage props, may play the dual role of facilitating cooperation between member states while functioning instrumentally for these members' domestic and foreign policy objectives. The final role, according to Archer's conceptualisation, highlights a more central and pervasive part played by IOs in that they are actors in world politics. As actors, they generate a flow of gestures and actions that become the course of the play.

As such, IOs summarily provide the stage, become the stage props and also act in the scenes of world politics. There is therefore a degree of malleability in ascertaining the most appropriate and imperative role to play as concerns world issues and thus constantly to cater for the changing structure of the society of states. Archer's analytical framework

will therefore be used firstly to evaluate the UN's functionality as an IO and secondly to gauge its abilities to carry out its aims and objectives, particularly as concerns child-related development goals.

In the field of human rights of children, a review of available literature reveals that much investigation has been carried out on issues pertaining to the human rights of children, the plight of children in war and post-war situations as well as the impact of disease on children in developing states. Within the UN system, reference is made to the protection of children and the provision of basic child rights through its Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted on 20 November 1989 (Dugard 2000: 5). Organs such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) play a dominant role in advocating progress for children and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) plays a vital role in monitoring children's educational advancement (Fakuda-Parr 2004: 398). However, the UN does not emphatically indicate the predicament of children as a priority area in world politics.

Few IR studies delve crucially into the broader plight of children and the impact of childhood experiences on human development. Within IR theory, realists' preoccupation with state power as an essential feature of IR denotes an absence of viewpoints on the role of IOs and the subject of children. While the liberalist view embraces institution building, it does not connote children in its theoretical underpinnings, but its focus on morality in IR may insinuate more sensitivity towards the plight of children (Nel 2006: 24-25). Nonetheless, there is no clear indication that any of these theories explicitly campaign for children generally, or children in poor regions.

Moreover, the studies available neglect to highlight the extent to which the subject of children can be used as a tool of analysis for evaluating progress in the achievement of development goals set up by international organisations such as the UN; neither has it been used to refine the UN's role in the international society. Archer (1992:136-153) cites examples of how the UN itself fits in with his classification of IOs' roles in the international society. Furthermore, Archer's classification has been used by Turiansky (2008:165), to evaluate the general role of IOs such as the African Peer Review

Mechanism (APRM), but it has not been used to evaluate the particular role of the UN in accomplishing the UNMDGs in West African children. More specifically, the classification furnished by Archer, has not been used to assess the UN's role regarding the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger among children in this geographical region or the achievement of universal primary education, thereof. To the extent that the research will contribute to the body of existing knowledge by utilising child development goals as a tool for analysing the UN's role, the research has a theme worth exploring. More so, because the research bridges the gap between Archer's classification of IOs' general role and the role of the UN in achieving its first two MDGs in West African children.

The inclusion of children within the assessment of IOs' role can be considered important to IR theory for two main reasons. First, according to Claude (1971: 7) changing global trends implies the unpredictability of the global agenda and the increased possibility for 'new' issues to be brought to unforeseen prominence on the global agenda. This means that issues, which occupied low priority, may suddenly be thrust into the spotlight due to the urgent need to attend to such matters. Environmental issues, for instance, were not viewed as a matter of global priority until recently, when its threat to human security was emphasised. Similarly, the unpredictability of the global agenda may give rise to a sudden need to address the plight of children, as a matter of 'high politics', in the near future. Lack of attention to the issue of children, prior to such a shift in prioritisation, will thus present a preventable exigency within the discipline.

The fact that children have not occupied centre stage on the world agenda does not cancel the possibility that one day, instead of nuclear warfare or environmental degradation, the dominant topic on the agenda of the UN may be the issue of children. A lack of adequate research on the issue of children within IOs may render IR ill-equipped to explain current and future phenomena in global politics. The inability of IR to predict the rise of religious fundamentalism and the related struggle to find a theoretical bedrock for the explanation of terrorism is a prime example of the risk involved in undermining certain pertinent aspects by excluding them from a field.

Second, if the theoretical framework of IR fails to highlight the developmental issues facing children across the world it would give a myopic picture of development in general and the role of the UN in particular. Children form a substantial percentage of the world's population, especially because statistics show that some 1.2 billion people in the world are between the ages of ten and nineteen, and 87% of these children live in developing countries where population growth is typically high (UNFPA 2007). Moreover, it is estimated that by 2030, about 60 percent of the world's urban population will be under the age of 18 (Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars 2003). Add to this the growing phenomenon in Africa of child-headed households and its effect on Africa's development and it becomes clear that research on the role of IOs in development must take into account the status of children (Olonisakin 2006: 272).

A review of available literature on the MDGs has focused to a large extent on official UN documents from specialised agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the UNDP. These sources are useful in depicting the UN's role in promoting the MDGs as well as in underscoring the depth of economic and social ground to be covered in order to achieve these MDGs in West African children. Information on individual West African states, particularly regarding the respective governments' commitment to achieving MDGs in this sub-region is available, albeit mostly at the rhetorical level: in some cases, the media statements of governments, or speeches delivered within multilateral fora. In the majority of West African states, inaccessible, unreliable or insufficient information mandates the use of UN, World Bank or other developmental agencies' sources, for gathering information on government efforts towards alleviating poverty and hunger or achieving universal primary education.

### **1.3 FORMULATION AND DEMARCATON OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The main research question, which captures the research problem, is as follows; 'What are the various roles played by the UN as an IO in supporting West African states towards the pursuit of certain child-related development goals?' A set of subordinate questions, implying secondary research problems, will support the main research question. These are the following; (a) How is the role and resulting functions of the UN

as an IO conceptualised within IR theory? (b) How has the UN historically fulfilled its roles as an IO at the practical level, as concerns child-related development? (c) How is the UN fulfilling its hypothetical triad of roles as IO specifically in terms of its MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger among children in West Africa? (d) How is the UN fulfilling its hypothetical triad of roles as IO specifically in terms of its MDG to provide universal primary education for children in West Africa?

The main research hypothesis is that the role of the UN as an IO is triadic in nature and each of these subsidiary roles interact with each other and in turn impact on the achievement of its child-related MDGs, in West Africa. This broad hypothesis can be broken down into the following secondary propositions: firstly, the projected role of the UN as IO is to fulfil a triad of duties namely to serve as instrument, arena and actor, in meeting its responsibilities to the society of states, as the need arises (Archer 1992: 68). From each of these roles, a number of functions emerge. With an independent legal identity, and high-profile leadership, the UN is clearly an actor in the global society. In the second phase of its triad of duties, the UN acts as an arena for the society of states by offering parliamentary style debating fora and by offering, through its secretariat, the necessary facilities for administering cooperation among its different member states (Archer 1992: 141) In line with its role as an instrument, the UN has often been described as an adjunct to its members' foreign policy interests, wherein it is manipulated by member states for unilateral gain (Archer 1992:139).

One of the most pressing needs identified by the society of states, as expressed through the UN's MDGs, is to ensure human security through socio-economic development. This leads to the second subsidiary hypothesis namely that the UN has the ability to commit to promoting sustainable children's development and security, but the actual implementation of these goals is problematic (Annan 2005: 27). The UN does succeed in its endeavours but only to a partial extent. One of the major problems is that the UN is faced with a contradiction in terms of the fulfilment of its role in the furtherance of socio-economic developmental objectives and the principle of non-interference in states' domestic affairs as contained in its charter (Thompson 2006: 252; United Nations:

Charter of, 1945: Article 2(7)). The UN therefore experiences a dichotomy between one of its founding principles and a norm as well as objective that it increasingly advocates.

Finally, it can be hypothesised that the UN is displaying the triadic nature of its role as IO in its assistance to West African states in their attempt to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; and to provide universal primary education for, children in the region. In this regard there are several commonalities and shared variables the UN has to contend with, and a marked interplay between national, regional and international factors.

In demarcating the research problem and identifying the frontiers of the research theme, conceptualisation and definition of the major terms is necessary. According to the CRC, a child is “any human being under the age of eighteen unless majority is achieved under the law relevant to the child” (UNICEF 2003: 59). International organisations can be defined as “formal, continuous structures with international memberships which are active in three or more states and have a permanent headquarters or secretariat” (Smith 2006: 148). The MDGs have already been conceptualised.

#### **1.4 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS**

A qualitative and analytical methodology will be followed in evaluating the role of the UN as an international organisation. This is primarily due to the complex, multi-faceted subject matter under study and because the investigation is dependent on the researcher’s knowledge in solving the stated research problem. The importance of a qualitative method of analysis is in the need to explain and evaluate Archer’s framework of analysis as applied to the UN, a goal which cannot be achieved with the use of a quantitative method. The research method will be inductive as there is the need to analyse the reality of the state of affairs being studied logically, yet the possibility and indeed necessity of additional research on the theme will be acknowledged and facilitated. The research will be conducted in a scientific manner in the sense that empirical data will be collected and applied to add value to the existing body of knowledge in the field.

Several key sources will be consulted in the process of assessing the role of the UN and progress towards achievement of the MDGs. As a starting point, the UN Charter will be

utilised as this furnishes a wide view of the organisation's self-proclaimed goals. The African Union (AU) Charter will be essential in presenting the role of international organisations from an African perspective. The 1989 CRC will provide the substance on the UN's position regarding children. Official documents from specialised agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the UNDP will be useful in elaborating on the ground covered by these agencies regarding financial and social assistance to children. The 2000 UN Millennium Declaration will inform the background of the MDGs and official documents of the World Bank such as the World Development Report will be useful for statistical data on related matters. Archer's International Organisations (1992) will provide the main theoretical underpinnings for an assessment of the role of international organisations. Bennet & Oliver's International Organisations: Principles and Issues (2002) and Claude's Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organisation (1971) will be used to expand on the theoretical base. The latest (2010) UN Millennium Development Report will be used to track and measure the progress achieved regarding the various MDGs. Finally, the policy frameworks of individual West African governments and a regional organisation such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will be accessed on internet sites and via official publications.

*Ad hoc* case studies will be utilised in the research, as well as selected elements of a comparative study to determine the progress of the first two MDGs as relevant to children in West African states. The case studies per definition will be taken from the group of West African states and their *ad hoc* selection will be determined by available and verifiable data. As the preliminary list of references shows, a good collection of secondary sources exists on the subject. Primary sources, notably official UN and AU documents, will also be used in the inquiry. The qualitative analysis will draw on academic research, as well as media and non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports on the subject. Significant use will be made of the increasing number of published opinions pertaining to the MDGs' progress. Although quantitative information may be utilised to strengthen the research with statistical facts, the data will be assessed qualitatively.

## **1.5 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

In terms of chronological delimitation of the study, the timeline relevant for the research is a ten-year period from 2000 when the MDGs were established, to 2010, the year when the research will be completed. The rationale for demarcating this period lies in the fact that these development goals provide a landmark and contemporary indication of the UN's role as an IO in the global sphere. The MDGS additionally represent the most high profile and recent UN efforts in improving the lives of children in West Africa.

With regards to geographical delimitation of the research, the roles of the UN are of course, of a global nature. This is germane at the theoretical level (chapter two) as well as at the level of historical overview of the UN's involvement in child-related development (chapter three). However, in terms of the case study application of the research (chapters four, five and six) the geographical delimitation is restricted to West Africa.

The states in this region are geographically and geopolitically defined by the UN to include the following fifteen countries, distributed over an area of approximately 5 million square km and situated between the Sahara Desert and the Gulf of Guinea: Benin; Burkina Faso; Côte d'Ivoire; Cape Verde; The Gambia; Ghana; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Liberia; Mali; Niger; Nigeria; Senegal; Sierra Leone and Togo (UNECA 2008).

## **1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH**

Chapter one serves to introduce and contextualise the research, in order to clarify the parameters of the research. The chapter discusses the demarcation of the research theme and indicates its relevance and application. The research problem and subsidiary research questions are formulated and supplemented by hypotheses that shed light on the expected outcomes of the research.

An analytical framework for the research within the discipline of IR is provided by chapter two. Archer's theoretical conceptualisation of the role of IOs will be supplemented with theoretical insights from various other authors. The chapter expands



on key concepts in the theme, explains the key terms and contextualises each within the discipline of IR. Some of the terms discussed include IOs, global governance, inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) and NGOs. In this regard, it investigates the theoretical underpinnings of IOs within the prominent IR theories.

The UN's historical role in general child development is the focus of chapter three. It firstly defines the term 'child', which is often subject to misinterpretation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a broad practical application of the theoretical framework provided in chapter two and to provide an overview of its historical role in facilitating child development. It explains how the UN has sought to fulfil the roles of instrument, arena and actor in pursuit of its development goals.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among children in West Africa is the focus of chapter four. As key terms of this chapter, the nuances of 'poverty' and 'hunger' are delved into. Chapter four aims to assess how extreme poverty and hunger among West African children impede human development, and places the level of poverty and hunger in the sub-region into perspective. It additionally reflects how the efforts made by the UN, particularly since 2000, in resolving the problem correspond with its hypothetical role as IO. It also identifies the variables that influence the achievement of this goal.

Chapter five investigates the UN's role in achieving the goal of universal primary education for West African children. It firstly explores the level of underdevelopment plaguing the primary educational systems within the sub-region. Furthermore the terms 'education', 'primary education' and 'universal primary education' are defined. In chapter five, the importance of achieving the goal of universal primary education is viewed as it relates to human development. The chapter investigates the attempts made by the UN in championing this goal in West Africa within the context of its role as IO. It points to the impact of these efforts on children in West Africa and examines the obstacles that prevent the achievement of this goal.

A summative conclusion will be provided concerning the role of the UN as IO in chapter six. More specifically, conclusions based on the previous chapters are drawn pertaining to

the UN's role in achieving the first two MDGs among West African children. The major arguments and considerations discussed in this chapter will be based on the analyses of the goals and the UN's success in the achievement of the first two of its MDGs among West African children. The chapter establishes the overall extent to which the UN fits the theoretical framework of the role ascribed to international organisations by Archer, particularly as concerns the proactive achievements in the field of development. Based on the conclusions, proposals are offered as concerns further research on the theme that may be required within the discipline of IR.

## **1.7 CONCLUSION**

A focus on IOs is not only pertinent but essential in remaining abreast with the changing nature of global politics. The current global sphere includes IOs in such a way that any analysis of the structural dynamics of global politics must pay attention to their role. However, as the study aims to depict, the role played by IOs extends beyond its nominal effect on the geo-political stratosphere. Its role broadens to reflect certain functional aspects, which address challenges of the twenty-first century. The developmental nature of the MDGs mandates that the research maintains a pivotal focus on how the UN plays its triadic roles in addressing global development issues. While issues not directly relating to human development may be mentioned, these will not be addressed in depth. More specifically, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and achieving universal primary education are pervasive socio-economic challenges which must be addressed for the MDGs to be deemed successful.

Beyond this, limiting the research to the UN's perceived triad of roles reconciles the circles of decision-making with that of action in one of the poorest areas of the world. Furthermore the study presents the opportunity to gauge the compatibility of Archer's framework of analysis with the implementation of the contemporary UN development agenda and to add to the existing body of knowledge on the topic.

## **Chapter 2**

# **THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS AS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

As an engineer or contractor requires a blueprint for the construction of a building, so an IR scholar requires a theoretical framework for the evaluation of matters pertaining to the world political system. The study of IOs cannot be accomplished without ascertaining how the concept fits into the discipline of IR, especially in evaluating the UN's role as IO. At issue is how the (perceived) role of IOs has unfolded in the IR discourse.

This chapter is multi-purpose in nature as it aims to first and foremost define the concept 'international organisations'. A definition of IOs fulfils the purpose of delineating the concept as well as distinguishing the term from related concepts such as NGOs and IGOs. McClelland (1966: 6) notes that 'theory is a framework for organising facts'. With this perspective in mind, the second objective of this chapter will be to provide a guide for managing ontological reflection on aspects and attributes of IOs. Lastly, the function of this chapter will be to establish a framework for examining the role that IOs play as constituents of the international society. Demarcation of this framework will facilitate the analysis of the role of the UN as an IO, which in turn will guide subsequent reflection on the role of the UN as an IO in the achievement of its child-related MDGs.

## **2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY TERMS**

### **2.2.1 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

'International organisations' differ from 'international organisation' in the sense that the latter refers to the process, whereas the former refers to the formal continuous structures, which are an embodiment of the process (Claude, 1971: 448). Scholars differ in their

definition of international organisations, with some offering a very broad interpretation. Smith (2006: 148) for example defines international organisations as ‘formal, continuous structures with international memberships which are active in three or more states and have a permanent headquarters or secretariat’. Most definitions of IOs, however, imply that their work is less constrained by the existence of state borders; compared to a state’s capabilities, which are restricted outside of its territorial boundaries. In this sense, the work of IOs may overlap with the work of the state; but it also goes over and beyond the duty of the state by the extension of its role beyond state confines. International membership is a prerequisite for IOs, which gives it distinction from national organisations. The formality emphasised by Smith’s definition reveals that procedural and regulatory mechanisms are entrenched in the functioning of the body of IOs, transforming IOs from the classification of a guild or society to that of an official establishment.

Archer (1992: 38) offers the following definition of IOs: ‘a formal, continuous structure established by agreement between members whether governmental representatives or not, from at least two sovereign states with the aim of pursuing the common interest of the membership’. Several major aspects can be deduced from this definition of IOs. Firstly it depicts the incorporation of members into IOs as conscious agreement. It follows that IO membership is not forced upon any member of the international community and is voluntary. Secondly, organisations where members are not exclusively governmental representatives are also included. This means that individuals can form international organisations, despite the fact that they do not represent their governments and have no affiliation to their governments. A third distinguishing factor is that the definition highlights the subject of self-determination in IO membership, with the condition that members of IOs are from sovereign states. The implication is that an organisation will not be classified as an IO if it consists exclusively of voluntary representatives from contested states such as the Saharawi Arab Republic and Taiwan. The fourth implication of Archer’s definition draws upon the aspect of aims and interests. Aims of members must be in the common interest of the membership. Members of organisations from two or more sovereign states, who are in mutual agreement of being members of the

organisation, but who are driven purely by individual political aspirations and not the interests of the organisation are excluded from the definition of IOs.

Both Smith and Archer's definitions emphasise the formality of IOs as continuous structures with the existence of international members.

A working definition which draws on both these definitions is as follows; that IOs are formal, internationally continuous structures, which are established by consensus from at least three of its members, with the aim of pursuing the common interest of the membership, while remaining active in three or more states and possessing a secretariat or head-quarters. This definition not only highlights the international fluidity of the output of IOs, but it also incorporates the aspect of an IO head-quarters and the inclusion of International NGOs (INGOs) as IOs.

The continuous nature of IOs' structures and activities conveys the issue of a global interconnectedness in their conduct and affairs, due to their international membership, status and scope of their agendas. This global interconnectedness can in turn be linked to a form of governance, because in the absence of a central world authority over states, the formal systematisation of state relationships serves as a form of administration or orderly control and standard setting among states. It is however essential to distinguish between IOs and global governance for conceptual clarity.

### **2.2.2 GLOBAL GOVERNANCE**

Global governance can be defined as attempts 'to bring about orderly and reliable responses to social and political issues that go beyond capacities of states to address individually' (Weiss & Gordenker, 1996: 1). IOs by definition institutionalise the ends that global governance sets out to achieve. Firstly the fact that IOs reach beyond the territorial boundaries of normal state capacities. Secondly, the aim of global governance in attempting to create order within state interactions projects an image of systematising and organising global relations. In other words, based on these two perspectives, IOs contribute to global governance.

The idea of IOs being a facilitator of global governance — even the very idea of global governance — is contradicted by the notion that the global state system is anarchic in nature. This is evidenced by the absence of a formal, overarching body of authority to apply law enforcement and thereby rule over states (Keohane 1984: 7). The contradictory nature of the terms anarchy and global governance can seem confusing when the structure of the global environment in IR theory is considered. If IOs fulfil roles in global governance, but anarchy suggests the lack of government in the global system, how can the phenomenon of IOs coincide amicably with anarchy, within the framework of international relations? The answer to this question is found in the fact that global governance does not mean a form of ‘world government’, whereby states are subjected to the jurisdiction of a single governing authority (Lawson 2003: 19). IOs interaction with states for instance, is contractual and voluntary. It is not mandatory or on the basis that the state is part of the world system of states. Although IOs organise state responses to global issues, all this is by horizontal agreement of member states, without provision for enforcement. This is unlike a state’s vertical and enforceable authority over its citizens.

International conflict, according to realists, is a permanent feature in world politics (Kegley 2006: 28). Liberalists, however, contend that international conflict can be mitigated through global governance, which spearhead co-operation and simultaneously discourage conflict. Closely linked to liberalist thinking in this regard is functionalism, which asserts that IOs attend to the cross-border needs of states in an era where globalisation promotes multi-layered fields in which states relate with others (Smith 2006: 152). In other words, IOs assume an international management role in order to prevent the endemic possibility of conflict in the community of states. The relevance of this argument for global governance is that rather than global governance being a world government over states it is more a facilitator of state relationships thereby preventing conflict and ensuring peace among states. It also implies that there is still anarchy in the structure of the world system as global governance does not imply the existence of a global governor or government.

## **2. 2.3. RELATED CONCEPTS**

### **2.2.3.1. INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

As the name implies, IGOs are formally based organisations consisting of at least three members, who are representatives of their various governments. The members, which must exclusively be representatives of states, often have a distinct foreign policy. Their membership affords them the opportunity to pursue national interests, while engaging in multilateral relations with other states. Mclean (2000: 162) notes that this type of IOs has a legal feature that not only makes them able to enter into legal agreements with other entities, but that legally obligates its members to abide by certain standards. IGOs exercise legal authority over their member states by states' voluntary acceptance of organisations as legally binding over them. IGOs constitute one type of international organisation (Kegley 2006: 12). Examples of IGOs include the UN as well as the AU. The European Union (EU), as a regional integration arrangement, is also an example.

### **2.2.3.2 NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

NGOs or INGOs are IOs that are not created using the medium of intergovernmental agreements (Archer 1992: 39). In the case of INGOs, they must operate across state borders, as opposed to within a single state's territory. The definition provides a clear distinction from IGOs by eliminating governmental agreement and representation as a prerequisite for NGO classification. Examples of NGOs include the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the *Médicins Sans Frontières* (MSF) or Doctors without Borders.

## **2.3. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

### **2.3.1 THE TRADITIONAL REALIST VS LIBERALIST DEBATE**

A significant part of IR theory is informed by a military-political assertion and a near aversion against arguments wherein the state is not central to politics (Buzan & Little 2000: 21). The state is seen as the central player in world politics through the inter-play of its strong interests of survival, power and competition. A belief that military power is the path to state survival drives the primary interest in military advancement. According to realists, the zero-sum nature of all interaction in an anarchic world mandates that far from forming lasting alliances, states rival one another. Survival in the form of self-help is realists' paramount concern and is justified as a response to the anarchy of the international system (Weber 2001: 15). Trust between states is therefore excluded by endemic suspicion and war is considered as a natural phenomenon in this condition of anarchy to be prepared for and accommodated, to the detriment of peace and cooperation (Weber 2001: 40).

Despite the precedence set by realism, some scholars have considered it a cliché that international cooperation and interdependence annihilate or at least reduce the possibility of war by fostering international security and peace (Goldmann 1994: 1). The main theoretical advocate of this assumption is the liberal paradigm, IOs as harbingers of peaceful international cooperation are seen as obstacles to war (McClelland 1966: 34). Dialogue, calm reasoning and discussion are made possible through the structure and resources of IOs, therefore the possibility of cooperation is heightened. According to liberalists, through systematisation and rules constructed on the basis of these norms, states are reoriented to value peace and their relationships with one another. Simultaneously, these values negate the traditional realist view of states' obsession with possessing a monopoly of power. Participation in IOs enables states to see incentives in attaining common interests and in using the opportunity afforded to advance their common interests in a peaceful accord (Barnett & Duvall 2005: 1). Liberals in this sense



seek to reform the international society by using normative tactics to guide the conduct of state and non-state actors in a quest to maintain global order and peace (Barnett & Finnemore 2005: 176).

It is important to clarify at this stage that in their advocacy for IOs, liberalists do not undermine the importance attached to state security. Their embrace of IOs does not imply the irrelevance of the state and its preservation. The liberalist proponent instead addresses a different methodology in the attainment of the greater goal of global security as opposed to a narrow focus on individual state security. International politics in this view can be reordered to engage states in a societal form of interaction so as to create international society as a remedy to international anarchy (Weber 2001: 40). Liberalism thus acknowledges the importance of a collective effort in achieving the paramount goal of security. However, it goes over and beyond the realist methodology that favours military robustness and maintains that a united approach in achieving security outweighs a divided one. The use of IOs like the UN, as a means to achieving security ends, is the operational level of the liberalist thought, especially in controlling the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); preventing inter and intra-state conflicts; eliminating terrorism, addressing common challenges such as climate change and fostering human security (Tannenwald 2004: 1).

To say the realist viewpoint disagrees with the liberalist arguments for IOs is an understatement, as realism edifies the very foundation of opposition to liberalism. Realists negate the plausibility of interdependence amounting to closer cooperation. From classic Realist; Jean-Jacques Rousseau's perspective, the probability of interdependence leading to hostility is much greater than that of it giving rise to peace or cooperation (Goodwin 1978: 294). The interpretation of this is therefore that, rather than creating IOs to nurture cooperation, states should be kept separate. Efforts to bring about cooperation through IOs will adversely engender the type of friction that leads to conflict. Cooperation is therefore seen as a condition that is difficult to achieve (Kegley 2006: 37). Moreover, since peace is inessential to the realist framework and conflict is deemed inevitable there are no grounds for pursuing cooperation. There is thus a causal extraction of the value of IOs from the realist thought.

The limits of the realist responses to IOs are found in their imperviousness to the changes that have characterised the international system. Leading realist scholars such as Rousseau and Hans Morgenthau theorised during an epoch when threats to international security and world political issues in general, were defined in terms of inter-state relations, especially since the state was the chief and largely unrivalled locus of political decision-making and action (Brzezinski 1994: 327). Neo-realists have largely built on the theoretical foundation provided by realist thinkers. The fact that realism presents no indication of its arguments being more relevant to a particular historical era than to others, elicits additional criticism (Kegley 2006: 31). An indication of the possible relevance of realist arguments to a certain historical era would provide less sweeping assumptions and would define the prescription of realism in analysing international political trends. The contemporary emergence of a myriad of non-state actors, the presence of intra-state conflict and the effects of globalisation alter the dynamics of the world environment such that the theoretical attributes of realism must be adjusted to remain relevant. Continuing priority awarded to realism without a fundamental readjustment impacts IR thought by providing limited explanations for occurrences on the world scene and creating loopholes within IR epistemology. This also encumbers the analytical process of aspects in the discourse, as they relate to global matters.

An alternative viewpoint within the realist framework, stemming primarily from neo-realists, does not outrightly discourage the utility of IOs for states, but uncovers their worth as a means for realist ends. To this end, in the maximisation of state power, IOs are strictly instrumental for the achievement of states' foreign policy objectives. Hegemons in the world political system, it is argued, succeed in the extension of their power throughout the world, using IOs, which service their requests. The collaboration that may seem apparent between states in an IO is conditional on the ability of IOs to realise state interest and can be considered neither tangible nor viable. The cohesive façade of IOs, that is 'mistaken' for genuine cooperation exists alongside inevitable cynicism and suspicion, which typifies all state interaction in an environment stifled by anarchy and self-help (Smith 2006: 152). The fact that neo-realists do not view IOs favourably does not therefore eliminate the place of IOs from a neo-realist theoretical perspective, as IOs

find a place, however negatively, on account of their instrumentality to states. Moreover, the fact that IOs are accommodated in neo-realism brings about an added dimension to the study of IOs within IR theory.

The departure from traditional realism to neo-realism in the 1980s marked an intellectual move towards liberalism. The same, however, can be said for liberalism, which also evolved in the direction of realism with the advent of neo-liberalism. The rapprochement between the two theories is significant in the sense that both neo-liberalism and neo-realism collectively recognise the corroboration of international institutions, and specifically highlight their impact on states in an anarchic environment. Despite the fact that neo-realism maintains its negative view of international institutions, and neo-liberalism its positive view, their joint provision for IOs reveals a surge towards theoretical simplicity through the bridging of dominant theoretical groupings (Wæver 1996: 162-163)

While liberalism provides a theoretical enclave for IOs amidst the dominant realist thinking, a further theoretical framework is required at this stage to augment the theoretical premise of IOs in IR. For this reason, constructivism will now be evaluated in relation to IOs.

### **2.3.2 CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Social intricacies find a footing in IR theory through constructivism, which places a premium on social effects in the realm of world politics. The inter-subjectivity of world politics to shared meanings explains the vulnerability of the global system to fundamental changes. Constructivism, by virtue of its occupation with social effects, can be used as a tool for explaining phenomena across a wide spectrum; from the place of war and security in IR, to the place of institutionalised peace. In this sense, IOs' place in constructivism is based on the existence of contending identities and interests which IOs serve to reflect. The ideas or interests that necessitate IOs may stem from the need to cooperate through IOs or the need to use them for particular ends. Constructivists' insistence that world politics is socially constructed impacts on IOs by making the latter a

result of cognitive and societal factors (Adler 1997: 322). IOs evidently depend on human agreement for their existence, which in turn is a reflection of the image of reality as espoused by the prevailing ideas (Kegley 2006: 40). However, in the same vein, constructivists argue that interests, ideas and society in general are impacted by the presence of IOs. Therefore, IOs shape the ideas, values and trends in the international political environment. Based on the assumption of inter-subjectivity, it could be predicted that IOs would fail to exist in world politics if the ideas and interests prevalent deemed them inessential. By the same token, in the event of a further adjustment in dominant perspective, IOs would resurge into international politics. Likewise, according to constructivism, if ideas and interests favour IOs at the expense of the state, IOs may replace states as dominant vessels of political decision-making and action on the global scene.

Unlike realists and liberalists, constructivists maintain that the character of states and other actors is not pre-given and is therefore unpredictable. Constructivists recognise that because states do not operate in a vacuum, causal factors are vital in all theorising about their behaviour. The advantage constructivism has over realism is its openness to the importance and prevalence of IOs. The disadvantage of constructivism over liberalism in analysing IOs is the shifting stance it occupies as far as IOs are concerned. However the similarity between all these theories is their tendency to view IOs in an instrumental regard (Ruggie 1998: 3). Evidence of this is in the realist view of IOs as mechanisms for states' maximisation of power; the liberalist argument of IOs as vehicles of partnership and cooperation and the constructivist outlook of IOs as agents of societal influence.

With their features, similarities and differences included, all three theories contribute to the understanding of IOs as a phenomenon in IR. Their various theoretical perspectives on IOs assist in the explanation of actions carried out by global actors. For instance, realism moulds an understanding of why the United States (US) attempted to convince the UN of the presence of WMD in Iraq in order to rally UN support for its 2003 invasion of Iraq. Liberalism paints a picture of why representatives from world powers met in Vienna in 1814 to agree on an accepted code of behaviour among states for peace and security (Archer 1992: 6). Constructivism may be used to explain the boundless

possibilities of world politics, more specifically, the changes in the agendas of IOs, such as the UN’s initiative in creating goals for development on the global level as a means of achieving human survival and progressively, achieving peace.

Table III below summarises the realist, liberal and constructivist viewpoints on IOs.

**Table II IOs according to Realist, Liberal and Constructivist theoretical viewpoints**

|                          | <b>Realism</b>  | <b>Liberalism</b>   | <b>Constructivism</b>   |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| Normative outlook on IOs | 1. They defer states’ focus from the important task of maximising state power.<br>2. Hierarchically second to states on the global level. | 1. They are an indication that states want to cooperate.<br>2. They are the necessary moral compass in the international community. | The evidence of complex, inter-subjective relationships with the ideas, interests and identities of the global environment. |
| Importance               | Low importance  | Highly important in the international environment   | Equally as important as a global actor or social construct.   |
| Role and Functionality   | Organs used purely for the extension of state foreign policy  | 1. Enforcers of important norms that enhance peace and cooperation.<br>2. Forums for peaceful negotiation and bargaining            | To shape and be shaped by ideas, interests and identities of the international environment                                  |

## **2.4 THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

As established in the definition of IOs, states agree to be members of the organisations which are international in nature, but after having established these global organs, what role are the IOs seen to play in the global environment? What effect does the role, which they play, have on the dynamics of the global environment? The theoretical perspectives within IR on IOs reflect on what IOs execute as well as what they are supposed to execute. Since it has been made clear that their presence alters the structure and dynamics

of the world political sphere it now needs to be determined how their presence and the achievement of their stated objectives impact on the international political realm.

IOs have variously been depicted as being mere extensions of foreign policy according to realists; proponents of peace and cooperation according to liberalists and agents and inter-subjective structures of influence, according to constructivists. Clive Archer, having analysed the leading roles attributed to IOs, espouses that IOs fulfil a triad of roles in the contemporary world political structure. These three roles are those of instrument, arena and actor (Archer 1992: 135).

#### **2.4.1 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AS INSTRUMENT**

The Oxford English Dictionary For Students defines an instrument as ‘a tool or implement, especially for precision work’. An alternative definition provided by the same dictionary is ‘a means for pursuing an aim’ (Soanes & Hawker 2006: 526). Based on the argument that states are and will continue to be the chief players in world affairs (Huntington 1996:36), realists conclude that the only conceivable role for IOs is an instrumental one in the hands of states. The assumption that states utilise IOs as a means to an end depicts that in line with the views of liberalists and realists, states do have particular national interest-driven ends. It also implies the implementation of means towards such ends. IOs can only be considered instruments once there is the implementation, or the perceived likelihood of the implementation, of means towards particular ends. While this does not suggest that IOs achieve all the ends that states have or that all states employ IOs as instruments, it does mean that IOs are regarded as being instrumental in the achievement of certain ends.

The depiction of IOs as instruments has grown to be the most widespread image associated with the phenomenon, a theoretical consequence of the prominence of the theme in IR literature (Ruggie 1998: 3). In practice, the image of IOs playing an instrumental role can be largely related to an adjustment in strategic thinking among states’ foreign policy makers, whether those of developing or developed states. A shift in

global norms and the widening foreign policy agenda induced by globalisation require approaches different from those previously used by states.

Instruments are used as the need for them arises. For instance, the need to cut a piece of paper would warrant the use of an instrument such as a pair of scissors. Likewise, states have reason to make use of IOs in the pursuit of their objectives, as a result of the incapacity of the state to realise all of its objectives independently. The task of IOs as instruments is therefore introduced where the state's capacity ends (Windfuhr 1998: 5). Liberalists consider IOs useful instruments for highlighting the advantages of cooperation and simultaneously augmenting the disadvantages of conflict (Lepgold & Nincic 2001: 142). On the other hand realists would argue that IOs are instrumental in extending global hegemony, for example, in the way that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was used by the US to extend its power and influence into Europe (Matei 1994).

An inability to achieve state ends is not only the result of a lack of state resources, but can also be attributed to its lack of authority over the object or subject of its foreign policy as well as the need to be seen to adhere to international standards of behaviour. Linked to this rationale behind the use of IOs as instruments is the necessity for a deterrence of unilateralism, whether driven by egocentric or utilitarian strategy. History has shown how unilateral action can cause global insecurity, by the creation of mistrust and the resultant intensification of the arms race; as well as the fuelling of interstate, inter-ethnic or inter-religious tension (Russian Federation 2008).

Realists, however, question this alleged incapability of the state to achieve its ends, as this idea undermines the power of the state and therefore its continued centrality within IR. Instead realists prefer to argue that IOs are merely instrumental in creating a legal façade for entrenching the position of powerful states in the international political environment (Lepgold & Nincic 2001: 142).

Note-worthy attributes of instruments are their neutrality, lack of independent action and ultimate dependence on the will of their creator or controller. This subsequently implies that in functioning as a utilitarian device for member states, IOs are subjected to member states' domestic and foreign policy agendas. It also follows that their neutrality facilitates their use by states in the attainment of goals. For instance, since IOs are financed by member states, there is a tendency for the state which provides the largest contribution to demand compliance with its requests; and as such the organisation is driven to prioritise particular issues (Villanger 2004: 3). Therefore, they serve as internationally legitimate but maneuverable mechanisms for achieving particular purposes. The malleability of IOs to state needs consequently consigns IO to puppetry roles and relegates them to the role of apt apparatuses for the servicing of member states interests (Archer 1992: 136). It should however be noted that from this theoretical perspective, the degree to which an IO may be used as an instrument by any one state is dependent on the relative influence of other states in the IO as well as the level of power belonging to the state in question.

An organization of the size and complexity of the UN challenges the suitability of IOs as instruments due to the improbability of the UN functioning continuously in line with one state's policies. This was evident when the Cold War saw the UN sustaining policies in line with both the US and the USSR's interests. The prominence of independent action by IOs such as the UN is curtailed by the power struggle within the organisation for control and maximum realisation of foreign policy objectives (Archer 1992: 137). Developing states' bid to exercise influence in the UN so as to achieve their domestic development goals coupled with developed states' already prevalent influence in the UN, elaborates this point.

Based on the fact that the institutions of IOs are not insulated from member state influence, the full implementation of an IO's constitution or charter can be impaired. The effect of IOs as instruments in the global environment therefore varies according



to the alterations that the controller of the instrument may make. State policies are extended and strengthened, as they strategically gain control over the necessary object of their domestic and foreign policies using IOs. This intricate web of variables makes international political trends difficult to predict.

#### **2.4.2 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AS ARENA**

At a practical level, an arena can be described as ‘a level area surrounded by seating, in which sports and other public events are held’ (Soanes & Hawker 2006: 44). The first thing that is prominent about the word is the fact that it denotes a venue or a meeting place. Because making use of a state as an arena for dialogue with other states would be impractical and prone to bias, IOs serve as convenient forums for articulation and if put in liberalist terms, cooperation between states. IOs enhance the channels of contact and communication between states, as well as reduce the strain on the state caused by the challenge of accelerated globalization (Scholte 2005:189). Another notable aspect of the definition is the emphasis on the leveled surface of an arena. This indicates that for an IO to be likened to an arena, all member states in the organisation need to be equal, at least in principle. Equality among all states, a theme central to the purposes of the UN (United Nations 2004: 5) epitomises the rationale behind partnership among sovereign states, and excludes the notion of producing a world government, which would imply a vertical hierarchy.

According to liberalists, IOs serve as the nonaligned scene of political collaboration and agreement. Their neutrality allows for a visibility of the holistic and unabridged concerns of states in the organisation. Their objectivity permits an impartial resolution of problems brought to the forum. The public nature of forums provided by IOs gives rise to transparency in the presentation of opinions, settlement of disputes and, in general, diplomacy itself. In turn, this transparency contributes to putting the looming suspicions of states at a measure of ease, making cooperation more likely in an anarchic environment. The arena for cooperation created by IOs reinforces the liberalist view that governments can commit to common codes of international

conduct without a central and pervasive system of authority (Lepgold & Nincic 2001: 142).

As mentioned earlier, the envisaged aim of dialogue and calm reasoning become reality through the resources of IOs. Moreover, constructivists ascribe to the idea that IOs offer the opportunity to shape state behaviour. Their view is that IOs create a forum wherein states may be influenced to adopt certain codes of conduct. Through the sphere provided, norms and rules are constructed and brought into focus. States are, as a result, reoriented to value peace and their relationships with one another. The socialisation of states within the arena of IOs enables the decision-making that ensues among governments (Lepgold & Nincic 2001: 151). International negotiation is encouraged and facilitated through the arena of IOs, with a view to avert conflict among states. The analogy of an arena reveals that IOs seek to create an environment wherein the socio-economic, geo-political, cultural, ethnic, religious and other dissimilarities between states are decreased, as states manage their relationships. Arenas essentially create a foundation for peaceful resolution of disputes and signify a fundamental departure from the traditional military method of dispute settlement (Burchill 1996: 42).

In essence, the attribute of neutrality allocated to the arena suggests that IOs lack independent policy *vis-à-vis* the issues on its agenda. Their purpose is to facilitate and make the occasion possible, whether it being argument or agreement. Arenas are not seen as generating independent views, but rather as offering programme or event coordination in forums where potentially divergent views will be expressed. IOs such as the UN attempt to synchronise the actions of states as they solve mutual problems, while maintaining friendly relations among one another (United Nations 2004: 5).

Recent studies have portrayed the causal relationship between IGO membership and a dampened proclivity towards violent conflict between states (Chan 2004:127). The

effect of IOs as arenas on the international political stage is therefore an increased likelihood for cooperation through multilateral diplomacy. With the evolved nature of cross-border crises facing today's states, the arena of IOs increases the possibility of addressing contemporary global political, cultural, humanitarian and socio-economic needs as a collective global effort. IOs prove the need to maintain permanent multilateral relations among states by furnishing the mandate they provide for collaboration, with the necessary implementation tools. The world stage reveals through IOs that the option of sovereign states being systematised and administered in an anarchic world is imperative. This is due to the opportunity created by IOs, through which great and small powers foment common ground and work around differences, to establish global norms and common standards of conduct.

### **2.4.3 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AS ACTORS**

Archer's conceptualisation of IOs as actors reveals a more pervasive and proactive role. It completes the triad of roles played by IOs and explains their legitimacy to operate independently in a state-centric world where government representatives lead global interaction. An "actor" can be defined generically as one with a profession of acting. The word "act" denotes taking action, hence doing something purposefully (Soanes & Hawker 2006: 9). Simply put, the acting role reflects a more dynamic, as opposed to passive role, presupposed by the roles of instrument and arena, played by IOs. An international actor acts and reacts on the global stage. It has the ability to take initiative and is not necessarily or constantly under the control of another. This role could imply varying degrees of dominance on the world stage.

IOs in the twenty-first century have been seen to share centre stage as actors with sovereign states, who were traditionally believed to be the sole occupants of the world decision-making arena. IOs as legitimate international actors make decisions that affect states. A good example of this is the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which prescribes international monetary policy to states. Despite the tendency by some to dismiss the UN as a secondary entity, incapable of acting independently, the UN's

ability to perform independently and more effectively than some state actors, proves the notion of its legitimacy as an autonomous actor (Archer 1992: 150). The influence, which the UN is able to exert on states, reinforces the notion of the IO's role as actor. No other school of IR theory argues this more strongly than constructivists, who attribute the ideals and behaviour of state actors to the contagious effects of IO norms and belief systems. IOs cognitively define international behaviour by an insistence on multilateral cooperation, an insistence that in turn shapes state performance on the global stage (Ruggie 1998: 3). An ability to induce actions by other actors through the purposeful processes of decision-making and the application of norms reveals an acting occupation since it depicts the existence of the actor's characteristics and a predisposition to the revelation of those internal characteristics on the world stage (Kegley 2006: 55).

The degree of autonomy — however substantial or minute — which IOs are said to possess, further qualifies their definition as actors. Autonomy in the initial stages of the establishment or development of an IO is difficult to gauge exactly, due to the involvement of states in their formation. However, IOs grow in autonomy to the extent that the organs and mechanisms which states created within the organisations begin to operate with more freedom (De Senarclens 2001: 512). IOs' independence is not a given despite their classification as global actors. The degree of autonomy belonging to IOs is markedly dependent on its available resources and the degree to which states are willing to cede authority. As earlier discussed, states may use financial measures to exert control within IOs. The relationship between states and IOs, moreover, reveals a peculiar feature in the global environment. It is an observable fact that IOs possess more resources than certain sovereign states. Despite this, their legitimacy as actors is questioned more often than that of small, fragile or even failed states. An explanation for this is the preconceived exclusive legitimacy of the Westphalian state as actor.

The characterisation of IOs as actors does not negate the plausibility of external influences affecting their actions. Their performance in peacekeeping operations, for

example, is dependent on the situation in the state. This would also determine if there is any peace for the IO to keep, in the first place. For an IO to be considered an actor there should be a difference between the state of affairs after the inclusion of the IO's independent actions and that before intervention. The prevalence of a difference in the political situation before and after intervention portrays the effect of IO action. While this is not to gauge IO effectiveness, the visibility of IO presence on the global stage proves its presence on the stage. Evidence of a theatre actor, for example, is only present once there is proof of its role as an actor. The level of influence, however little, does not counteract the actor's occupation as an actor. Instead, it highlights the issue of the actor's preponderance on the global level.

As actors at the global level, the presence of IOs certainly adjusts the appearance of the global arena from a monochromatic collection of states to a multi-functional sphere in which states and IOs perform roles as actors in the international environment. The classification of IOs as actors implies the presence of a central authority and plays down the anarchic feature of the global society. While some have argued that states jeopardise their sovereignty by permitting IOs to act globally, others counter this argument by purporting that IOs simply act to address the overarching issues facing contemporary states and regulate inter-state relations. IO activity functions on a double tier basis in that it not only permeates intra-state affairs, but it also manages inter-state relations. While there exists an overlap between the roles of IOs in intra and inter state relations, the overlap does not result in a conflict between the roles, as they exist and are played out in harmony with one another.

The actions of IOs concurrently straddle the instrument, arena and actor analogies. Their role in the global society is triadic and dynamic in the way that it metamorphosises into its three roles as the need arises. IOs are multipurpose due to their swift ability to fulfill various needs in the international environment. Using the metaphor of a drama production, Archer notes that IOs serve as instruments and are therefore stage props. Their analogy as arenas represents a modification in the

previously mentioned instrumental role played by IOs in that their role is extended from being tools dependent on the will of their controller(s), to also being the stage on — or the arena in — which these organisations-as-instruments or, in this case, stage props, may play the dual role of facilitating cooperation between member states while functioning instrumentally for these members' domestic and foreign policy objectives. The final role, according to Archer's conceptualisation, highlights a more central and pervasive part played by IOs in that they are actors in world politics. As actors, they generate a flow of gestures and actions that become the course of the play. As such, IOs summarily provide the stage, become the stage props and also act in the scenes of world politics, depicting a three-pronged *raison d'être*.

## **2.5. CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGNISATIONS**

IOs have become prominent in the discipline of IR because they are structures with international memberships that possess formality and continuity in operating across state borders. As prominent features in the sphere of world politics, IOs have been found to contend with the criticism of realist thinkers, agree with the liberalist view and conform to constructivist outlook. Despite the three different outlooks provided by the theoretical schools, IOs have become a pervasive unit of analysis within IR. Their position in world politics can be viewed as prominent, but also shifting due to their ability to play various roles — that of instrument, arena and actor.

There is a degree of malleability in ascertaining the most appropriate and imperative role for IOs to play as concerns world issues and thus constantly to cater for the changing structure of the society of states. Their ability to play different roles mandates that, despite the fact that they are essentially one category of the role-players in the society of states, they can be perceived as three different phenomena. The three roles IOs play in the pod of world politics add a new feature to its evolving character.

Its uniqueness stems from the threefold efficacy added to the sphere, as opposed to the single role of actor traditionally played by states.

The arguments reveal that it would be a *faux pas* to view the role of IOs in one dimension, as this would mean a less than holistic assessment of their contribution to global politics. As such, to say that IOs are simply instrumentalist in their global role, or are only actors, would be tantamount to the metaphor of the three blind men who touched three different parts of the same elephant and based on their limited sensory exploration came to three radically different conclusions as to what kind of animal they encountered. Archer considers the three roles as essential perspectives from which to assess the role of IOs in international society, such as the role of the UN in the global community. IOs' various functioning as instruments, arenas and actors will therefore be utilised in evaluating the UN's role in the implementation of its MDGs in the following chapters.

## Chapter 3

### **THE UNITED NATIONS' ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN: A HISTORICAL AND GENERAL OVERVIEW**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Children in the sphere of global politics, is an area that has traditionally received scant attention. However, owing to the fact that the current generation of youth is proportionally the largest in the history of the world, any study of world politics or the global economy must prominently feature the subject of children. This is because more than 1 billion people across the world are between the ages of ten and nineteen (UNICEF 2009c). The fact that 85 percent of these constitute the African child brings to fore the urgency in assessing the question of children in general, and more specifically, children in Africa. Child development is a matter of priority on the dual basis that tomorrow's opportunities are harnessed by an investment in today's children and that tomorrow's problems are preventable by interventions made on behalf of today's children. The UN is one of many entities that, recognising the need for a chief focus on children, have played a role in promoting child welfare.

The present chapter will, firstly, clarify some of the contention that exists as to the definition of a child. Cultural, ideological and other differences worldwide create challenges in delineating the nature and extent of the UN's involvement with children. It is for this reason that the chapter commences with the definition of a child. The UN's present role cannot be adequately appreciated or analysed without a review of the role the organisation has occupied and played in child development over the years. Hence, the chapter will secondly provide a historical overview of the UN's involvement in child development. The role of the organs within the UN that are instrumental in the



development of children will be analysed in this chapter. The chapter will therefore establish the historical role of the UN as concerns child development, in light of the framework of analysis provided by Archer in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the UN's role as an IO should be assessed in the dimension of children in general, for an understanding of its responsibility and capability in achieving its child-related MDGs.

### **3.2 ESTABLISHING A DEFINITION OF THE “CHILD”**

A definition of the term ‘child’ brings into focus the group of people being spoken of, when the words ‘child’ or ‘children’ are mentioned. Clarifying the term ‘child’ delineates whether, for example, a state is permitted to enlist a 15 year old into the army. It explains the need for a state to intervene in the protection of a 14 year old from certain types of employment and not essentially in the protection of a 19 year old from the same type of labour. According to Article 2 of the African Union’s Charter on the Rights of the Child (Article 2 Part 1 AU 1999), a “child” refers to any human being below the age of 18 years. While the AU definition is clear and concise in setting the maximum age limit for childhood, it omits the fact that the laws of different African states contradict the given definition, making it problematic to universally accept the AU’s definition. For this purpose, as well as the fact that it is the UN’s role in child development that is the primary focus of this research, the UN’s definition will be provided and used as conceptual demarcation.

The UN defines a child as ‘every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier’ (Article 1 Part1 UNICEF: 1989). By allowing for differences in state laws, the UN’s definition of the child acknowledges the intricacy involved in establishing a definition suitable for use in global politics, and resultantly ensures wide scale acceptability. At the same time, the definition obliges states to fall within basic requirements by its insistence that in states’ definition of a minimum age, the convention’s fundamental principles are adhered to (UNICEF, 2007a:1). The principles in question do not prescribe the age at which states are to set the minimum age limit, but instead provide guidelines which enable states to pass age limit

laws, with economic disparities, culture, religion, child capability and child rights taken into consideration.

### **3.3 EVOLUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS' EXPLICIT ROLE IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

At the end of World War II, few if any could have predicted the UN's involvement in the development of the child, because the aim of its formation was the prevention of war on a scale as grand as that of WWI or WWII (Berridge 1987: 195). However, it is evident that the focal point of the UN has experienced a shift, in line with the more holistic agenda of global politics, to consist of matters that were initially deemed "low politics". Article 1(3) of the UN Charter, however, provides the initial link to the inclusion of children; through its self-acclaimed commitment to human rights. It thus sets the scene for a possible broadening of the term human rights, to include women's and eventually children's rights.

In 1924, the UN's predecessor, the League of Nations, established the *Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child*, which was pivotal in spearheading child rights on the international human rights scene (UNICEF 1998: 20). This initiative served as the basis for subsequent child-related global ventures. With the League of Nations' demise, new institutions were created to ensure the promotion of children, globally. UNICEF, as the UN's primary arm for global child care, was established in 1946, originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. The Fund was created to facilitate emergency disaster relief for children in the wake of WWII. The mandate for children's disaster relief expired by 1950 and so the relevance of an emergency fund for children came into question. This stage prompted a two-fold shift in the UN's role as concerns children, in terms of a deepening as well as a widening of its priorities. Firstly, it deepened its focus on children, to reveal a concern for children's general welfare, as opposed to the *ad hoc* needs of children in emergencies. This shift gave recognition to the necessity of meeting the long-term needs of children and not merely the short term ones. Secondly, the UN widened its role to engage with children's developmental needs across

the world, abandoning the previous restriction to children in post-war regions (United Nations 1968:334). An extension of the UN's mandate to the developing world was significant in that it heralded the beginning of a UN child developmental focus in these areas. This extension proved pivotal, since the bulk of UN child developmental activities soon shifted to the developing regions of the world. The UN's new role summarily signified a two-stage involvement with children to the extent that it now committed its resources not only to the most desperate requirements of children, but also to the sustenance of those vulnerable sectors in the developing world, through mechanisms to facilitate the training of personnel and support staff (Farer & Gaer 1993: 254).

As a conduit in the establishment of global norms, the UN General Assembly in 1959 unanimously adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*, which recognised that the particular nature of children's needs mandated a declaration for children, separate from those already provided for by the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 1968: 360). Although the latter legal instrument denotes children's prerogative to special care and assistance, the former instrument addressed the more extensive needs of children (UNICEF 1998: 20). Such a legal move signified the *de jure* alignment of global child principles to correspond with the UN's new *de facto* child development mandate. Furthermore, the 1959 Declaration highlighted the importance of continuing and developing the child's right initiative, established under the auspices of the UN's predecessor. This move by the UN also affirmed its progress in the distinct area of child rights over and above that of generic human rights. The universal acceptance of the Declaration signified the UN's prominent role as actor in influencing the behaviour of states.

In negotiating its institutional advancement within the UN body, UNICEF was led to attain a more relevant, child-related mandate. This need coincided with the increased placement of child needs within holistic economic and social policy outlines. Consequently, more research within the broad sphere of child needs was essential and with this research came the realisation in 1961 that substantial contributions to child development could not be made without an investment in education (Jones 2006: 594). UNICEF began to direct its aid and resources towards education and vocation. As part of

its initiative to strengthen the primary and secondary education systems in states, it collaborated with UNESCO as well as the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Through the broadening and deepening of UNICEF's activities, from 1961-1970, it linked children's aid to national development by emphasising the importance of meeting children's daily needs as a means to achieving national development (Nobel Prize Foundation 1965). Along with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF became the most effective mechanism of direct assistance for the wider goal of human development (Farer & Gaer 1993: 254). From the onset of the partnership between the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF in eradicating killer diseases among children and training health personnel, the UN became a vehicle in administering humanitarian assistance in the form of healthcare to children in developing countries (United Nations 1971:123). UNICEF's collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in feeding children, educating their mothers on proper nutrition and establishing training institutes, declared its stand as an agent in the eradication of extreme hunger in children, launching its protracted but crucial fight against malnutrition (United Nations 1968: 337).

From its establishment of 'corridors of peace' to enable the access to and vaccination of children in conflict zones, to halving of early 1960s child mortality rates, the UN's role in child welfare and development had clearly been recognised. Its global role was rewarded by the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to it in 1965 (United Nations 2002). This prestigious prize assisted in publicising the exigency behind a commitment to child development, by bringing an achievement in the arena of children's development into the spotlight. Although beneficial in spawning media attention, the sense of urgency implied by the award was not sufficient to rally global political efforts to the extent of realising child security and development (Gregg 1972: 218).

The UN's specialised agency tasked with the protection of children's interests, UNICEF, acted in setting up the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) in 1989. This UN document fundamentally delineated child needs as being separate from those of adults, contrary to popular historical belief (UNICEF 2005d: 3). Through this legal mechanism, the UN spearheaded a change in the way other IOs viewed the subject of children and

unified all issues relating to children, including early childhood care, child protection, survival and development, child disabilities, gender equality, as well as youth engagement and development (Horton 2004: 2071). While acknowledging that it was incapable of single-handedly enforcing the rights of the child, UNICEF played a dominant role in advocating adherence to child rights. Its method of standard-setting, which obligates states to become enforcers on behalf of the UN, proved crucial in this regard. UNICEF compels states to comply with international norms by apportioning them the responsibility of working with the necessary entities in society to promote child rights to the fullest potential. Furthermore, it restrains its member states by urging them to realign their child-related policies to acceptable standards and to maintain a favourable international reputation (Mingst & Karns 1995: 38). This enables the UN to serve as a focal point for global child rights issues.

Events such as the *Jomtien World Summit for Children* in 1990 (Hulme 2009: 9) provided the dual function of becoming a forum within which the rights of children were discussed, while acting to ensure the realisation of child welfare, development and protection. The forum provided by the summit lent a voice to children who usually have none (United Nations 2002). Above this, the Summit for Children served as an arena for proving that successful UN summits could spawn substantial political resolve and financial resources for children. UNICEF re-invigorated the process of summitry and set not only the stage, but also the agenda for other summits (Emmerij, Jolly & Weiss 2001 112). Its attendance by 71 heads of state marked a milestone in acting on the recognition of children as owners of rights. The endorsement for health care access, education, sanitation, as well as a decrease in child mortality during this forum publicised the example being set by top-level delegates in their commitment to child welfare (Jolly 1991:1819).

10 years after Jomtien, through the Millennium Summit of 2000, the UN became the arena for the largest, most recent development conference, which included the prioritisation of children. This high panel event was attended by 189 heads of state and government — showing its prominence. The Millennium Declaration, which was endorsed by these leaders, served to reaffirm confidence in the UN, as well as its Charter.

From the Summit, came the eight MDGs, which are eight developmental targets to be achieved globally by 2015 (UNGA 2000). The MDGs were especially significant for children in the global arena due to the opportunity for child-related issues to share the stage with other prominent items on the MDG list and the global agenda, alongside items considered ‘high politics’. The two particular child-related MDGs are: the second MDG — the achievement of universal primary education (discussed in chapter five) and the fourth MDG — the reduction of child mortality rates. Including universal primary education as a goal highlights the centrality of education in child and human development. The fourth MDG, that of reducing child mortality, speaks to one of the key but often overlooked priorities of development, especially in developing countries. Its inclusion as an MDG invites further introspection in the field of child survival (United Nations 2009: 2).

A further four of the MDGs are issues that indirectly relate to children. The first of these is the first MDG — the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, which is discussed in the next chapter. This goal cannot be addressed independently of children, due to the increased impact of extreme poverty and hunger on children. The prevalence of underweight and undernourished children is particularly brought to the attention of global audiences with this MDG (United Nations 2010: 13). Promoting gender equality and empowering women are dual issues linked to the interests of children and constitute the third MDG. Women empowerment becomes especially vital due to the gendered nature of poverty and the tendency for poor mothers to have ill or disadvantaged children (UNICEF 2001:56). Similarly, maternal health is inseparable from child health, due to the dependency of children on their mothers for early development (UNICEF 2007b: 24). The improvement of maternal health, which constitutes MDG five, essentially benefits children by strengthening their health and that of their mothers (UNICEF 2001:56). Disease in children stunts child development and in parents jeopardises the welfare of child caregivers. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, which is MDG six, therefore positively affects children (United Nations 2010: 44). Its inclusion by the UN denotes an acknowledgement of the overarching effect that disease has on humanity.

As the most recent UN action plan to human security, these goals provide some structure to the UN's child-developmental agenda but are by no means exhaustive of the UN's mandate in child developmental issues. Having thus established the credentials of the UN as a key role player in child development, a number of specific areas will be alluded to.

### **3.4 THE UNITED NATIONS' TRIADIC ROLE IN GLOBAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

#### **3.4.1 THE UNITED NATIONS AS INSTRUMENT**

UN activities, whether pertaining to children, women or humanitarian situations, are exponentially centring on the developing world. By nature of the enormity of the need in developing states, the number of UN projects has had to increase at a faster rate in the developing world than in the developed world. Despite this, and the allotment of multilateral as well as bilateral development aid to developing states for over five decades, the need for aid has amplified. The increased allocation of aid to developing states, coupled with questions on aid effectiveness, infringe on developed states' continued interest in honouring multilateral aid commitments (Kaul 1995: 182). An infringement such as this has a negative effect on the UN's propensity for utilisation as instrument of its member states. This is based on the fact that both the honouring of aid commitments and the utilisation of the UN as instrument of its member states, rely on political will from policy makers in government.

Diminishing political will for multilateral aid commitments to developing states however, may be characterised by a prioritisation of bilateral over multilateral aid flows. This is marked by a re-channelling of aid from multilateral mechanisms towards bilateral ones. In so doing, aid commitments towards developing states would serve the domestic interests of donor states, regardless of aid effectiveness or ineffectiveness in developing states (Kaul 1995: 183). Such gravitation in favour of bilateral aid commitments could explain the decreasing role of the UN as instrument of its members, for child development.

Another issue, which affects the UN's use as instrument, is that of national political sovereignty, which is not merely a concern held by developed states, but a universal political principle. Child developmental needs in developing states require external assistance in varying levels. Depending on the nature of this assistance, states are often required to sideline their autonomy in policy-making, in favour of decisions made by experts in the developed, mostly Western world. Although this requirement is for the end of child development, which nations support in principle, the practical implications of adopting external policies have political ramifications. For developing states, therefore, increasing integration of developmental objectives implies the erosion of national sovereignty (Kaul 1995: 183).

As discussed in the preceding chapter, IOs are characterised according some theorists by their lack of independent action and consequent dependence on the will of more dominant actors for creation and control (Villanger 2004: 3). For this reason, the UN does not possess full control over decisions made towards the development of children, or the implementation thereof. By virtue of their ownership over UN developmental projects, donors have more comparative influence than the organisation itself.

Another issue supporting the argument for the UN's use as instrument by its member states is that of its legitimacy. While some states may possess the means to achieve their foreign policy objectives in the global arena, the legitimacy needed may be lacking (Russian Federation 2008). This is particularly so against the background of norm-setting in the international arena, which could denote hegemonic influence over other states or global actors and could reduce receptiveness to these norms by certain audiences. On the other hand, the neutrality possessed by the UN allows room for it to be used as an instrument for norm-setting. Through the legitimacy possessed by the UN, it could be used for norm-influencing, for example concerning children in conflict situations. In this regard, states make use of the UN as a tool for sensitising states on the problem of child involvement in conflict. Through the UN's influence, it becomes a global norm to criminalise the recruitment of children as soldiers. As a result, norm shifting takes place. The UN in the latter scenarios serves as a base from which states exert influence onto other states and actors (Finnemore 1993: 594).



### 3.4.2 THE UNITED NATIONS AS ARENA

Assembling leaders from governmental and non-governmental groupings in high-level decision-making on issues related to children, is a crucial role the UN plays. Its essence lies in the opportunity for cooperation between stakeholders, whose inputs may impact on the lives of children, worldwide and for generations to come. Sessions such as the 2001 *General Assembly's Special Session on Children* offer essential opportunity for global heavy-weights to review past commitments to child development. Additionally, such dedicated sessions are vital in assessing global and national shortcomings and for delineating action plans, to address the challenges (UNICEF 2001:4).

The first ever address by children to the UN General Assembly, in 2002, was made possible by the UN's role in staging cooperation on child developmental issues. In articulating their own concerns, children gave decision makers the opportunity to hear first-hand how an investment in children implied human progress (UNICEF 2002a). Children were thus in the spotlight, both as subjects of discussion and as key speakers, when they utilised the UN organ as a forum towards strengthening the commitment of governments to furthering the ends of children (UNICEF 2002a: 3 & 5). During this forum, wherein the UN dedicated a special session to children, the member states committed themselves to creating a world fit for children by cooperating at intra and interstate levels to ensure that children are granted the best possible beginnings in life (UNICEF 2007a: 2).

The Special Session on Children comprised of 404 child delegates, from 148 countries who were selected for their active participation in child developmental affairs. Part of the rationale behind children having the audience of heads of state and government was to urge governments not to renege on their commitments to them. The UN thus played a substantive role by being one of the few forums wherein children could participate in decisions on the developmental agenda and stipulate the course of action for the actualisation of child developmental objectives. Its role highlighted the importance of

children in the global arena, as not merely subjects of government policy, but also key stakeholders in the realisation of objectives (UNICEF 2009f: 4).

While governments may be the principal actors bound to international agreements within UN forums, the effect of the latter on NGOs and INGOs in the international arena should not be dismissed. NGOs and civil society organisations have a moral responsibility to achieve child-related developmental objectives, which stems from the norms imparted to them through the UN arena. Based on this moral responsibility, NGOs gear towards partnerships with one another, INGOs as well as with other global actors towards realising the necessary objectives (UNICEF 2006b: 7). These partnerships further reveal the rationale behind the UN's commitment to providing forums, which give rise to concerted efforts in diminishing the burden of child mortality and other child-linked issues (Horton 2004: 2072). The “*World Fit For Children*” — a document by and for children — was a result of the *World Fit For Children Summit*. The initiative provides a forum for leaders of INGOs, NGOs and governments to commit to national policies, action plans and the allocation of resources in the reduction and possible eradication of child poverty and other child-related challenges (UNICEF 2007a: 7).

The UN also assembles pertinent actors on a podium in order to devise a strategy to combat another child-related challenge, namely child trafficking. The nearly impenetrable networks usually involved in trafficking and prostitution rings mandate a cooperative approach. Consequently, the UN gathers governments for cooperation in efforts geared at fighting these insidious crimes that also affect children. Its arenas pool together states, global actors, civil society groups and religious leaders in support of attempts at tackling the multi-faceted nature of child trafficking and prostitution (Fleshman 2009: 9). Forums which the UN provides, therefore assist in shaping norms for the goal of child protection.

Concerning the scope of child labour, the UN's role as an arena becomes evident when it creates the opportunity for states to cooperate in anti-poverty programmes in the obliteration of child labour. This it does while providing the arena for advocacy and cooperation towards the abandonment of child exploitation in favour of education

(UNICEF 1997: 4). The arena provided by the 2005 UN World Summit, was useful in assessing existing continual impediments towards the elimination of child labour. A re-energised global commitment towards addressing these obstacles was also envisioned in this high-level event, comprised of 150 heads of state and government (the highest ever assembled), which the UN facilitated (ILO 2006: 8). A forum for child labour awareness is additionally created by the UN's efforts at combating child trafficking, as child labour is particularly prominent among trafficked children (Fleshman 2009: 7).

Events such as these highlight the continuing role of the UN as arena for cooperation in initiatives centred on child development. However, this forum created by the UN also exposed the flawed nature of cooperation among states towards the realisation of child development, in light of the failure to meet the desired outcomes (UNICEF 2006d: 36). Advancements made toward the achievement of child developmental objectives thus revealed a failure for the UN to meet its desired 2005 outcomes *en route* to the achievement of the MDGs (UNICEF 2006d: 36).

### **3.4.3 THE UNITED NATIONS AS ACTOR**

Child development is increasingly being emphasised in the UN's role as actor. The organisation essentially focuses on the rights-based approach to development, which places '*values and politics at the very heart of development practice*', and UNICEF, specifically, has transformed itself into a mechanism for the practical application of this approach. While the UNDP's focus on development is shared among men, women and children, it can be viewed as a key thinker within the UN, in delineating the extensive confines of the rights-based approach to development in children (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004: 1416). Practical application of this approach is visible throughout the UN's initiatives towards child development.

The UN's prioritisation of children in its 2002 General Assembly Session signified a departure from certain traditional assumptions, such as that children are unaware of their needs. While this role is ordinarily encompassed in the UN's role as arena, this departure codified a new approach in the promotion of children's concerns worldwide; one in

which the opinion of children is considered relevant and legitimate, especially in the formulation of solutions for problems that affect them. As a result of the UN's role in norm and trend-setting, this initiative could set a precedent for future child conferences. Far from sensationalising child developmental challenges, the UN's role as actor in supporting child development stems from its highlighting the plight of children. This role is significant in revealing the UN's intention to empower children in efforts geared at their own development (UNICEF 2009f: 4). The UN's role in endorsing the "*World Fit For Children*"; is noteworthy in that the document re-commits leaders to the un-realised promises from the 1990 *World Summit For Children*. Similarly, the *World Fit For Children* links governments to their commitments made two years prior in the Millennium Declaration (UNICEF 2002a:3 & 5).

As mentioned earlier, the goals agreed upon in the Millennium Declaration have moulded the UN's approach to child development to a large extent. With the recognition that extreme poverty and hunger make children and their families vulnerable to most societal ills, the UN's role *vis-à-vis* child development constitutes a strong focus on poverty alleviation (UNICEF 2006a: 2). Some of the societal ills linked to poverty are HIV/AIDS, child labour, lack of education, child marriage and child trafficking. The UN's onslaught against poverty has an effect on each of these malaises that affect children. More so, efforts aimed at eradicating child poverty are intrinsically connected to the needs of the mothers, families and communities (UNICEF 2006a: 2). As such, the UN's role portrays the recognition of the need to integrate children into general poverty-relief initiatives, as well as to integrate families and communities into child poverty alleviation. A focus on holistic poverty alleviation in turn affects a multitude of other developmental aspects of the child (IPU & UNICEF 2005: 28).

As part of its holistic efforts to focus on poverty and hunger alleviation, the UN plays a monitoring and evaluation role. This role is extensive and highlights the successes and failures of governments in strategies aimed at child development (UNDG 2010: 23). Over and above monitoring government actions the UN engages with global actors regarding their role in influencing domestic macroeconomic strategies. UNICEF, in particular, broadens its poverty alleviation efforts by advising governments on suitable

macroeconomic policies for the successful implementation of initiatives towards child development. For instance, the IO acts as advocate *vis-à-vis* International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in arguing that Least Developed Countries' (LDCs) debt repayment would be detrimental to child development. UNICEF's argument is that funds used to repay debts, are more urgently needed to meet the needs of children in LDCs (Eberstadt 1997: 154).

UN actions towards child development increasingly confirm that poverty and hunger in many cases are equal to malnutrition. Its actions as global advocate for the inclusion of child nutrition alongside poverty alleviation initiatives expose the extent of malnutrition facing children and emphasise the necessity of prioritising this human rights issue on the global agenda (UNICEF 1998:10). Apart from advocacy, the UN has a substantial educative role, in which it disseminates its research findings and educates global audiences on the nutritional catastrophe in certain regions of the world. In so doing, the UN guides willing donors and policy makers to understand the extent of the human rights caveat created by malnutrition, and exposes the dire need for funding and policy shifts towards affected areas.

Part of the reason for the UN's identification of extreme poverty and hunger as pressing, is the fact that these conditions are largely responsible for child mortality. As such, attempts to eradicate the two cannot succeed without due attention to child mortality (UNICEF 2005d: 10). A chief initiative in this regard is the *Child Survival Partnership*, which is a collaborative effort between UN agencies, such as the WHO and UNICEF, and other entities such as the World Bank, Gates Foundation, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (Horton 2004: 2071). The "*Unite for Children*" cooperative, as one of the UN's initiatives to advance the interests of the child, seeks to mobilise support from governments, NGOs, activists and corporations to protect children against the effects of HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, UNAIDS & PEPFAR 2006:1). Partnerships, that are fomented by the UN, are seen as fundamental to effective implementation of remedial programmes such as immunisation, healthcare, early child care, nutrition, sanitation and child protection (UNICEF 2006a: 23).

UNICEF assumes a leading role in advocating for the rights of children. Its actions in so doing are indicative of the link it observes between child development and child rights. According to UNICEF, child poverty hampers the right of a child to health care, nutrition, sanitation and protection, *inter alia*. Critics, such as Robert Black and his colleagues, from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg's Department of International Health, instead argue for a paradigm shift that advocates a stronger interventionist focus on child health, mortality and child hunger, to ensure the survival of children. Their argument is that the UN's role in child development becomes undermined by its overemphasis of child rights to the detriment of the more basic need of child survival (Horton 2004: 2072).

Beyond the theme of child survival, UN actions extend to the intrinsic aspect of early childhood development, which it deems essential for long-term conducive human development. The UN allocates a key part of the responsibility for early childhood development to governments, by insisting on their budgetary prioritisation of this aspect. Its actions involve attempting to influence various governmental policies, steering them towards the prioritisation of early childhood advancement. It plays this influential role by highlighting early childhood development as first strides toward esteeming child rights (UNICEF 2001: 15). Despite the allocation of this responsibility, the UN plays a coordinating role over governments, especially since many states lack the institutional capacity to successfully implement key strategies.

Poor nutrition, as a symptom of poverty, has a significant impact on diseases in adults and in children. One pertinent link between poverty and disease is the cyclical relationship between the two in the sense that child poverty is exacerbated by disease and the reverse is likewise true. More specifically, HIV/AIDS perpetuates poverty due to the high costs involved in caring for sick family members, causing resource deprivation for children in the family. The results of this are even more onerous when the sick family member is the sole income provider. (UNICEF, UNAIDS & PEPFAR 2006:11). At the same time, it has a behavioural impact on children, in that poverty is a leading cause of child prostitution. This in turn increases the likelihood of HIV/AIDS contraction.

As a prominent player in global norm agenda-setting, the UN's role in child development therefore does not exclude the HIV/AIDS burden. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases affecting children forms part of the UN mandate. Its inclusion as an MDG enunciates the impact of disease on development and advocates a global as opposed to national approach to combating the HIV pandemic (UNDP 2005: 148). Realising the centrality of this burden essentially has a bearing on UNICEF's partnership with the World Bank in simultaneously reducing the spread of HIV and reducing poverty through the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* (PRSP) (UNICEF 2004a:15). Beyond this, it has resulted in the creation of UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS), which is an intra-UN collaboration for combating the AIDS pandemic (UNICEF, UNAIDS & PEPFAR 2006:11). Holistically, the UN's role addresses HIV/AIDS research and statistics, to determine the extent of the pandemic. At the community level, the UN role involves efforts towards the prevention of mother-child transmission as well as care of children orphaned by AIDS and the growing phenomenon of child-headed households (UNICEF 2004a:15). The psychosocial well-being of children orphaned by AIDS also broadens the responsibility of the UN, with regards to AIDS orphans in Africa and the rest of the developing world (Hope 2008: 57).

Education is a central and crucial component of the UN's child developmental objectives and is therefore inseparable from child rights. Education serves as a tool in breaking the cycle of poverty, among other reasons because it reduces gender inequalities and teenage pregnancies. The UN thus serves as a key driver in the task of encouraging as well as providing universal primary education (UNICEF 2000:3), but in doing so engages in partnerships with governments and other actors as it does in achieving all of its MDGs. It is not only faced with crushing prejudices concerning female education and thereby transforming norms, but it is additionally faced with the task of capacity building for primary education. The UN's role as an actor is evident in its initiative to educate girls as a matter of urgency, due to its conclusion that the education of girls reduces poverty and hunger, child mortality, maternal mortality and major diseases. Its actions towards the provision of universal primary education is further justified by its finding that, even with the achievement of other development goals, without the education of girls the sustainability of those goals is highly unlikely (UNICEF 2008b: 25).



Child education has historically been addressed by four key UN bodies, which are UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank (Jones 2006:591). The UN serves as a focal point in achieving universal primary education and in fostering this child development objective. Chapter 5 is allocated to the role played by the UN towards the MDG of achieving universal primary education in West Africa.

Empowering the girl child implies child development and as UNICEF argues, is a useful tool in the fight against poverty. Poverty, the protection of girls, the preservation of family honour and the provision of stability in unstable social periods should not justify marriage imposed on girls below the age of 18. These arguments have been the driving forces behind the prominence of this phenomenon (UNICEF 2005a: 1). The UN seeks to expose the reality of children involved in marriages in order to discourage its continuation across the globe. This is partly done through its prioritisation of women empowerment as an MDG. It educates audiences about the effects of early marriage on the girl child's life and explains the relationship between child marriages and socioeconomic woes that communities, and children in particular, encounter (UNICEF 2005a:1). A good example of this is the relationship between child marriages and maternal mortality or that between child marriages and the depth and severity of poverty of the community. The UN's attempts to curtail the practice of early child marriages illustrate the importance of establishing the root causes of harmful traditional practices in order to decrease the susceptibility of children to such predicament.

Noteworthy in the UN's attempts at counteracting child marriage is its focus on geographical regions that are prone to the incidence of child marriages, based on the observed causal factors such as deeply embedded traditional practices. UN efforts against child marriages additionally point towards the promotion of gender equality, specifically as concerns the girl child's right to choose. Data presented by the UN concerning this phenomenon, point to the gendered nature of poverty, exacerbated by child marriages (UNICEF 2005a:1). Important in the UN's role in this aspect of child welfare, is its conformity with other objectives, such as combating violence against women and ensuring education access, poverty alleviation and gender equality as



mentioned earlier. It however goes further to explore the effect of child marriages on boys and men in the society. The UN's role in child marriage should not be mistaken for activism that proposes the divorce or separation of children from marriages in which they are already involved, as this would have far-reaching effects on the society. Rather, its actions stem from the need to discourage such harmful practices.

Despite the fact that not every aspect of the UN's child development objectives is highlighted by inclusion as MDGs, the UN continues to act towards the various issues that constitute child development.

Poverty and child labour are two inextricably linked dimensions in child development. Because poverty is a driving factor in child labour, the UN's role in addressing the latter largely consists of anti-poverty initiatives and is therefore linked to efforts at alleviating child poverty, and in this regard it partners with other actors in. However, poverty cannot be addressed without due attention to child labour, as impoverishment is deepened in the long-term by the abandonment of education in favour of child labour (UNICEF 2009b: 15). Moreover, child labour more often than not constitutes child abuse. The realisation of this link influences the UN into playing a dual role in addressing child labour. It serves as actor in educating governments and civil society alike on the realities of child labour, by revealing the deleterious effect of child labour on children's educational progress. Within this sphere, the UN also brings to the fore a prevalent but often overlooked dimension of child labour and child abuse, which is domestic exploitation of children. The second feature of the UN's role constitutes its attempts to influence states into criminalising child abuse, which often manifests as child labour. A key aspect of child rights affected by the abuse of children, especially through child labour, is the right to education. Thus, as a key player in advocating for children's universal right to education, the UN's role in endorsing education and opposing child abuse overlaps (UNICEF 1997: 4).

The severity of child labour was captured by the UN in its efforts to combat the complexities of this global problem prior to the adoption of the MDGs. Since then, the IO has not neglected its role in alleviating child labour. Instead, global attention to the issue

of labour has shifted efforts towards the provision of productive but decent work for all, *en route* to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger affecting children and their families (ILO 2010). Part of the role it plays in exposing the predicament of child labour, is debunking the myths surrounding the crisis. Misconceptions concerning child labour exist and these have an influence on the capacity with which such a trend prevails. These are myths pertaining to: the geographical extent of the phenomenon; the nature of the link between poverty and child labour; the industries prone to child labour and the exaggerated effectiveness of sanctions in alleviating child labour. Specifically, some of the realities of child labour the UN depicts are the existence of the problem on a global scale, as opposed to only in the developing world; the fact that child labour is in fact separable from poverty-stricken communities; the preponderance of child labour in import and export industries; and lastly that the imposition of sanctions alone are ineffective in eliminating child labour (UNICEF 1997: 21). In so doing, the UN progressively acts to inform and thereby empower the world with the necessary tools with which to address child labour and its far-reaching consequences.

Child labour and all the other child-related problems the UN strives to address, constitute abuse. The dimension of child labour compulsorily brings the ILO to the fore, as the responsibility for child protection from harsh labour and exploitation is shared between UNICEF and the ILO. As a short term goal, the ILO aims to abolish the worst forms of child labour; however its long term goal is the successful elimination of all forms of child labour (Fleshman 2009: 7).

One crucial role of the UN, and more specifically the ILO, in reducing child labour is in its ability, through research, to predict the decline of child labour with the simultaneous increase in child education and decrease in poverty. Of particular note in this case is China, wherein proportionally more children have been taken out of poverty and more children enrolled in schools over the past 25 years than in any other state. The ILO aims to strategically serve as a vehicle for the combined reinvigorated efforts between states to enact the laws related to abolishing the worst types of child labour (ILO 2006: 11).

With regards to the fight against child abuse, the UN serves as an actor by providing indicators for the existence of abuse (Forrester & Harwin 2000: 430). In portraying child abuse as an indivisible concern of human rights, the UN acts to influence states into prioritising this problem in its policy frameworks and financial obligations. Standards set by the UN in this matter involve states enacting and enforcing legislation for the protection of children (UNICEF 2005d: 6). Its role in this regard is to assist governments towards realising alternatives for children engaged in exploitation and abuse (Hope 2005: 30). Attitude change concerning the abuse of children is a component, of this effort, but is complicated by persistent belief systems. As a result, the UN assigns states the role of changing perceptions within communities, through campaigns launched to target belief systems (UNICEF 2005d: 6).

Cognisant that the demand for child labour fuels trafficking in children, the UN's efforts toward child development are inclusive of anti-child trafficking efforts. In particular, the UN mitigates the problem through fostering efforts to reduce the ease by which children, especially girl children, are transported, sold and exploited. While the UN's actions have unmasked a particular vulnerability of girls in this regard, its initiatives are not limited to the girl child. In enforcing international anti-trafficking norms, the UN facilitates the implementation of international instruments, such as laws to make child trafficking a punishable offence world wide. By so doing, it provides states with some ammunition to fight child trafficking (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2002: 4).

The difficulties in single-handedly combating trafficking are daunting, and the UN therefore spearheads collaborative efforts. The mobilisation and coordination of the state, civil society, business, private sector and other entities in initiatives to eradicate child trafficking and prostitution are therefore inclusive (United Nations 2008a: 4 & 12). The UN thus acts as coach in guiding states towards the most efficient approach through which to address the problem. The dense networks usually involved in trafficking and prostitution rings have necessitated that the UN works with governments at progressively infiltrating and shutting down all such activities. Its partnership with states, global actors, civil society groups and religious leaders supports attempts at tackling the multi-faceted nature of this scourge (Fleshman 2009: 9).

Because IOs operate at a systemic level, they have opportunity to set standards and norms for states. As concerns child-trafficking, interdependence characterises the relationship between states and the UN and between the UN and the global environment, because the UN is dependent on global norms for the definition of its role in combating this abuse. In turn it persuades states to change their policies, in line with international norms (Finnemore 1993: 566). Norm shifting, thus sets the scene in which to solve the causes of trafficking. The UN's research and advocacy aims to expose the fact that the root causes of trafficking are more pervasive than poverty, conflict, discrimination and injustice, as previously thought. It now includes the demand for cheap, and or unusual, sex as well as cheap or even free labour (Fleshman 2009:21). The increased need to change norms is evident due to the fact that criminalising trafficking is not as effective a measure as stifling demand for trafficked children.

Accurate information on child trafficking is however difficult to obtain and as a result, the exact number of victims trafficked is largely unknown (Fleshman 2009: 6). This problem is heightened by the fact that public servants and law makers alike are often reluctant to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem as it reflects negatively on their own societies and questions the efficacy of their institutions (IPU & UNICEF 2005: 3). As such the UN's role in child trafficking factors in the complexities it encounters and collaborates with local actors such as parliamentarians in addressing the problem.

A shift in the nature of conflict has mandated the alteration of the UN's involvement where children are concerned. More specifically, a marked reduction in inter-state wars and an increase in the occurrence and intensity of intra-state wars have provided the UN with new challenges to face, when protecting children (UNICEF 2009b: 4). Protecting children in conflict situations ensures a division of roles played by the UN, from addressing the immediate needs of children during conflict to meeting their long-term post-conflict needs (UNICEF 2005b: 7).

Violence has a substantial influence on children, by nature of them being the most vulnerable members of society. As such, the UN finds it essential to protect children from

the harmful effects of war and violent conflict in sustaining human development. It has therefore investigated the issue of children in violent conflict situations and seeks to familiarise itself with the child protection situations of each state, advocating for the alignment of national policy with the provisions of UN norms, and specifically with the CRC (UNICEF 2005b: 3). While this may be seen as an effective child protection mechanism, the corrosive effect this method of advocacy has on the sovereignty of states and their autonomy in policy-making is undeniable. This is especially so because the UN not only advocates for the alignment of national policies for children whose states are in conflict but also for general child protection and development.

The UN's role regarding children in intra-state conflict is dynamic in the sense that it moves from passive to active as the need and resources arise. In a situation where the state mechanism has collapsed, the UN often finds itself playing a more leading role than the state itself. On the other hand, it may be sidelined to a more supportive role in instances where the state bureaucracy has not completely collapsed, but needs assistance. Since the nature and result of armed conflict regions implies a weak state entity, the UN's partnership is shared between whatever may be left of state representatives, as well as parties to the conflict. The severity of the predicament children in conflict are faced with stems from the fact that war affects all aspects of a child's life and development (United Nations 2009: 1). This is exacerbated by instances of children being used as targets of war, being part of pre-meditated genocide and being sexually abused by combatants. As such, the development needs of children can not be met without the alleviation of the conflict.

An auxiliary dimension to the role of the UN is brought about by the composite problem of child soldiers, evident in conflict ridden and war torn regions. Child development involves the care and provision for children who were formerly armed combatants, and the UN makes it clear that its role in these situations is not to punish the children, in the same way that adults would be reprimanded for playing such a role. Instead, it acts to provide the necessary environment for rehabilitation. UNICEF actions in supporting the reintegration of former child soldiers is visible in Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Somalia and Sudan (UNICEF 2005d: 53). Its role in

this instance is not restricted to disarming children, removing them from their circumstances and reintegrating them back into the community, but also encompasses mediating with the necessary stake-holders in the conflict to ensure that priority is afforded to the rehabilitation of children (UNICEF 2009a: 412).

Norms that influence the UN's activities come to the forefront when children are mentioned in the sphere of armed conflict and the UN is able to influence states into cooperation in action against perpetrators of violence (Finnemore 1993: 594). Poverty in conflict-torn states has more pervasive consequences than it has in peaceful states and children are often permanently disabled or displaced (UNICEF 2000: 10). Therefore, the role of the UN in conflict regions is so broad, that it is difficult for it to achieve its stipulated objectives. The extensive effects of conflict on children during and after war can only be avoided if conflicts are prevented in the first place. This is because controlling the effects of war on children, whose needs differ from that of adults, is a tall order. The UN's mandate in protecting children therefore should be more comprehensive to include the issue of conflict prevention. Conflict prevention, however, has been a UN weakness for a number of reasons (that will not be explored in this dissertation) (Rubin & Jones 2007: 391).

The introduction of the threat of terrorism on the global agenda has the added implication that children are not only targets of attacks, but are also trained and used as attackers. As targets of war, the effect on children is catastrophic. As perpetrators in conflict, the impact of conflict is as dire: far-reaching and possibly immeasurable.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the UN's child development role was broadly evaluated in order to establish its historical role. Key events stand out in the journey of child development to the global agenda. In 1924 for instance, the *Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child* spearheaded the prioritisation of child rights and subsequent child-related global ventures. Another pivotal step has been the establishment of UNICEF, which reflects the

normative place of children in global politics. With the creation of UNICEF, broader children's issues were deemed important for inclusion on the global agenda. The gradual extension of the UN's mandate to the issue of development was also significant in that it heralded the beginning of a UN child development focus in the poorer regions of the world. The focus has since intensified with the bulk of UN child development activities shifted to the developing regions of the world.

The unanimous adoption of the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*, in 1959, which recognised the particular nature of child rights, confirmed that children were owners of rights at the global level. Its universal acceptance signified the UN's prominent role as actor in influencing the behaviour of states and in beginning to endorse the notion of child rights. With the UN's acknowledgement of the importance of education for children, children were no longer simply associated with emergency, nutritional and healthcare needs. This realisation paved the way for the inclusion of education as an inseparable element of child rights.

In 1989, UNICEF acted in setting up the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). This UN document served as the cornerstone for stipulating child needs on the global agenda in that it legally distinguished them from those of adults. In addition, the CRC highlighted the urgency of catapulting certain crucial issues relating to children, to the global developmental forum. Issues such as early childhood care, child protection, survival and development, child disabilities, gender equality, as well as youth engagement and development were brought to the fore. UNICEF has thus played a pervasive role in advocating adherence to child rights by standard-setting and compelling states to comply with international norms.

The *Jomtien World Summit for Children* in 1990 also stands out for bringing child-related matters to the global agenda by reminding states of the need to prioritise children — using children as harbingers of this message. Through the 2000 Millennium Summit, the UN again became the arena for the prioritisation of children. Its attendance by 189 heads of state and government showed increased prioritisation of children on the global agenda. Particularly, achieving universal primary education and reducing child mortality rates

were emphasised as indispensable aspects of human development. The MDGs are considered the most recent UN move in including children as key priorities in the international human security agenda and have since influenced the global framework for emphasis on child survival and development.

In the course of tracing the UN's historical role in the development of children, this chapter applied Archer's triad classification of the UN: as instrument, arena and actor. As an organisation of collective sovereign states, the degree to which the UN is used as instrument of its member states for child development depends on two aspects: the extent to which such interventions impact on individual sovereignty and the level of political traction to utilise the organisation accordingly. States' wielding power over the UN gives rise to their ability to utilise the IO as an instrument for the extension of their policy objectives. Because the bulk of UN child development issues projects are aimed at the developing world, the likelihood for use of UN organs for child development in these regions lies with the states, which have the ability to use the UN in this way. However, the use of the UN as an instrument for the development of children is influenced not only by the states that possess substantial influence over the organisation, but also by the political resolve to commit aid and resources towards the development of children in the developing world.

As arena, the UN provides a foundation for states to build a commitment to advancing an agenda on children (Seymour 2009). In fulfilling this role, the UN convenes the necessary actors for cooperation towards averting child trafficking, child poverty, child abuse, or any other child-related abuse. It provides a platform for states and INGOs to collaborate in their advocacy and the strengthening of partnerships for achieving child developmental objectives. The UN's role morphs into that of an actor when it then partners with the same actors, in efforts geared towards the same objectives.

As actor, the UN's role towards child development incorporates macroeconomic policies of governments and makes a case for the inclusion of children in poverty reduction initiatives orchestrated by government. This illustrates the advisory component of its role as actor. The UN highlights the role of education in child development and exposes the



inhibitive relationship between education and child labour. More so, the UN advocates for the rights of the girl child through efforts to close the gender gap in education and to discourage child marriages and other harmful traditional practices. The UN's role in child mortality has experienced a pivotal augmentation, with the inclusion of this aspect as one of its MDGs. In protecting children from the dire effects of conflict, an efficient UN role is possible if conflict is prevented. The UN is thus faced with the daunting task of preventing conflict for the sustainable development of children (UNICEF 2005b: 3).

However, the UN's role towards child development broadens to include combating child trafficking and prostitution, where it plays a paradoxical role, due to the fact that although it may advise governments and assist when requested to, it has no authority over matters canonically considered intra-state. Its influence in re-aligning national policies to UN norms is more reliant on the voluntary shift of policy than on its authority over states. This challenge also exists amid its role in efforts to solve problems such as child poverty and child education. This brings in another component of its role in furthering child interests; namely its restrictions.

The UN may achieve the objective of child development, only if a given government does not object to its approach. Due to the fact that a conflict with the political interests of states could jeopardise the UN's endeavours in advancing child development, critics have argued that the UN's position as an instrument of states will always constrain its ability to play a constructive child development role. As an element in child development, child rights are further argued to be achievable purely on the basis of an abandonment of inter-state approaches. A people-centric approach is favoured, due to the interferences the state has on the implementation of objectives towards the realisation of child rights (An-Na'im 1999: 216).

The role of the UN as actor in child development affairs is so broad, that it is spread thinly in its duties towards children. As instrument, the UN has a limited role, due to the fact that this aspect of its role is heavily dependent on its member states. As arena, the UN's duties are quantifiable in that it serves as the forum for a myriad of child-development cooperatives. The greater part of its role, however, constitutes its actions

towards developing children. The UN's wide mandate not only reveals the prominence accorded to child development, but broad enough parameters to limit its role as instrument to a nominal one. Based on its role in child development, the UN serves as a focal point for global child development concerns, and it offers a vast platform for debate. It doubles as a network for developing and sharing universal norms and standards, which are embodied by its becoming a vehicle for administering humanitarian assistance around the world (Krasno 2004:3).

The hurdles faced by the UN in playing its development role regarding children are exacerbated by the considerable measure of antagonism it encounters as an entity, whose leadership does not accurately represent the realities of global relations (Schechter 1999: 12). (The visible absence of developing states among the permanent members of the Security Council, for example, projects an imperialist image to the developing world) In the late 1980s this hurdle was surmounted with the invitation of non-western States to the drawing table during the drafting of the CRC, as a direct result of the accusation that the document was being influenced by the Western bias from the working group that comprised of representatives from industrialised states (Miljeteig-Olssen 1990: 151). Unfortunately, this has been the exception rather than the rule of UN child-development activities.

While children may not have originally constituted a priority focus of UN operations, the development of the 'child' has been incorporated formally into the UN mandate. The next chapter applies the UN's role in child development to the specific goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among West African children.

## Chapter 4

### THE UNITED NATIONS' ROLE IN ERADICATING EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER AMONG CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

*“Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.”* (UNICEF 2005d: 18)

Extreme poverty and hunger constitute twin trajectories toward individual and national underdevelopment. Their preponderance potentially traps people and states, blighting the dignity of humans, and eventually the *de facto* sovereignty of states. Over and above the short-term implications on their well-being, poverty actually cripples the physical development of children (UNICEF 2002b: 3). In turn, the disadvantage placed on children as a result of poverty cripples the development of a nation's future. While the impact of poverty on adults is dire and far reaching, poverty's impact on children is potentially fatal and lifelong. Its effects spread to all aspects of the child's life, affecting the physical as well as psychological domain. The impact of poverty on children is so extensive that even a short exposure could have long-term developmental effects (UNICEF 2006a: 3). Poverty's cyclical, intergenerational capability implies the importance of its prioritisation and provides impetus to focus on the child. (UNICEF 2000:1).

Evidence reveals that while poverty is felt among children in various parts of the world, its prevalence among sub-Saharan African children is greater than in any other part of the

world, including other parts of the developing world (UNICEF 2005c: 4). Moreover, poverty on the African continent is categorically different from that in other parts of the world, due the enormous scale on which it exists and the dynamics that compound its effects.

Having noted that Africa has the poorest children in the world, within the continent the poorest region is its Western part. With the largest number of nations from any region on the list of the LDCs of UNDP's HDI ranking, West Africa evidently faces immense developmental challenges. The bleak picture is further darkened by the fact that thirteen out of the fifteen countries geographically located in the area are ranked under the Low Human Development category (UNDP 2009a: 201). Coupled with the fact that it is a region riddled with political instability, ethnic animosity and climatic uncertainties (UNDP 2004:14), its candidacy for underdevelopment is inarguable, and the implication for the region's children is daunting. Children in the region suffer severely from preventable illnesses, are casualties of conflict, sold into trafficking and are products of impoverished societies (Behrendt 2008). What role, if any, does the UN play amid this?

The roles of the UN have previously been established as those of instrument, arena and actor. With children bearing the brunt of a nation's poverty, while at the same time being the future of the nation, how can the UN's response to a region as disadvantaged as West Africa be analysed in terms of its triad roles? The scourge of extreme poverty and hunger among children in West Africa is the focus of this chapter, which will assess how these problems impede human development and the possibility of attaining the region's developmental objectives. The aim of this chapter is to capture how the UN's attempts at reaching its relevant primary MDG among West Africa's children, particularly since 2000, support its role as IO. It also identifies the variables that influence the achievement of this goal.

The chapter will commence with a conceptualisation of key terms, which will be followed by an evaluation of the poverty situation in West Africa and specifically among its children. A perspective such as this is important in spelling out the nature of the UN's

challenges in the region. Thereafter, the UN's roles as instrument, arena and actor, in attaining its first MDG as concerns West African children, will be assessed.

## **4.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY TERMS**

A definition of the key terms to be used is necessary to clarify pertinent terminology. 'Poverty' is a term that is used extensively, but because of the variation between the effects of poverty on children and that of adults, the further elucidation of the term 'child poverty' in this study becomes necessary. Also, demarcation within the term 'poverty' of 'extreme poverty' requires some attention. A last salient term to be discussed is that of 'hunger', since it is extensively associated with poverty.

At this stage it is noteworthy to add that the eradication of poverty among children is only achievable in conjunction with that of their parents, families and even communities. This is due to the fact that children, more often than not, depend on others for survival. Poverty alleviation cannot, therefore, be achieved in alienation from their families or communities.

### **4.2.1 POVERTY**

The essential term employed in this analysis, is 'poverty'. Scholars in the past have defined poverty as a lack of income. However, contemporary development discourses, which the UNDP supports, argue for an extension of this term, in favour of a multi-faceted definition, which takes cognisance of the broader rather than simply material needs of the individual. Poverty encompasses aspects of deprivation to the extent that the capabilities of an individual, whether economic, social or political, are hampered. To this end, the term can be defined, according to Haughton and Khandker (2009: 2) as '*pronounced deprivation in wellbeing*'. Wellbeing, for the purpose of conceptual clarity, is equal to the command over essential resources. These resources entail nutrition, basic health care, sanitation, shelter and education. Although the above definition is linked to

the income perspective of poverty, it extends beyond that to include access to elements which are essential to the functioning of the individual and to the maximisation of the capability of the individual (Sen 1999:20). The distinctive element of these deficiencies is their snowballing effect — hunger, disease, and illiteracy — each of them intensifying the rest to perpetuate a cycle of abject poverty (Despouy 1996).

In terms of poverty that is specific to children, UNICEF (2005d: 18) notes that

*“Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.”*

The importance of this definition is in the fact that, more often than not, children do not earn a living and poverty that affects them cannot be based simply on the generic minimum living standard, gauged as “living on less than one dollar a day”. Child survival and protection, child health, education, nutrition and shelter are considerations that are as, if not more, crucial in the establishment of conditions of poverty (White, Leavy & Masters 2003:381).

When child poverty is identified as “extreme”, it introduces an even greater imperative for intervention. Extreme poverty is multifaceted in the sense that although low income is a common derivative, the latter is influenced by vulnerability to disease, as in the case of HIV/AIDS. Exclusion from education, chronic hunger, malnourishment, inaccessibility to essential facilities such as clean water and sanitation, as well as environmental degradation, threatens lives (Doek 2009: 18). Extreme poverty is therefore the most desperate state of poverty, and is used interchangeably with terms such as chronic, acute and absolute poverty. It connotes the presence of severe, prolonged poverty, the resultant deterioration of the fundamental rights of an individual and the unlikelihood of assuming basic responsibilities (Despouy 1996).

#### **4.2.2 HUNGER**

Extreme poverty and hunger are inextricably linked with the propensity for hunger to exist amid extreme poverty. The definition of hunger should be set against the background of the recognition that groups of people have varied nutritional needs (Brown University Faculty 1990: 292). Based on this, while the availability of a certain amount and quality of food may lead to the sustenance of one individual, it may be inadequate for another. It would therefore be inaccurate to describe hunger as simply the absence of food.

Against this backdrop, hunger is commonly defined as an ‘uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food; the recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food’ (Olson & Holben 2002: 1841). Holben (2010) quotes Action Against Hunger, a global humanitarian organisation, in saying that definitions of hunger are potentially subjective. According to him, this is due to the possibility of one being hungry while being well fed and the converse possibility of a malnourished individual feeling no hunger. For this reason, it becomes necessary to introduce a more objective definition, which takes into account the basic caloric needs of an individual. In this regard, hunger exists when the caloric intake is below the minimum prescribed by the World Food Programme (WFP), which is 2000 kcal/day. This definition is most suitable and will therefore be used to indicate hunger.

#### **4.3 OVERVIEW OF EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER AMONG CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA**

Despite the abundance of oil, minerals and other lucrative natural resources, West Africa is faced with a plethora of development dilemmas, many of which were inherited from colonialism and have continued, in some areas worsened, since independence. Like various other regions in Africa, weak, porous borders characterise the West African region, making problems spill over borders with ease and transforming state problems into regional ills.

An overwhelming majority of the states in the Western region of Africa have experienced war and ethnic dissension since their independence. Sierra Leone's civil war from 1991-2002 destabilised the entire region. Although having witnessed some improvement under its post-conflict leadership, the state remains fragile due to the combined effect of the clash between political parties and a pervasive frustration with the dawdling rate at which political reforms are taking place (International Crisis Group 2009b). Sierra Leone, like many other West African states, lacks the capacity to overcome the political and developmental complications brought upon by political frays.

The volatile political climate under the rule of Liberia's despotic former leader, Charles Taylor, and the two civil wars it experienced from 1989 to 2003, rendered the region politically cataclysmic. Internecine conflict brought with it death, destruction, human rights violations and poverty. Nigeria's historical preponderance to oppressive military rule and intermittent ethnic tensions — primarily stemming from the grievances between the cultural groups based in the North and South and religious differences between the Christians and Muslims in the North — plunges that country into regular trouble. The scope of Nigeria's political problems is complicated by the activities of militants in the oil-buoyant Niger-Delta (Reno 2009: 51). Côte d'Ivoire's spell of peace was broken in 2002, when a two-year civil war broke out. Fuelled by its proximity to troubled Liberia, the area is no stranger to political quandary (Kaplan 2006: 3& 4). The 2011 presidential stand-off in Côte d'Ivoire has once again drawn attention to the fragility of political order in the region.

The region's fragility was further exacerbated by the events in Guinea, following the death of its military dictator in 2008. This paved the way for a military takeover and undermined the possibility of democratic elections or a turn towards civilian rule, tragically demonstrated in September 2009, by the killing of 150 participants of a peaceful demonstration (International Crisis Group 2009a). Political instability in Guinea has ramifications for the children of that state, due to the internal displacements caused by its being on the brink of conflict (WFP 2010a). In the Casamance region of Senegal, low intensity conflict has sporadically affected Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea Bissau for over a decade (Atuobi 2007: 2). Displacement of more than 100 000 people in the



Senegalese state caused the loss of livelihoods, malnutrition and poverty. Guinea-Bissau additionally reveals the effect of political violence on peace and stability, in the sense that the assassination of the chief of military staff on 1 March 2009, followed the next day by that of the president, has hampered the propensity for the rule of law to thrive in that state (International Crisis Group 2009c). The effects of Guinea Bissau's political crisis on children are similar to that of Guinea. The security of children in a state where the rule of law has diminished is not guaranteed.

Political trouble has also plagued Niger since its independence in 1960. Austere military rule, combined with repeated insurgencies in the uranium rich country, offer some explanation as to the prolonged absence of stability Niger has experienced. The country's most recent hope for political stability — President Tanja — defied expectations by his 2009 amendment of the constitution in favour of another term in office. This is despite Niger's tendency for upheavals and political violence (BBC News 2009). Fighting between factions of Tuareg nomads and the military in Niger and Mali's northern regions has ensured residual instability in the country (IRIN NEWS 2010a). The Gambia and Burkina Faso, although peaceful to a large extent, remain governed under the heavy hand of dictatorship, and are impacted by the migration of displaced people in the region.

Political instability in West Africa has had severe effects on the region's children. High child mortality rates throughout the region are partly a consequence of conflict and the acute malnutrition and hunger that ensues as a result (IRIN NEWS 2008). Infant and child mortality rates soar in comparison to those from other regions of the world, with three out of the top five states with high child mortality rates being from West Africa (United Nations 2009: 1). These high mortality rates are due to the combined effects of maternal illiteracy, poor healthcare amenities and an increased child propensity to malnutrition and avertable diseases, all of which are worsened when a society is tormented by conflict.

Despite the immediate death caused by conflict, an array of physical and psychological conditions is associated with its prevalence. Conflict and post-conflict political woes undermine all aspects of children's economic and social development (UNICEF 2005a:

1). More so, conflicts in all cases mentioned have led to the phenomenon of children's displacement and separation from family. The result is an increased susceptibility to the symptoms of the dilapidated society. One of the most instantaneous effects of displacement on children is the blow to health and nutrition, which is additionally responsible for the heightened prevalence of children living in extreme poverty and hunger. Moreover, conflicts (most notably in Sierra Leone and Liberia) have given rise to the opportunity for children to simultaneously assume the roles of victims and perpetrators of violence, with devastating long-term effect on the social fabric of their societies (Mac-Ikemenjima 2008 :147).

With the proliferation of conflict in any region comes the propensity for sexual abuse and other gendered-based violence, particularly against girls. This trend is visible in Sierra Leone and Liberia, with adolescent girls being especially prone to rape, recruitment, trafficking, complications from pregnancies and HIV/AIDs. The long-term trauma caused to such children impedes their full development and gives rise to stigmatisation. Fighting furthermore thwarts attempts to develop the regions where children live in poverty with their families, as basic government facilities cannot function amid conflict (IRIN NEWS 2010a).

In some West African states, in the absence of full scale war, corruption is rife. Nigeria leads the way in its notoriety, due to the depth and prevalence of corruption in society. According to Atuobi (2007: 12), Côte d'Ivoire experiences corruption on a scale second only to Nigeria in the region and Ghana, Senegal and Burkina Faso are the only states with relatively lower levels of corruption. Ingrained corruption jeopardises even the most basic political processes in a country, which in turn gives rise to widespread dissatisfaction and hinders democracy, good governance and the rule of law. Moreover, a state's capability to provide public goods, such as education, health and security is impeded by its corruption (Atuobi 2007: 12). This, in turn, affects its socioeconomic delivery to children. Access to safe water for more than half of the population of Benin, for example, is allegedly hindered by corrupt government officials, who according to IRIN News (2009) mismanage aid provided by the Japanese government for the provision of clean water. The building of safe water sources to cater for the population is

impeded by the reservation of water projects for contractors who, with government partnership, over-inflate production costs. The result is the exorbitant increase of water connection costs and the inability of people to afford water.

An increased susceptibility to water-borne illnesses is the result of children drinking unsafe water. This is attributable in many cases not only to corrupt government officials in different states of the region, but also to governments' incapacity to provide fundamental services, such as water supply. The absence of safe water and basic sanitation for children inherently impedes their development, by their exposure to infectious diseases and their inability to absorb nutrients (UNICEF 2007b: 30). Diarrhoea, a water-borne illness and the leading cause of child mortality in the 1990s, is one of the largely preventable diseases that children die from in West Africa (UNICEF 2005d: 17). The health situation facing the region's children is worsened by the unavailability of vaccination to a vast majority, caused by widespread poverty. The result is immunization-preventable illnesses leading to deaths among children in the region (UNICEF 2006b: 20). An added complication arises with the dismal management of health systems in the region. Lack of resources is a leading factor responsible for this. However poor management of health systems remains a problem in Nigeria, a country with the economic clout to address its child developmental crises (IRIN NEWS 2008). Health has long been established as a fundamental element of socioeconomic development, therefore concerted efforts to improve the health of a community are geared towards socioeconomic advancement (Rahman 2006). The health crisis in all its dimensions encumbers the eradication of extreme poverty. It is no wonder then that West African states are beleaguered by acute underdevelopment.

The socioeconomic dimensions of West Africa's crises are comparable to those of the region's political woes. The relationship is such that socio-economic inadequacies invariably lead to political conflict and *vice versa*. States' inability to cope with socioeconomic pressures and shocks foments violence and humanitarian crises, which in turn perpetuate economic travails (WHO 2002: 1). States' poor use of resources and the resultant decay of basic infrastructure in the majority of states in the region, add to the growing problem of underdevelopment. An added dimension is the fact that the

disreputable political situations described in West African states have undermined regional economic development. Investment in states is impeded by unreliable political environments, and lack of infrastructure in turn lowers the probability of foreign direct investment (FDI) (Oduro & Aryee 2003: 20). The lack of FDI in the region does nothing to address the dearth of jobs for a majority of the region's populace.

With most states' economies heavily reliant on primary products and the unequal trade policies that govern the international trading system, some analysts attribute West Africa's socioeconomic quagmire to the legacy of colonialism and economic imperialism (Obadina 2008b). This notwithstanding, in the relatively politically stable states of the region, part of the explanation for the region's economic backwardness may be found in poor macroeconomic management. Socioeconomic problems facing states are similar throughout the region.

Socioeconomic woes of the region perpetuate the prevalence of internal and external child trafficking across West African countries. This phenomenon is inextricably linked to conflict and poverty — two overarching problems in West Africa, with child labour being fuelled by the availability of both factors (Olateru-Olagbegi 2004). Countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone have experienced child labour in the form of child soldiers, among other forms of labour, such as in the mining sector. In other countries such as Mali and Ghana, the experience of child labour is mostly passive, in the form of street children, begging for survival (Bøås & Hatløy 2008: 7-14). Child labour is also common in Benin, where UNICEF asserts that at least 39 per cent of children are labourers (EStandards Forum 2009).

Table IV below gives a statistical indication of the socio-economic dimension of West Africa's crisis.

**Table III Economic situation of West Africa**

| Country              | GDP per capita average annual growth rate (%), 1990–2008 | % of population below int. poverty line of US\$ 1.25 per day 1990-2008 | % of central govt. expenditure (1998-2007*) allocated to: health | % of central govt. expenditure (1998-2007*) allocated to: defence | ODA inflow in millions US\$, 2007 |
|----------------------|--|--|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Benin</b>         | 1.2  | 47   | 6x   | 17x   | 470                               |
| <b>Burkina Faso</b>  | 2.5  | 57   | 7x   | 14x   | 930                               |
| <b>Cape Verde</b>    | 3.8  | 21   | -  | -   | 163                               |
| <b>Côte d'Ivoire</b> | -1   | 23   | 4x   | 4x  | 165                               |
| <b>The Gambia</b>    | 0.4  | 34   | 7x   | 4x  | 72                                |
| <b>Ghana</b>         | 2.1  | 30   | 7x   | 5x  | 1151                              |
| <b>Guinea</b>        | 1.3  | 70   | 3x   | 29x   | 224                               |
| <b>Guinea Bissau</b> | -2.6   | 49   | 1x   | 4x  | 123                               |
| <b>Liberia</b>       | 1.8  | 84   | 5x   | 9x  | 696                               |
| <b>Mali</b>          | 2.2  | 51   | 2x   | 8x  | 1017                              |
| <b>Niger</b>         | -0.4   | 66   | -  | -   | 542                               |
| <b>Nigeria</b>       | 1.4  | 64   | 1x   | 3x  | 2042                              |
| <b>Senegal</b>       | 1.1  | 34   | 3  | 7   | 843                               |
| <b>Sierra Leone</b>  | 0.6  | 53   | 10x  | 10x   | 535                               |
| <b>Togo</b>          | 0  | 39   | 5x   | 11x   | -                                 |

Source: UNICEF 2009g

\* Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading

x Data refer to years or periods other than those specified in the column heading, differ from the standard definition or refer to only part of a country. Such data are not included in the calculation of regional and global averages

- No data available

The prioritisation of defence spending over child-related concerns, such as health, in most states in the region, (with the exception of Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone) arguably signifies insufficient political will towards prioritising child development. It furthermore offers a partial explanation for the high mortality rates in the region. The absence of data for some states and the dark figures imply that the scope of the problem is probably understated.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS as a socioeconomic predicament affects the development of West Africa's children through illnesses in affected children, inadequate nutrition and poor health care. The restriction of livelihoods resulting from the collapse of the family and loss of breadwinners plunges children into a situation of impoverishment. In West Africa, the stigma attached to the pandemic also means the social exclusion of children from social institutions and the denial of the right to education, healthcare and protection (Richter & Rama 2006: 12). While the level of HIV/AIDS in West Africa is comparably lower than that of Southern Africa, the mere existence of the pandemic in poverty-stricken areas of West Africa and the danger of mother-to-child transmission through breastfeeding mean that access to food and nutrition for babies is severely jeopardised. Additionally, the large scale absence of paediatric HIV/AIDS treatment reduces chances of survival, ensuring that child mortality rates remain on the rise.

Despite the political and economic causes of extreme poverty and hunger in West Africa, poverty is now cyclically linked to environmental degradation as both origin and effect (Rahman 2006). Many countries in the region face crises that perpetuate the spread and intensity of poverty. Anthropogenic and geologically-induced environmental damage in the West African region is a result of the combination of conflict and natural processes in the region. One of the chief geological challenges of the region is long periods of sparse rainfall, which is insufficient for the preponderance of agriculture and livestock (Gordon 1998). While this is independently a controllable problem, the combined effect of predominantly rain-fed agriculture in the region creates the challenge of food insecurity (OFEDI & GRAIN 2009:1). Food price hikes due to large scale unavailability threatens the survival of children living in extreme poverty. This aggravates the already prevalent

developmental issues and increases the severity of hunger among adults, but even more inimically among children.

Of the various states in the region, Niger is most prone to drought. Its poor rainfall distresses crop and livestock to the extent that the country faces the challenge of feeding its population. Droughts and chronic locust infestation are driving forces behind the food insecurity, which is the order of the day in Niger (WFP 2010c). Togo, like Niger, suffers from serious food insecurity. However, unlike Niger, the food insecurity can be linked to floods in the northern and southern regions of the country. Northern Togo's reliance on food harvests exacerbates the food insecurity by crippling the availability of food and income (WFP 2010b). Despite being the only Medium Income Country (MIC) in West Africa, Cape Verde is still considered as a food deficient country due to its low food production and lack of natural resources. Periodic droughts in the country restrict the ability for agriculture to thrive, thus impacting the income from this sector of the economy (WFP 2010e).

Soil erosion, desertification and deforestation of various degrees are pervasive, interconnected features of the West African environmental situation. They cumulatively impact on extreme poverty by causing a dearth of essential natural resources for daily sustenance. The lack of resources such as food, water and firewood constitutes a direct onslaught on the livelihood of families in areas affected and prevents any sustainable development from taking root. The Sahel region of West Africa is impacted much more by the combined effect of these paucities than other parts of the region; therefore countries such as Senegal, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso experience the debilitating effects of these environmental woes, deepening the iron grip that poverty already has in most areas and thrusting the children of these societies firmly into the entrenched and extreme poverty and hunger. Burkina Faso's plague of poor climatic conditions, heightened by rapid desertification, increasingly results in a daily struggle to get food (Nzirorera 2009). This condition was worsened by flooding in September 2009, which ravaged the lives and livelihoods of communities in the West African country. The resultant displacement that occurred, meant homelessness for at least 130 000 (UNICEF

2009d). In The Gambia, poor hygiene and environmental practices increase the vulnerability of children to disease and entrenched poverty (Oduro & Aryee 2003: 21).

Togo and Ghana's experiences with flooding demonstrate the role played by climate in extreme poverty. In 2008, the loss of cultivation and lives in the two countries to flooding cemented the poverty experienced by children already living in poverty and plunged more into the predicament (OFEDI & GRAIN 2009: 1). Poverty exacerbation is the result of this ordeal, as against the backdrop of the food and financial crisis, communities are now bereft of shelter, food, sanitation and other essentials. UNICEF's role amid this is the provision of the most immediate needs of women and children in the region (UNICEF 2009d). These interventions are crucial, as children in poor households are increasingly faced with the cumulative effects of food shortage, as a result of rising food and fuel prices and the global fiscal downturn. Susceptibility to poor feeding practices and inadequate care, two features of extremely poor households, put children at a grave developmental disadvantage. In The Gambia, this is largely the case in its impoverished communities (Oduro & Aryee 2003: 21).

Years of conflict in the West African region have also damaged the grazing lands of much of West Africa, with dire consequences, as agriculture is a dominant source of livelihood in the region (IPACC 2007). This makes the provision of even staple foods for consumption difficult and further heightens the pervasiveness of hunger and malnutrition. In Niger, for example, recurrent malnutrition is a principal cause of child deaths (IRIN NEWS 2010b).

#### **4.4 THE UNITED NATIONS' TRIADIC ROLE IN ERADICATING EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER IN WEST AFRICA**

##### **4.4.1 THE UNITED NATIONS AS INSTRUMENT**

Archer (1992: 131) observes that the UN is utilised as instrument of actors in the global arena. In the case of the first MDG and the plight of West African children, the UN's member states made use of the organisation as the instrument of communication, but not



essentially as an instrument to address extreme poverty and hunger in West African children. The UN was instead used to reflect the renewed commitment of all states to the fight against world poverty. This was done in the General Assembly in September 2000 (UNGA 2000). Its adoption of the UNMDGS acknowledges the vulnerability of all UN member states to transnational woes such as disease, poverty and illiteracy (Picco 2003). In theory, the September 2000 declaration also signified a commitment by UN members to the right to human development (UNGA 2000).

In practice, however, members' use of the organisation differs slightly. Officer (1994: 417) purports that the member states strategically make use of the UN's organs to achieve certain objectives, and these organs then appear to function effectively but not to achieve all objectives. This is done in order to maintain the primacy of states within global politics to deliver maximum public goods such as economic development, humanitarian assistance and peace and security. Realists would argue in favour of this, as it supports the view that states remain the dominant actors in global politics and IOs serve the will of states. Otherwise the transfer of allegiance from states to the UN, on account of its ability to address global problems that the organisation is entrusted with, would imply global governance. As Officer argues, this situation is not in states' interest to accept. With heavy reliance on member states and their governments for funds, policy setting and programme execution, the UN's flexibility to direct additional resources or attention to one developmental dimension is largely curtailed (Dijkzeul 1997: 166). As a result, even if the UN wanted to exert a concerted effort towards poverty eradication in a particular area of the world, it would be unable to.

While the UN serves as an instrument for the more developed states that dominate the global economy, the political nature of the UN does not rule out the possibility of a measure of control of the UN machinery by less developed states. This holds true especially within the UN General Assembly, where states hold equal voting power, regardless of their relative size or power. Kirkpatrick (1984: 363) notes various power blocs within the UN body, which channel power and ultimately influence decisions made in the General Assembly and even the Security Council. Some blocs are of a geographic nature and by reason of numbers can control the dynamics within the UN if they possess

common interests. The more heterogeneous the bloc is, the less cohesion it will have and the less likelihood to exert ample influence in the use of the UN body as an instrument in the achievement of certain objectives. He compares the African bloc to that of Latin America within the UN and concludes on the ability for Africans to achieve better results than Latin Americans due to the former's cohesiveness. Africa's potential influence is enlarged by the fact that its 53 states hold more than a quarter of the UN's membership — more than any other geographic region of the world. African solidarity within the UN has not, however, translated into great advancements in the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger among West Africa's children or any other part of the continent thus far. Africa's joint utilisation of the UN as instrument is also hampered by the fact that Africa has been unable to agree on which African states should represent the continent as permanent members of a restructured Security Council (Maxwell 2005: 420). The fact that Africa has no permanent UN Security Council seat has a bearing on the UN's ability to prioritise Africa and for African states to use the UN as an instrument in its favour (Ikokwu 2009).

Felice (1999: 565) argues that the UN's role as instrument used by states should be interpreted more broadly; namely that the governing elite within states make use of its qualities to achieve their own objectives. This dimension reinterprets Clive Archer's role attributed to IOs as instruments of states (Archer 1992: 135), as it makes the distinction that it is in fact the governing elite within states that monopolise the use of IOs, instead of the entire populace. The argument proves true to the case of West African states in the goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger among all groups of its citizenry, including children, in that no children from the poor families of the states in the region were represented during the drafting of the MDGs. Evidence of this comes from Fakuda-Parr & Hulme (2009: 13 & 18), who allude to a compactly managed drafting process, without input from persons outside the circles of bureaucracy and governance. The MDG project therefore may seem noble at first glance, however its feasibility to effectively achieve poverty eradication may be questioned on the grounds that it could be seen either as agreed-upon appendages of the foreign policy of the ruling elites in developed states, or as adjuncts of the domestic policy of ruling elites in developing states.

At the same time, however, the UN is a mechanism that can work in states' favour. Its usefulness lies in the legitimacy it gives states to act towards the achievement of goals, whether individual or collective. Participation in the UN also gives states, especially the more prominent ones, the authority to make decisions affecting other states — authority they would not have in the absence of participation at the global level. This legitimacy is evident with the collective action of states towards the MDGs, which mandate that all states make use of the UN in the implementation of the MDGs (Picco 2003).

#### **4.4.2 THE UNITED NATIONS AS ARENA**

With the Millennium Summit of 2000, the UN served as the arena within which the world had the opportunity to cooperate in the eradication of poverty among West Africa's children and the world at large. It served as a forum in which to legally bind West African and other states to commit to their development and more importantly, the development of their children. Developed states make use of the UN's legality to obligate developing nations to commit to self-development through the goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (Nderitu 2009: 84). Since the goals were agreed upon (with endorsement from all 189 member states at the time), the UN Millennium Declaration — resolution 55/2 — was passed in 2000 (UNGA 2000). With this, the UN secretariat and global offices became the fora for the largest development cooperative in history.

In terms of functioning as an arena, UN agencies such as the WHO, UNICEF, and the World Bank facilitated cooperation towards the goal of health in Africa by the formation of a dedicated forum for the harmonisation of efforts by developing states and development agencies. The forum, known as the Harmonisation for Health in Africa (HHA) provides the arena for discussions on resources, global health partnerships and the effectiveness of aid. It also fills the role of coordinator for efforts from international health agencies and other stakeholders (UNICEF 2008a: 26). Through the forum, there is coordination in cooperating with governments in addressing health issues; paying particular attention to starvation, malnutrition, and preventable diseases and towards strengthening health service delivery specifically to the vulnerable and those living in abject poverty. This approach recognises the inseparable link between health, extreme

poverty and hunger and synchronises the three aspects in providing access to health for the extremely poor.

With the recognition that an aspect of extreme poverty is the exclusion of societal segments — such as women and refugees — from civil, developmental and democratic processes, the UN offers a stage for discussions pertaining to the strengthening of the capacity of local governments and developmental actors to incorporate these excluded segments into national development strategies (UNHCR 2010). The post-conflict nature of large swathes of West Africa mandates that refugees are systematically integrated by means of developmental “road maps”, to provide sustainable development for both the refugees and the societies in which they live.

UNICEF addresses the exclusion of women from development and growth by becoming an arena for the exposure of the gendered nature of extreme poverty. Its policy dialogues with post-conflict states in West Africa assist in the facilitation of efforts geared towards the integration of women in the fight against poverty (UNICEF 2005a: 3). Through this forum, the UN presents the opportunity for extreme poverty and hunger in children to be discussed. This is done with emphasis on their mothers, since the needs of women and their children can rarely be separated. Moreover, the UN and its specialised agencies provide support for efforts already geared towards democratic governance by providing the arena for dialogue and policy advice. This is an important point to note, especially since the UN’s strategy towards the development of West African children does not actively address the issues of participation and democracy, which indirectly affect the lives of children living in poverty. The UN’s role as arena for the development of children however also assists in the provision of a yardstick with which to gauge progress in human development in West Africa (Fakuda-Parr 2004: 396). Efforts such as these assist in the fight against extreme poverty and hunger among children by allowing for the inclusion of women and children’s rights in developmental strategies. The forum created by the UN aids in creating a politically conducive atmosphere for economic growth nationally and regionally in a region afflicted by the political woes discussed earlier. The UN’s role as an arena for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is one that is best

played if it continues to facilitate discussions on issues that assist in the achievement of the first MDG in West Africa's children.

#### **4.4.3 THE UNITED NATIONS AS ACTOR**

In the forefront of the UN's role as actor is its expression of universal ideals, common objectives and its resultant ability to institutionalise and legitimate certain international norms. As part of its norm-setting role, it persuades states and other actors to align themselves with global standards and to exact behaviour in agreement with those principles. Acting in direct contradiction to the normative scope portrayed by the UN reflects badly on the global actor concerned. As such, this role is sometimes conceived as hegemonic in nature: the UN co-opts core states, periphery states, the world economy, as well as individuals (Lavelle 2001: 29) to follow what it perceives as fundamental to the global agenda. In setting the MDG of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in children, the UN openly expresses to the periphery states of West Africa the value of putting children at the heart of West African states' development policy frameworks.

The UN's role as actor includes its attempts to propel political will in much of the West African region, towards child friendly policies and highlighting the scourge of children in extreme poverty. However, results have been uneven, with some states maintaining their low prioritisation of children (African Child Policy Forum 2008: 6). The child-friendliness of African governments — assessed in terms of child legal and policy frameworks, budgetary allocations to basic children's needs and child participation in discussions on their wellbeing — is a gauge of political commitment towards the prioritisation of children by their governments.

The normative role played by the UN further protrudes into the role of actor in the IO's engineering of the legal implications of the goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. It does this through legally binding states to view extreme poverty as an abuse against

human rights and to consequently commit to eliminating this abuse (Nderitu 2009: 84). The UN therefore motivates West African governments to be proactive role players in the fight against poverty, and pledges to offer support as the need arises (Horn 2009: 65). It coaches governments and other actors to mobilise for the achievement of the MDGs and gears them for action when their commitment to the goals appears to wane (UNGA 2010).

Monitoring forms part of the UN's duty in achieving its global objectives and is a distinct feature of its role as actor. Within the confines of this position it pools together the tasks of information gatherer, statistician and analyst of information and communicator thereof. Central to its action as monitor is the tendency to observe and paint the picture of the dilemma of extreme poverty and hunger in West Africa. This is done by the provision of data to governments, NGOs, donors and research organisations worldwide. Bearing in mind that accurate information concerning poverty in many parts of African and especially West African states is hard to obtain due to unreliable or out-dated figures, or the loss of records (Obadina 2008a), this aspect of the UN's role is crucial. Vital information pertaining to the predicament of West African children is contained in the UN information database. The support, for example, provided by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) through the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) proves crucial to the conduct of population censuses and the management of the issues affecting poverty eradication initiatives. At the same time, however, while monitoring is central to the assessment of the extent of poverty, it can be argued that too much attention and resources are paid by the UN to the proliferation of statistics, to the detriment of problem solving capabilities. Tracking and monitoring the progress of the MDGs therefore marginally side lines the UN's role as actor in the actualisation of the MDGs (UN ECOSOC ECA & AUC 2008: 27).

Advocacy related to the norms of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among West African children constitutes a major component of the UN's role as actor, and is dependent on the organisation's ability to effectively monitor the impediments to the development of West Africa's children. The MDG Africa Steering Group in partnership with the MDG Africa Working Group — both constituents of the UN — work towards

the holistic achievement of the MDGs in Africa. Their actions are evident on two main levels, which are the mobilisation of resources and the more general sustenance of international support for the MDGs in Africa (UN ECOSOC ECA & AUC 2008: 8). UN advocacy for the eradication of extreme poverty in West Africa is conducted by different key sub-actors within the UN system. The WFP acts in alleviating hunger among children in various states of the region. In The Gambia for example, it influences government at the executive level to support its Food for Education Programme in food-insecure communities of the country. Advocating for the needs of impoverished West African children also addresses the effects of refugee influx on food security. Its initiative to support communities hosting Senegalese refugees, for instance, is a case in point (WFP 2010d). As chief actor in UN developmental projects, the UNDP is another key sub-actor that advocates in favour of the poorest people with the least access to basic utilities such as water and sanitation. It promotes a more prominent role for the state and increased public investment for the wider delivery of essential services (UNDP 2010a).

Despite the legitimacy of the UN to promote good governance and to highlight its effects on the rights of children, its execution does not match the role and success of NGOs. The latter provide strong advocacy by forming avid social movements which go the extra mile to harass governments, when all else fails, for the purpose of advancing child interests (Breen 2003: 459).

Due to the prevalence of conflict in West Africa and its potential to erode development, the UN links its extreme poverty and hunger eradication initiatives to its core responses to children in humanitarian emergencies. The organisation's role as actor is demonstrated when it responds to the immediate needs of the children in conflict by rapidly assessing the situation and basing its actions towards children in these circumstances on these needs (UNICEF 2005a: 3). Apart from this, the UN primarily acts in the prevention of violence directed at children. In the case of abuse against children, it acts on their behalf by reporting severe, systematic abuse and exploitation. It also attempts to attend to the psychosocial needs of the child, once abuse has taken place (UNICEF 2005e: 11). Research shows that in Burkina Faso, for example, the institutional care provided for children orphaned and vulnerable, is not effective in meeting the psycho-emotional needs

of children (Sanou Turgeon-O'Brien, Ouedraogo et al 2008: 139). This is indicative of a need being fulfilled by the UN's role in child psychological development. Such a need could otherwise serve as an impediment to extreme poverty eradication, through the possible hindrance of holistic child development.

Attention to refugees, as derivatives of political hostilities has been included in the UN's responsibility towards child development. Through partnership, the UN plays a fundamental part towards refugees. The UNHCR reconciles the UN's general role in the development of children in West Africa, to that of children in conflict and post-conflict environments. As actor, the UNHCR recognises that the developmental needs of children in poverty without the condition of war fundamentally differ from those of children who have experienced war. This is evident in its operations involving children in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where despite the health, sanitation and nutrition needs of all children, the implication of displacement is also taken into account. Its role as actor towards West Africa's refugee children can be divided into separate components. As an entity that acknowledges the need to assist the refugee family in its entirety, the UNHCR's focus is on the systematic, immediate reintegration of the children's families into the community and the long-term sustainability of the families' livelihoods, to avert extreme poverty and augment independence. It supports local stakeholders to protect refugees from violence and all forms of exploitation. An integral part of the UNHCR's role as actor is its involvement with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The UN promotes partnership with ECOWAS as an ally in the solution to West Africa's refugee problem, due to the regional nature of the challenge presented by refugees (United Nations 2008c:225).

The UN thus approaches its role as actor in the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in West African children by partnering with other actors. Sustained investment in child development has been stipulated by the UN as being of paramount importance if its first MDG is to be achieved (UNICEF 2007b: 6). UNICEF, as the leading UN arm in the advancement of the child-related MDGs, acts on the one hand by providing funds and other resources for the achievement of child-related MDGs in the region and on the other hand by synchronising initiatives with other development actors for the eradication of



poverty (UNICEF 2005a: 3). With limited resources allocated to the fight against the poverty pandemic, UN joint ventures with NGOs and other stakeholders have been increased, so as to more effectively improve the situation of children living in poverty. For example the number of UN partnerships in Niger has increased and the organisation now links to 20 humanitarian NGOs, which ensure that the early warning food crisis systems yield rapid response from a coordinated grouping of humanitarian actors and avert the nutrition disaster experienced in 2005's food crisis (IRIN 2010d). Likewise, in The Gambia, the Child Protection Alliance is a UN partnership with government, religious and community leaders, the tourism industry and other actors involved in child protection, in launching broad mass media campaigns to create awareness around child prioritisation (UNICEF 2007b: 11).

Child trafficking has been established by the UN as an impediment to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in West Africa and, as such, efforts aimed at combating this scourge are indirectly geared towards extreme poverty eradication. This responsibility falls under the mandate of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the ILO, according to UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2002: 24), however UNICEF plays associate to these UN agencies. The UN holistically functions as activist in creating awareness around the dangers of trafficking and assists in a legislative capacity advising governments on techniques in combating trafficking. Education is key in addressing the endemic problem in the region, however since the next chapter addresses the UN's role in educating West Africa's children, the issue will not be discussed here. Nevertheless, in Togo for example, the UN partners with traditional chiefs and NGOs to address sensitive issues such as birth registration, girls' education, child marriage, child labour and trafficking. The partnership provides a pathway into the community for discussion and progressive debunking of harmful traditional practices (UNICEF 2007b: 11).

One of the UN's methods of advocacy in favour of children living in extreme poverty is by means of assessing the impact of privatisation and commercialisation on the availability of basic services and the exploration of options for the improvement of public services. Advocacy through the assessment of the effects of privatisation on service delivery is imperative in the realisation of public service delivery, especially against the

background of a 2015 due date. This is because material poverty exists amid poor sanitation and lack of access to nutrition, which directly increases the chances for child malnutrition, and impacts on a child's health and education (UNICEF 2006a: 4). Therefore, despite attempts by actors to combat child malnutrition, for example, it will remain a vicious cycle unless broader issues such as service accessibility are addressed. Child malnutrition cannot be combated unless the fight against children living in extreme poverty is won. Therefore, although food distribution by the UN may have an effect on child hunger and malnutrition by curtailing the children's immediate needs, a more extensive UN role as actor in the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is displayed in its focus on privatisation as a barrier to development. Efforts aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in children must be geared towards sustainable poverty eradication among their communities, for the effects to remain (IRIN NEWS 2010b).

The UN is the third largest multilateral donor, after the World Bank and the European Union; nevertheless individual development assistance provided by members of the UN, such as the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands overlaps multilateral aid provided under the umbrella of the UN (Baulch, 2006: 939). Bilateral aid thus exists alongside multilateral commitments and could explain the failure of UN member states to concomitantly honour UN financial commitments. From a foreign policy perspective, states arguably receive more strategic credit for their bilateral (and thus more visible and nationally branded) development aid than they would otherwise for collective "anonymous" aid as dispensed by an IO. The political nature of development aid, including bilateral aid, can therefore not be ignored when assessing the role of the UN in achieving poverty eradication, as bilateral aid flows impact on the donor behaviour of members within the multilateral organ. Moreover, the UN undoubtedly is affected by a shortage of dues from its members. For example, the advisory and budgetary committee of the General Assembly has expressed concern regarding the UN's ability to perform its duties maximally due to non-payment or late payment from its member states (UNGA 2007).

As the main source of financing for developmental projects, UN collective aid provides the basis for resources to be utilised. Consequently, its ability to harness aid from its

member states directly influences the developmental role it plays globally. The effectiveness of aid as a tool of child development has therefore been questioned by development scholars such as Sarcinelli (2004: 154). He observes that in addition to the failure of member states to honour aid commitments, further controversy surrounds the issue of aid, as some of the aid provided is not used for its intended purpose, namely assisting families living in poverty. A third base for controversy linked to aid is cited by Moyo (2009), who points out the tendency towards foreign aid dependence. Sustainable development, which is necessary for the eradication of extreme poverty, is unlikely without the empowerment of people and the economies from which they come. Development aid primarily focuses on the immediate needs of the poor, increasing the probability that financial assistance is frequently needed. The combination of these factors affects the UN's ability to act as an organisation in its own right, whether in the advancement of the first MDG in West Africa or in any other of its goals.

A feature of extremely impoverished societies in the world and especially in West Africa is a high incidence of child deaths. Child survival therefore demands a substantial portion of efforts towards eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. However, it was not included as a pivotal aspect of child development from the inception of the MDGs until a year before the end of UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy's term of office in 2005. According to Horton (2004: 2071), the four-year lapse in the inclusion of such an essential element of child development is allegedly the result of Bellamy's prolonged reluctance to address the issue of child survival, opting instead for a focus on the rights-based approach to children. Its eventual adoption was due to a 2003 inquiry, by Robert Black and colleagues, from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg's Department of International Health, into why 10 million children globally, continued to die. Consequently, the Child Survival Partnership, an initiative between WHO, the World Bank, the Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and UNICEF, was founded in 2004. Its creation denotes a UN shift in policy towards a focus on child survival and presented the opportunity for the organisation to again become an arena for the coordinated approach to responses aimed at the eradication of extreme impoverishment among children (Horton 2004: 2071).

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

The United Nations' role in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among West African children was discussed in this chapter against the background that the UN considers itself to play the various roles of a convener of nations, a contributor towards global objectives, and a propeller of collective international will and commitment to act in the achievement of development (Clark 2010).

Development is especially necessary in the West African region, which is ensnared by poverty, disease and hunger on a level second to none. These hardships affect all components of the region's societies and its effect on children is especially noteworthy, due to its crippling and multidimensional nature. Governmental and regional incapacity to tackle these issues mandates a global approach to the fight against poverty and hunger. As a central feature of the current global system, the UN plays its triad of roles, in addressing these malaises.

The UN's role as instrument in achieving poverty and hunger eradication in West Africa is one that involves the organisation being used as publicist of its member states' support for the twin goals of extreme poverty and hunger eradication. However as the organisation is not essentially used as an instrument in achieving the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in West Africa, it plays a minimal role in this regard.

The UN, however, was the primary arena for discussion on the MDGs and set the scene for further collaborations and discussions centred on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger between stakeholders and national policy advisers in West Africa. Its role as arena for discourses surrounding child poverty, child malnutrition and child hunger is one that serves as a harbinger of subsequent dialogue, and its role in this regard is thus a continuous and pivotal one.

As actor, the UN influences West African governments as well as other stakeholders to actualise this developmental objective through partnering with key players, monitoring

the progress of poverty eradication initiatives, advocating for children living in poverty, and building capacity in local governments and communities. As the UN's pivotal child development role player, UNICEF leads and coordinates other actors in approaches towards the development of West African and other children.

The delayed completion of its undertakings on the socioeconomic development of West Africa's children could be explained by a particular organisational characteristic of the UN. This organisational restriction is that the UN and its developmental agencies have been and still remain conciliatory bodies between the legally sovereign states for which they work and the target groups for which they advocate and negotiate. In this sense, the instrumental nature of the UN does not allow it to fully act in its own right in the achievement of its developmental objectives. The failure of UN member states to deliver their dues prolongs the crisis of underdevelopment and decreases the likelihood of eradicating extreme poverty among West Africa's children. An orientation towards prioritisation of individual state interests over collective developmental goals, supports state-centric realist notions and interferes with the UN's role as an actor that engages with the developmental woes of a region such as West Africa. This renders the UN an actor without sufficient capacity to fundamentally address the poverty and hunger of children. Heavy reliance on member states is the biggest impediment to its eradication of extreme poverty and hunger initiatives and has given rise to merely modest achievements (Dijkzeul 1997: 166).

Its delay in including child survival as priority to the goal of child development may be interpreted by critics as a UN failure that has detracted from the global approach in addressing this important facet of poverty eradication among children. Its perceived failure to comprehensively address child survival, explains why the UN still grapples with child extreme poverty and why its roles, whether as instrument, arena or actor, have not thus far resulted in the achievement of extreme poverty eradication, especially in the chronically poor region of West Africa. Another cause for concern regarding the UN's role as actor is its dependence on development aid as an instrument in the achievement of the MDGs, especially since aid is subjected to much political posturing and has been the subject of debate regarding its long-term viability.

The UN's triad of roles regarding extreme poverty and hunger eradication in West African children yield the following main conclusion; firstly, for the UN to be utilised as an instrument of its members, there has to be a perceived need by its members to achieve the objectives of the organisation. The need for the UN to play the role of an instrument in achieving the discussed goals may not exist due to the fact that other global actors are pursuing these objectives or the UN members have no interest in achieving them. The UN is therefore under-utilised as an instrument in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among West African children because there is no (perceived) need for this role. Secondly, the UN's role as actor involves it pro-actively and independently acting towards the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger among West African children. Despite its shortcomings, this role signifies its most accomplished attempt in achieving these goals. It thus obviates the need for the UN to become an instrument of its members in achieving poverty and hunger eradication among West African children. Therefore, the UN's member states may not be utilising the organisation as instrument because, as actor, the UN attempts to accomplish these same objectives. As arena, however, the UN's role does not overlap with its role as instrument or actor and so the IO may essentially be both a successful arena and an actor in eradicating poverty and hunger facing the children of West Africa.

West African economic and political problems are such that without assistance from the UN, there is little hope for solution. Children in the region bear the brunt of conflict and socio-economic collapse, with death, poverty, malnutrition and disease being evidence of this. Education is central to extreme poverty eradication, however, the institutional incapacity of many governments, obfuscates this prioritisation. The multitude of challenges facing the region's educational systems is therefore the focus of the next chapter. It accordingly highlights the UN's three roles in addressing the objective of universal primary education in West Africa.

## Chapter 5

### THE UNITED NATIONS' ROLE IN PROVIDING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION AMONG CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

*'What is true of the family is also true of the international community. Every boy and girl around the world has a right to expect that we will do all we can to ensure that they will enjoy their right to an education.'* (UNICEF 2004b: 2)

Far from a luxury reserved for elites in circles of influence, education has become an essential component of human survival and development. The above quote by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, portrays the international community's acknowledgement of this reality and willingness to be bound to the provision of this aspect of human development. Education's benefits far outweigh its costs by means of being an investment in human life. Additionally, education is not merely linked to development, but is an integral feature of human rights, due to the immense contribution it makes to socioeconomic advancement. Apart from the benefits afforded to the individual, the state shares in the rewards of education, as human capital is an asset, crucial for meeting the demands of competitiveness in an increasingly globalised world. This fact is illustrated by the reality that the literacy levels in developing states lag behind those in their developed counterparts. In the presence of illiteracy, disease, poverty and other intrinsically linked socioeconomic malaises are more prevalent and markedly more difficult to eradicate.

The previous chapter elucidated the socioeconomic woes facing the region of West Africa and the effects of these problems on the survival and development of children. The myriad of socioeconomic challenges facing the region negate the probability of the region independently addressing the crisis before 2015. Primary education provides the mere basis of educational achievement and is therefore simply the first step, rather than the end, of human intellectual enrichment. Even primary education, however, is inaccessible to millions of children in West Africa. With the observations made in the preceding chapter, deficits in West African development can be expected, as a lack of funds additionally plagues the educational systems of most countries in West Africa.

As an organisation tasked to address the development needs of its member states, the mandate of facilitating education for the children of the world's poor falls on the UN. Keeping in mind the levels of deprivation in the region of West Africa, this chapter will reflect on the role of the UN in accomplishing the MDG of universal primary education. Does the UN exhibit the attributes of instrument, arena and actor in the context of its role as IO, in the actualisation of universal primary education within West Africa, as it does in the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger?

This chapter focuses on the goal of universal primary education for West African children and seeks to highlight the importance of achieving this goal, as it relates to human development. The chapter has four compartments. It firstly demarcates the chief concepts that will be utilised such as education, primary education and universal primary education. It secondly contextualises West Africa's educational crisis and examines the depth of the problem confronting the region. The efforts by the governments of the region to meet their own needs, regarding the education of children, are briefly critiqued. Thirdly, the UN's three-fold role in solving this impediment to human development is established. In this regard, the chapter aims to assess the extent of the UN's role as instrument, arena and actor in achieving the MDG in question. Finally, a conclusion of the main arguments will be presented, with a view to underline key facets of the UN's role in achieving the MDG pertaining to primary education for all in West Africa.



## 5.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY TERMS

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘education’ as ‘*the process of teaching or learning.*’ (Soanes & Hawker 2006: 317). This broad definition includes all spheres of learning, teaching and vocations.

When education is qualified as ‘primary’, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as ‘*education for children between the ages of about five and eleven.*’ The challenge introduced by a definition such as this, is its age restriction. The definition is inhibitive in that a child younger than five or older than eleven, needing foundational education, is automatically eliminated. A more beneficial illustration of the term would be a description of its purposes. According to the Cambridge Primary Review, ‘primary education’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is for the purpose of meeting both the present and future needs of children, within and beyond the classroom by the provision of key skills (Alexander 2009). These skills assist in ensuring the individual child’s development and securing a sustainable economic role for the child in society (Shuayb & O’Donnell 2008: 6).

More specifically, primary education may be defined as ‘*the first years of formal, structured education that occurs during childhood*’. The major objective of primary education is the attainment of ‘*basic literacy and numeracy...as well as establishing foundations in science, geography, history and other social sciences*’ (Word IQ.Com 2010).

Universal primary education connotes that all children complete a full course of primary education. It therefore, *inter alia* implies the elimination of gender disparities within primary education. Overcoming all impediments to obtaining primary education, such as school fees and access to education, is the implied imperative associated with this term (UNDP 2010b).

## 5.3 OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION CRISIS AMONG CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA

The previous chapter emphasised that West Africa is no stranger to social and economic dilemmas. As can be expected, the educational systems of the various states mirror the challenges of their economic and political systems. Post-war states such as Liberia and Sierra Leone have droves of their populations internally displaced and living in poverty. The dilapidation of the educational infrastructures in both states has been a direct result of war. In Liberia, high drop out rates are due to the combined effects of teenage pregnancies, and harmful traditional practices, such as pre-teen and early marriages. Even the children who attend school receive a questionable quality of education as a result of large numbers of unqualified teachers (UNGEI 2010a), and as the UN has warned, poor instructional quality as well as long-term increased costs to national development, can be attributed to poorly qualified teachers (Fleshman 2010: 17). With female teachers comprising a mere 19 percent of teachers in Liberia, gender parity is clearly problematic. The problem in Liberia's educational system is compounded by widespread sexual abuse and assault by teachers, arguably reflecting on the damaged social fabric of the war-eroded society (UNGEI 2010a).

Sierra Leone's educational constraints are similar to those confronting Liberia, especially with the harmful traditional practice of early marriage that impedes girls from attending and completing school. This combined with poverty, which increases the incidence of girl child labour to generate income, thus leads to low levels of female literacy. The costs of education have proven to be inhibitive to many children, with girls bearing the brunt of this. Despite the abolition of tuition fees by the government of Sierra Leone, other fees remain a hindrance and the shortage of schools is an added factor impeding school enrolment (UNGEI 2010b).

Conflict in Casamance in the south of Senegal, has fundamentally affected the educational system of the country. Many villages where schools are, have been abandoned by their inhabitants in a bid to flee from conflict. Children are faced with the daunting task of commuting long distances to school, with the risk of being attacked along the way. Poverty additionally prevents the rebuilding of schools closer to human settlements and the refurbishment of schools, which are in many cases dilapidated. All

these factors have severe implications on the educational system of Senegal. The government has officially committed to achieving the goal of ‘Education for All’ (EFA) and to improving the country’s educational quality. Community-based and Koranic schools are incorporated into the conventional educational structure, to increase enrolment in the predominantly Muslim state (UNGEI 2010c). The effects of this have been mixed. The limitation of traditional Koranic schools lies in the strict provision of Koranic teachings, to the detriment of wider formal education. While this barrier has been overcome with the inclusion of Franco-Arab schools, which provide a combination of secular and Koranic teachings, these schools present a further barrier to education, namely school fees (André & Demonsant 2009: 4).

In Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Togo, the education systems are characterised by a prioritisation of boys’ education over that of girls. This has been largely responsible for low female enrolment rates. According to the 2010 estimations by the United Nations’ Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI), fewer than half of all girls in Benin are in school. In Burkina Faso, just about 30 percent of girls are enrolled. Mali’s level of enrolment for girls is similar to that of Burkina Faso; with less than 40 percent of girls enrolled. The level of school attendance for Malian girls is even lower. Guinea reportedly has had some measure of improvement, but with over 40 percent of girls still out of school, gender parity remains elusive. Ghana and Nigeria’s northern regions are similar in that the combined effects of poverty and Islamic beliefs influence the attitudes to formal education for girls, lessening their prioritisation by families and communities at large. Harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriage are both believed to reduce female promiscuity and the spread of HIV/AIDS, however their inhibiting effects on girls’ health and school attendance are undeniable in Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Ghana and Nigeria (UNGEI 2010d; UNGEI 2010e; UNGEI 2010f, UNGEI 2010g, UNGEI 2010h, UNGEI 2010i, UNGEI 2010j, UNGEI 2010k, UNGEI 2010l, UNGEI 2010m).

Deeply entrenched poverty in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Mali weighs heavily on access to school infrastructure and equipment, in that schools lack the capacity to provide basic facilities. The high costs of education

serve as a deterrent to enrolment, especially because many adults in families are poor and illiterate and therefore do not see the immediate benefits of education for their children. Pervasively poor health and sanitation conditions in schools allow the spread of disease, reducing the child-friendliness of school environments (UNGEI 2010d; UNGEI 2010e; UNGEI 2010f; UNGEI 2010g; UNGEI 2010n; UNGEI 2010j).

In rural parts of Ghana, parents consider the distance to the nearest school when reckoning whether girls should stay at home and work, rather than travel on foot for long distances. The dual shortage of teachers and school infrastructure in Ghana, further poses the question of educational quality and long-term developmental outcomes (UNGEI 2010h). The capacity burden of West Africa's educational crisis is heightened by the incidence of refugees in communities without the economic capacity to provide education, even for their own children. This constraint to primary education is evident in Guinea, whereto refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone have flooded. One consequence is pressure on the already apparent shortages of school facilities and essential school equipment (UNGEI 2010g). Another result is the heightened difficulty for migrants to access education, since they either populate urban slums with underfunded schools or their existence in the community is unrecognised by local authorities responsible for educational administrative arrangements (Sayed 2008: 60). The problem is exacerbated by the fact that refugees usually present cultural and linguistic differences as well.

In The Gambia, the Gender Unit at the Department of State for Education is programmed to address the gender inequality in the education sector (UNGEI 2010g). In the same country, the President's Empowerment of Girls' Education (PEGEP), is a conscious effort to improve gender parity (Tangara 2010). Similarly, the government of Sierra Leone has demonstrated political will towards gender equality and universal primary education. This is evident firstly through the creation of a Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) as a means of prioritising gender parity and universal primary education — two constituents of child welfare. The 20 percent allocation of the government's national budget to education matches resources with rhetoric and mirrors government effort to develop its educational infrastructure. This

dedication on the part of government is responsible for the diminishing gender gaps in primary education and the 69 percent attendance of primary school age children (UNGEI 2010b). The government of Liberia attempts to address its education crisis through a focus on improving the gender balance in education. This is through the launch of its National Girls' Education Policy in 2006 for the purpose of achieving universal, free and mandatory primary education. Female teacher training and the provision of support systems for girls in schools are additionally part of the government's priority area, as well as the consolidation of health systems in all schools (UNGEI 2010a).

Ghana's government has made significant advances towards universal primary education. Much of this progress was spearheaded by the Ministry of Education's abolition of school fees during 2005. School fee abolition in Ghana was marked with a higher enrolment for girls than boys. This is due to the fact that poverty weighs more heavily on girls in Sub-Saharan Africa and as such, the removal of this barrier to education assists in plugging the gender gap. As a result, Ghana boasts the smallest educational gender gap in the region (UNICEF 2010h). More so, Ghana is well under way to achieving universal primary education and closing the gender parity gap in primary education by 2015 (Mumuni 2010). Although the Guinean government lacks the ability to sufficiently attend to the gender question in education, and Guinea missed the target of gender equity by 2005, considerable improvement has placed the state second to Ghana's achievements in gender parity (UNGEI 2010g). In Mali, the underlying principle of '*un village, une école*' (a school for each village), has guided the government's attempts to provide educational opportunities for all children. These attempts are made amid the added financial burden of its refugee population from the civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire (UNGEI 2010j).

The Nigerien (from Niger) government again lacks the capacity to autonomously arrive at equality in education and universality in primary education, but has demonstrated overall commitment to these targets. Mechanisms, such as the "10 Year Educational Development Programme" of Niger's Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy, focus on girls' education, improving educational quality and access to education (UNGEI 2010k). In Nigeria, the government has had a National Policy on Education since 1981 and has the capacity to administer it, but has not successfully implemented it. According to

UNGEI (2010) its failure to implement the national policy is due to the interplay of internal dynamics such as population expansion, weak political will, a lengthy spell of undemocratic governance and resource mismanagement. Additionally, the government of Nigeria passed the Universal Basic Education Act into Law in 2004, as a means of meeting the basic educational challenges it faces. This legal mechanism has failed to produce desirable results, due to the far-reaching problems of teacher scarcity and a scarcity of classrooms (UNICEF 2005f). Amid these hindrances, the Nigerian government reports an 88% enrolment in primary schools, but admits to variations in primary school completion at national and sub-national levels (Chukwu 2010).

The table below puts West Africa's educational crisis into statistical perspective.

**Table IV Primary school enrolment and attendance in West Africa**

| Countries     | Primary school enrolment rate (2003-2008*)<br>Gross |        |       | Primary school enrolment rate (2003-2008*)<br>Net |        |       | Primary school attendance rate (2003-2008*)<br>Net |        |       |
|---------------|---|--------|-------|---|--------|-------|--|--------|-------|
|               | Male  | Female | Total | Male  | Female | Total | Male   | Female | Total |
| Benin         | 105   | 87     | 96    | 87  | 73     | 80    | 72   | 62     | 67    |
| Burkina Faso  | 71  | 60     | 65    | 52  | 42     | 47    | 49   | 44     | 46    |
| Cape Verde    | 105   | 98     | 102   | 85  | 84     | 85    | 97   | 96     | 97    |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 81  | 64     | 72    | 61  | 49     | 55    | 66   | 57     | 62    |
| The Gambia    | 71  | 77     | 74    | 59  | 64     | 62    | 60   | 62     | 61    |
| Ghana         | 98  | 97     | 98    | 73  | 71     | 72    | 75   | 75     | 75    |
| Guinea        | 98  | 84     | 91    | 79  | 69     | 74    | 55   | 48     | 51    |
| Guinea Bissau | 84  | 56     | 70 x  | 53  | 37     | 45 x  | 54   | 53     | 54    |
| Liberia       | 88  | 79     | 83    | 32  | 30     | 31    | 41   | 39     | 40    |
| Mali          | 92  | 74     | 83    | 70  | 56     | 63    | 46   | 40     | 43    |
| Niger         | 58  | 43     | 51    | 61  | 46     | 54    | 44   | 31     | 38    |
| Nigeria       | 104   | 87     | 96    | 68  | 58     | 63    | 66   | 58     | 62    |
| Senegal       | 84  | 84     | 84    | 72  | 72     | 72    | 58   | 59     | 58    |
| Sierra Leone  | 155   | 139    | 147   | -   | -      | -     | 69   | 69     | 69    |
| Togo          | 104   | 90     | 97    | 82  | 72     | 77    | 82   | 76     | 79    |

Source: UNICEF 2010

\* Data refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading.

x Data refer to years or periods other than those specified in the column heading, that differ from the standard definition, or refer to only part of a country.

- No data available

Evidence from West Africa reveals that while school enrolment rates may be low, in many cases the retention rates are even lower. Drop-outs are commonplace due to poverty and harmful traditionally enshrined practices such as early marriage and resulting teen pregnancies, as well as trafficking for work as domestic servants. The decision for boys rather than girls to attend school is additionally more likely, in cases of long distances to the nearest school (Tuwor & Sossou 2008: 369 & 375). These broaden the already pervasive gender gap. The shortage of teachers and lack of educational resources such as books, classrooms and sanitation in schools impede the wider goal of providing quality access to education for all children. Ethnic and disability-based discrimination in the region are also key factors responsible for the inaccessibility of primary education in the region (UNICEF 2002: 8).

Statistically, due to the combined effects of the challenges mentioned, West Africa has the lowest literacy levels in the world. During 2008, UNESCO (2008: 60) noted that there are more than 65 million non-literate adults in the region. An alarming 40 million of these are women. Of the states that make up ECOWAS, only Ghana, Nigeria and Cape Verde have adult literacy amounting to at least two thirds of their population. Liberia alone has a 50 percent rate of adult literacy. In Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger, less than 30 percent of all adults can read and write. The figure is lower for women in these four states, in that a mere 20 percent of women are literate. If the current crisis in the region's primary education system persists, these dismal adult literacy levels will be transferred to the next generation.

While various governments have implemented mechanisms to attain the goal of education for all, in most cases the size of the obstacles mitigates efforts being made. The educational situation in West Africa however is not all bleak, as despite reversals in

enrolment levels, Cape Verde is optimistically viewed as one of the countries most likely to meet both the objectives of enrolment and retention by 2015. Togo follows Cape Verde, as a country which may not have achieved its objectives yet, but is on track (ECA 2005:13). Despite this, a substantial amount of support is crucial for the goal of universal primary education. As an IO, the UN performs certain responsibilities towards the alleviation of West Africa's educational quagmires. A discussion of its roles towards this sizeable goal will now follow.

## **5.4 THE UNITED NATIONS' TRIADIC ROLE IN ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN WEST AFRICA**

### **5.4.1 THE UNITED NATIONS AS INSTRUMENT**

Achieving universal primary education in West Africa may be a component of the UN's global developmental agenda, however the UN's use as instrument in fulfilling this goal is heavily impacted by the gap between political rhetoric and action. Hulme and Scott (2010: 9) note that the priority of ending global poverty has not gained sufficient political foothold in powerful developed states or the elite circles of developing states to generate action. This does not suggest that either the former or the latter are against the aim of fighting extreme poverty, but that the political traction they channel towards capacity building for sustainable development is weak. The previous chapter indicated the UN's use as an instrument for relaying the message of a commitment of developed states to the goal of ending extreme poverty. Arguably the same applies regarding developed states' use of the UN towards West African children's completion of primary education. For developed states, ending global poverty and giving food to the hungry is a noble objective that they theoretically support, but their support falls short of being expressly linked to their major foreign policy goals. They do not, therefore, utilise the UN to ensure that all West African children are educated *en route* to ensuring that global poverty becomes extinct. In rhetoric it may seem obvious that all states are committed to ending illiteracy but the opposite is the case in practice.



For this reason, the UN's role as instrument of its member states in the accomplishment of universal primary education may reflect a commitment to the principles that underpin the stated goal, rather than the realisation of the goal. The previous chapter drew on this line of argument. Its applicability to the second MDG crops up from the absence of evidence signifying the purposeful use of the UN as a device in the implementation of this specific goal in West Africa. While substantial evidence — in the form of documents and press releases — exists to indicate member states' rhetorical commitment to the goal of primary education for all, their actions fail to adequately match these stipulations. Insufficient political will for the UN's utilisation as a mechanism in actualising the second MDG in West Africa further plays a part in this.

Developed states' funding towards primary education in West Africa has been neither widespread nor sustained. The rationale for this may be found in Steer and Wathne's (2010: 1), observation of donor tendency towards the allocation of education aid to states with the institutional capacity to effectively organise its use and not necessarily to those with the greatest educational needs. The largely underdeveloped nature of West African institutions therefore diminishes the possibility of primary education financing. This trend in donor behaviour could further explain the UN's minimal use as instrument by states towards the achievement of universal primary education in West Africa, and could decrease the likelihood of the UN being used as a mechanism for meeting this developmental goal in West Africa.

However, Steer and Wathne (2010: 3) also indicate that post-September 11 2001, US foreign policy can be characterised by a shift towards the inclusion of basic education in its social sector investments to the Muslim World and failed states. This shift by a dominant UN member should translate into its use of the UN as instrument for the promotion of primary education in West Africa's Muslim and failed states, however, it does not have this effect. The reason for this could be linked to Caporaso's argument (1999: 599) that the mandate for multilateral action arises with the inability to solve a problem within the bilateral arena. The UN is likewise primarily used as an instrument when the IO lacks the capacity to act singularly, or when its action would signify defiance of international law. Support towards the achievement of primary education in

many cases may legitimately be provided bilaterally. Due to the fact that, like many other IOs, the UN often acts in the interest of its more powerful states, and is an instrument of its members, validation is needed from its dominant components in order to act towards the objectives necessary for the actualisation of its objectives. Regarding the specific goal of universal primary education in West Africa, validation is evidently lacking (Frey, 2008: 340).

Since universal primary education is not constitutive of developed states' domestic policy objectives, little incentive, apart from normative-based reasons, exists for the prioritisation of education in their foreign policy objectives. The previous chapter underscored the UN's minimalistic use as instrument for the achievement of specific public goods rather than as a replacement of governments whose role is the provision of public services. Intrinsically linked to the goal of extreme poverty eradication is that of universal primary education provision. If the UN's efficiency potentially threatens the state's relevance, the UN will be sidelined by its members and left to address global needs just nominally. As a result, the argument of Officer (1994:417) discussed in the previous chapter to this effect, casts a shadow of doubt on the UN's use by its members in the proactive achievement of the MDG to provide universal access to primary education for West African children.

Köchler (2006: 327) raises the argument that from the very founding of the organisation, the five permanent members of the Security Council have wielded power over the rest of the UN's member states, which has caused a paradoxical power relationship within the UN. Against the background of international law, which is meant to uphold the sovereignty and equality of all states, this imbalance means that the UN can be manipulated as a tool of its more powerful members. The most influential of the permanent Security Council members is arguably the US, based on its uncontested military and economic preponderance, which allows it opportunity to act unilaterally with a measure of impunity. However, incentive for the US to advance developmental issues in West Africa can be found in the evidence laid out by McClellan (2007: 69), who highlights the recent US interest in rebuilding failed states such as Liberia, especially with the fight against global terror being a key foreign policy goal of the US.

McClellan additionally comments on the US interest in Nigeria. Over and above the possible Nigerian links to terrorism, by 2015 the West African state is projected to become the supplier of twenty-five percent of US oil, superseding the mere sixteen percent it currently exports to the US. Such strategic considerations in West Africa would give the US reason to include states in the region in its foreign policy ends and to promote development in the region.

In order for the UN to be used instrumentally towards the achievement of certain ends, the political will to achieve those ends should firstly be apparent. Secondly, the ability to achieve those ends should also exist. Although the more dominant members of the UN possess some ability to utilise the UN in pursuit of their national interests, the goal of educating West Africa's children does not essentially form part of the national interests of developed states. While developed states express normative support for poverty eradication in West Africa and across the world, their support is not effectively carried through to the use of the UN as a tool to achieve universal primary education. This reflects insufficient political will and reduces the UN's use as an instrument of its member states.

#### **5.4.2 THE UNITED NATIONS AS ARENA**

The 2000 Millennium Summit was a forum for the burgeoning of top level commitment towards the goal of providing primary education to all children. It served to reaffirm the cooperation already envisaged in the World Conference on Education For All (EFA), held 10 years prior in Jomtien and to foster global solidarity in the accomplishment of this goal (UNICEF & UNESCO 2007: 1). In spite of the goal towards EFA agreed upon in Jomtien, the 2000 Summit served as the arena to establish consensus on the global hierarchy of educational priorities in favour of universal primary education. This marked a crucial delineation of educational objectives and specifically, a departure from the more general objective of education for all (Tarabini 2010: 208).

Through the arena created by the Millennium Summit, the global prioritisation of childhood education was highlighted. The aims of abolishing gender inequality in

primary education and providing universal primary education acquired renewed global focus. The Summit offered a crucial global stage for commitment at the topmost political level to harnessing intergovernmental capacity towards the objective of primary education for all (Ruggie 2003: 314). While the conference was not held specifically for West Africa, its inclusion of the West African governments signalled solidarity for the crisis West Africa's educational system faces. Under the auspices of the Millennium Summit, there was a renewed emphasis on the rights-based approach to the provision of universal primary education. While the Universal Declaration for Human Rights was the first legal instrument to bind states to the norm of achieving universal primary education as a means to achieving human rights' objectives, the summit of 2000 convened nations to refocus on this aspect of human rights.

The responsibility for the attainment of the MDG to provide universal primary education was jointly placed on West African governments and the other members of the UN, within the arena created by the 2000 Millennium Summit (Fakuda-Parr 2004: 400). This arena proved important as it prevented abdication of responsibility to other non-state global actors involved in developmental issues. It was especially pertinent to harness the political will to realise development projects geared towards education for all, something that had been glaringly absent in the past.

In September 2008, the UN again offered the arena for governments, businesses and civil society groups to rally round and make concrete commitments towards guaranteeing the MDGs. This high-level MDG event was crucial in restoring a commitment to the goals envisaged in 2000 (UNESCO 2008: 25). The forum resulted in \$ 4.5 billion dedicated by UN members to education globally. With specific regard to educating West African children, the arena presented the opportunity for the Beninese government to commit to building 6000 new classrooms, as well as improving teaching quality. The Monaco government's commitment during this high-panel event of development aid to facilitate schooling for 100, 000 pre-school and primary school children in Burkina Faso and Mali, among other states, additionally illustrates the use of the UN as a forum of cooperation towards actualising the second MDG (United Nations

2008b). Whether these commitments translate into action is a completely different matter.

Financial impediments to education are brought to the fore through the arena provided by the UN, as the School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI) launched during 2005 as a joint initiative between UNICEF and the World Bank facilitated the transition into school fee abolition in West and Central Africa. This was done through the creation of settings for discussion among stakeholders in states which have begun implementing free education and for states planning to do so. Knowledge-sharing between these states is highlighted by the UN as crucial for successful transition to fee elimination and is made possible through this arena (World Bank & UNICEF 2009a:30).

Poverty is a substantial barrier to primary education in West Africa, as the majority of pupils are unable to pay school fees. In Mali, for instance, girls from poor households are four times less likely to attend primary school than girls from more affluent ones (UNESCO 2008: 2). The UN's role in eliminating this barrier to education is crucial for the attainment of universal primary education. The forum which the UN provides in West Africa not only supports workshops geared at facilitating free education, but encourages cooperation among the governments of West African and donor states, by linking education ministries and international development agencies into cooperative networks. For example, through the UN arena brought about by SFAI, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) — a collaboration of development agencies, educational specialists and NGOs — engages with the Beninese government and other partners involved in Benin's education sector to support school fees abolition (UNICEF 2009e)

Opportunities for networking and civil society partnership are created within the framework of the UN, through the MDG to achieve universal primary education. Education specialists as well as women's and children's rights' groups are given opportunity to pool their expertise in the attainment of education for all. The abolition of violence against girls in West African schools, a phenomenon which threatens the gender equity in schools, is one such issue which has been targeted through the

partnership created by UNGEI and illustrates how partnership is linked to the UN's role as arena for international cooperation and dialogue. The forum advocates for an end to violence by teachers against pupils in West African schools, a practice that has traditionally been ignored or excused as disciplinary measures against unruly pupils. It further creates an opening for civil society organisations to create action plans and policy recommendations for governments in addressing the problem of violence. An added advantage of this UN arena is the opportunity to obtain World Bank education funding based on government adherence to action plans created by women's and children's groups in this environment (IRIN 2010c). This forum signifies a fundamental shift from previous international methods of ensuring change in country developmental policies based on World Bank specifications.

Benefits of the UN's role as arena for cooperation in initiatives for girls' education are demonstrated by the establishment of the Girls' Education Project (GEP) in northern Nigeria. The GEP acts as a forum for partnerships involving state ministries of education in this region of Nigeria. In 2006, the GEP broadened its alliances with the formation of the Nigerian Girls' Education Initiative (NGEI), as arena for NGO joint ventures with the national and local governments. This arena offers opportunity for coordination in the quarterly creation of action plans and for follow-ups on previous action plans (UNGEI 2010l). The UN's use as arena therefore has a two-fold impact on the potential for collaboration in that it works as a direct forum for cooperation by connecting global actors, and influences the actors it links together to become forums for cooperation with other actors.

As arena for the realisation of universal primary education in West Africa, the UN thus harnesses key stake holders and facilitates agreements among them. However, its role furthermore extends to that of linchpin in the achievement of this goal.

### **5.4.3 THE UNITED NATIONS AS ACTOR**

The evolution of the UN's role into that of actor stems from its ability to extend its priorities beyond those laid out by its member states, to include issues arising from its institutionalised culture (Fomerand 2010: 1924). The MDG to universally achieve the goal of primary education forms part of its human development mandate. The four key UN proponents for child educational development are UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the UNDP (Jones 2006: 1). The UNDP, albeit not a specialised agency in education, acts as coordinator of the UN development system and thus lends support to the directives towards the achievement of universal primary education (UNDP 2010b). UNICEF's work in endeavours to provide universal primary education thematically falls into the spheres of basic education and gender equality (UNICEF 2006c). However, as will be highlighted, other UN agencies have been found to play additional parts in the contribution towards primary education.

As discussed earlier, the concept of promoting universal primary education is an indispensable element of human survival and development. Drawing on the arguments of constructivists as discussed in Chapter Two, this notion is largely promulgated by the UN. The organisation serves as an actor that moulds the ideas of the global community by ensuring that parallel values for human survival and state security are shared (Fomerand 2010: 1923). National security and human security are both crucial components of the UN's agenda and education essentially addresses both priorities. While the UN's role as actor has been visible through it being a purveyor of resources for development in West Africa and elsewhere, its role as actor in shaping ideas remains significant and should therefore not be underestimated (Eberstadt 1997: 156).

In the UN's sphere of influence, education is not only conveyed as the integral mode of heightening human potential but as the necessary route away from poverty. As a region ensnared by poverty and disease, West Africa is particularly susceptible to the UN's influence concerning educational values. The values of states and communities in the region are thus being shaped by the significance the UN places on education. In so doing, the UN attempts to trigger action towards the attainment of this goal. The rights-based approach to education, adopted by the UN, furthermore programmes states, civil societies, multinational corporations (MNCs), and individuals to envisage and work

towards a world wherein the achievement of education is universal. As actor in global politics, the relationship between the UN and its influence on global trends like universal primary education is a two-way process. The UN's approach in swaying state and non-state actors towards prioritising education is a reaction to the demands of an increasingly globalised world, and the prioritisation of human development on the global agenda. The UN's influence over states towards their prioritisation of education is therefore explained by the need to address education as a global norm. This reactionary behaviour can also be used to explain the role the UN plays in achieving universal primary education in West Africa.

In drawing attention to the work they do, as well as the work that still remains to be done in West Africa, UN agencies monitor, produce and widely disseminate reports. IOs such as the UN are, according to Barnett and Finnemore (1999: 699), *inter alia* created for the purpose of filling the information gap across the world. Their technical expertise enables them to produce awareness and knowledge about factors that impact on complex socio-economic issues such as lack of access to education. Reports such as the State of the World's Children, Human Development Report and the World Education Report thematically focus the world's attention on problems facing the developing world (Spaulding & Chaudhuri 1999: 53).

UN reports and awareness campaigns aim to serve a dual purpose. The first is to identify dynamics in the educational sector, in order to mould the communities' social perceptions into abandoning views that counteract with the education goal (Fomerand 2010: 1927). In so doing, the UN acts to raise awareness of the goal to educate children and depicts a sense of urgency to ensure the realisation of this goal by the target year of 2015. This serves to reshape the social perception of communities into one in which education for both boys and girls is prioritised. The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) News, in conducting interviews in Gantauda (a remote village 90km from Bissau; the capital city of Guinea Bissau) has reported that parents are aware of the potential for education to improve their young children's chances of survival (IRIN NEWS 2010e). Knowledge of this intrinsic developmental reality in a village far from modernisation is noteworthy, as it indicates a consequent willingness to enrol children in school. This



awareness is also partially attributable to the UN, which builds global consensus on the need to educate children, thus putting development at the very core of human development (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004: 1416).

Secondly, the UN's reports are intended to purposefully guide action by other actors (Fomerand 2010: 1927). With specific relation to the MDGs, periodic reports are aimed at stimulating debate among the public within and outside West Africa on the course of action towards the attainment of the MDGs. Courses of action based on the results of the debates are then more likely to be adopted, towards the actualisation of the MDGs. For instance, UNICEF's report card on child protection is one of various methods through which the UN highlights the high levels of bullying and corporal punishment in West and Central African schools (UNICEF 2009b: 22). By drawing attention to these issues, the UN exposes them as barriers to child-friendly education, with the intent to trigger debate among educational stakeholders. This serves to guide the actions of governmental and international actors aiming to improve the quality of the West African education sector.

Advocacy forms part of the UN's actions to influence perception and is evident in its actions towards providing education for West African children. In Niger, it works with the traditional structures where it serves to create awareness for the purposes of child protection and education (UNGEI 2010k). Here, the UN advocates for birth registration in rural areas and discourages early marriages in its campaigns. These aspects have an impact on education by enhancing record-keeping and increasing the likelihood of school completion, respectively. In Benin, UNGEI advocates for children by focusing its campaigns on government to engender political will and the increase of funds for widespread educational provision (UNGEI 2010d).

As advocate in educating West African children, the UN acknowledges the importance of traditional and religious leaders in reform. For example, UNGEI involves political, community and religious leaders in its advocacy towards education in Côte d'Ivoire (UNGEI 2010f). In so doing, its role incorporates the necessary channels towards the goal of adjusting perception, as key in achieving primary education. This is especially crucial, since traditional practices such as the prioritisation of education for boys, child

marriage and female genital mutilation impede primary school attendance and completion. According to Tuwor and Sossou (2008: 364), such patriarchal customs are the root causes of low school retention levels among girls in West Africa, despite national endorsement of universal primary education. Through the methods of advocacy mentioned, the UN attempts to impart to West Africa global values such as child protection and child development.

One major way in which the UN shapes national policy in West Africa is assistance with the domestication of international standards into national legislation. This not only guides local perception to align with international standards, but also legitimises international standards at the local level. The UN also monitors initiatives in West African governments' policy to the right to education, as embodied by the CRC and endorsed by the second MDG. All West African governments have ratified the CRC and publicly endorsed the MDGs and although this provides a positive framework for the achievement of primary education, international pledges do not signify national commitment. The translation of international values into national laws and policies plays a significant part in their implementation (Mwambene 2008: 224 & 230).

The UN fundamentally departs from its role as an arena for fostering partnerships in that, it itself forms partnerships with donor and West African states towards endorsing, financing and smoothing the progress of gender equality, particularly in education. Its partnerships exist on various levels, beginning with continuous policy support to governments. Globalisation mandates an increased governance role in education for the UN, in which it is not only enabled to set the agenda while partnering with national and local governments, but also to delineate national strategy, priority and procedures (Tarabini 2010: 205 & 206). This results in a paradoxical UN relationship with the governments of West Africa and elsewhere. Its attempts towards child development in West Africa involves the UN balancing the need to steer clear from dictating terms (which potentially dampen interest in cooperation and foil efforts to engender national ownership of initiatives) with the need to guide national initiatives. UNICEF, for instance, engages with government representatives of the region in discussions on barriers to education, such as gender inequity, school fees and forced labour (UNICEF

2004). These discussions serve as catalysts for the implementation of policies that abolish the barriers to universal primary education. While deciding on new educational policies to replace harmful old ones is fundamental, the UN emphasises its role as assistant to government departments, in the development of policy. In stressing this, it genuflects to state sovereignty — a principle enshrined in its Charter.

Beyond its policy advisory position, the UN partners with governments in funding and implementing decisions to provide quality access to education. Its partnership takes into consideration the need to build the capacity of communities in order to allow disadvantaged and marginalised children to attend school (UNICEF 2004). The result of UNDP partnerships with authorities of districts in Niger, for instance, resulted in a district issuing free birth certificates to alleviate this obstacle to child enrolment. In another district of Niger, UNDP partnership led to the construction of a primary school closer to the poor communities, thereby increasing the convenience of school attendance, especially for girls (UNDP 2009b: 8). Despite attempts made by the UN towards this goal, support towards the global problem is marginally less than is sufficient to achieve the purpose of universal primary education. The US\$2 million financing of UNESCO literacy programmes across the globe in 2008, for example, is insufficient for the end of educating 72 million children world-wide (Manzo 2008: 4 & DFID 2010). While initiatives towards capacity building are apparent, more concerted efforts are needed if the intended educational advancement is to be achieved.

Girls' education is a key component of the UN's partnerships. This originates from the viewpoint that high population growth — prevalent in Africa — and its resultant link with poverty can be resolved with education for girls, which encourages family planning and results in the birth of fewer children (Mehrotra & Delamonica 2002: 1106). In addition, putting children first in development is increasingly seen as an investment that can potentially sever the ties that bind people in developing countries to a cycle of poverty, in a single generation as opposed to repeatedly attempting to combat poverty of a population for generations (UNICEF 2003). Partnership in developing the girl child through education strategically combines the benefits of educating children, with those of educating the girl child. The UN's approach to girls' education serves to prioritise it as

both a means to and an end in development. As a means, girls' education is achievable *en route* to the broader goals of development, women empowerment and gender equality. As Kofi Annan stated:

*“Without achieving gender equality for girls in education, the world has no chance of achieving many of the ambitious health, social and development targets it has set for itself.”* (Global Campaign for Education, 2005).

Kofi Annan's statement highlights the importance of gender equality as a trajectory for the other MDGs. Child mortality is one of note, due to the increased likelihood for educated girls to have children that survive beyond the age of five (Klasen 1999: 1). Child mortality rates are particularly pertinent, due to its overall use as a measure of child wellbeing (UNESCO 2010).

As an end in itself, the prioritisation of education for girls leads to the personal development of women in a region rife with gender disparity. Despite the missed target of gender parity in 25 countries by 2005, the UN continues to partner with governments and donors. One such partner is ECOWAS, which has made financial contributions to the UNGEI plan of action as part of its involvement in girls' education (African Union 2009).

In Sierra Leone, UNGEI cooperation with the Development Assistance Coordinating Office (DACO), which is implementing the country's PRSPs, reflects the UN's consecutive implementation of girls' education with poverty reduction (UNGEI 2010b). UNGEI partnerships in Sierra Leone have resulted in the creation of a database, national survey on girls' education, gender analysis of the curricula, training for teachers, sensitisation and advocacy. In Senegal, UNGEI partnership has not been formally established. An Action Plan for 2006-2010, however, aims to improve the living conditions of women in order to ensure they release their daughters from housework to attend school. Secondly, it aims to increase the number of quality schools that are within the reach of all children and provide equal educational quality to both girls and boys. Concern arises, pertaining to UNGEI's intended partners for Sierra Leone, based on the

fact that they are not within the framework of UNGEI's initiative and may prove to be frail partnerships (UNGEI 2010c). As in the case of Sierra Leone, the fact that UNGEI partnerships have not been established in Niger may have important implications for the country, since it was one of the states that missed its 2005 gender parity target (UNGEI 2010k).

Technical assistance and training is recognised by the UN as an integral feature of its assistance to West African states, and assist in the twin implementation of girl and child-friendly school environments (UNICEF 2002b: 9) In efforts geared towards the provision of universal primary education to children, the UNICEF Regional Bureau in Dakar partners with UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). In this regard, the UN undertakes to train ministries of education in various states of the region. In 2006, this cooperation provided technical assistance to Sierra Leone's ministry of education. Furthermore, the partnership coordinated workshops in which officials from ministries of education in Burkina Faso, Benin, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone were trained to ensure the availability of Essential Learning Package (ELP) throughout primary schools in their states (IIEP 2006). ELP comprises of a strategy aimed at accelerating the speed at which access to quality education in West Africa is achieved. The initiative between UNICEF and UNESCO gives special attention to girls' education (UNICEF 2008b). Likewise, partnership between UNESCO's IIEP, UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA) and UNESCO Accra, resulted in the training of delegates from Ghana's ministry of education on educational planning and management issues in schools against the backdrop of HIV/AIDS, since the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS remains a barrier to education for children in West Africa (IIEP UNESCO 2009).

A factor that is highlighted by the UN's role as actor is the inextricable connection between poverty and education. The fact that the two elements relate to one another cyclically, with lack of education being a major determinant of poverty and the latter being a leading cause of lack of access to education (Sayed 2008: 53). High poverty levels in the region of West Africa imply the need for concerted efforts to alleviate hunger and malnutrition, which hamper learning. The UN reflects its recognition of this

fact through the WFP's food assistance to the region, which forms part of the UN's interagency partnerships. During 2010, the WFP partnered with UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in strengthening the delivery of the ELP to 77 800 school children in Cape Verde (WFP 2010e). The same interagency collaborations are observable in the WFP's provision of school and take-home meals for primary school children in Ghana (WFP 2010 f).

Throughout West Africa, similar WFP cooperation can be seen in providing school children with food. These partnerships all reveal some measure of UN internal coordination in developmental projects and WFP partnerships also depict the UN's strategy to alleviate hunger as a fundamental means to the end of education for all. This strategy is essential, as the extent of poverty and the deterioration of West Africa's educational system render attempts at education futile unless they have some emphasis on long-term development (Hope 2008: 155). Beyond partnership, the UN's role as actor is influential in the simultaneous fight against hunger and illiteracy. Its influence over West African governments, such as Ghana, to implement school feeding programmes in the poorest primary schools and kindergartens, ensures that education amid extreme hunger is addressed (Ghana Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 2006). This aspect of the UN's role as actor is pertinent in the achievement of universal primary education, and proves to parents the benefit of primary education to the welfare of households (Bennell 2002: 1190). The indirect part played by the UN here is noteworthy as its efforts; both directly and indirectly, contribute to the holistic achievement of the second MDG in West Africa's children.

In partnering with interagency and external components towards the realisation of the goal to ensure access to primary education, the UN reconciles two major, conflicting components. These are: the need to eliminate school fees in order to remove this barrier to education, and the need to ensure high quality education in all primary schools. Conflict between the two variables arises due to the impact which school fee abolition has on the availability of funds and the resultant ability to provide quality education. Partnership with the World Bank, through the Education For All Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) attempts to improve access to school through the comprehensive elimination

of fees. The UN's provision of child friendly education has been brought into its partnerships with NGOs, national governments and civil society. NGOs such as Save the Children Sweden and Plan International, for instance, have collaborated with the UN to highlight the root causes of school-based violence in West and Central Africa as a means to eliminating this crisis in the region (IRIN 2010c).

A further observation is that UN interactions with local and regional actors have shifted from being mainly ceremonial to being functional for the direct furthering of UN developmental goals (Forman & Segaar 2006: 216). This not only indicates an inclusion of non-global actors in the global developmental agenda, but also specifically recognises them as fundamental actors in achieving the goal of universal primary education in West Africa.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

Education offers the potential to dispel poverty but high poverty levels impede access to education. This is especially the case for the region of West Africa, where a dearth of teachers, combined with chronically dilapidated schools and a shortage of funds to rebuild, threaten to retain existent poverty traps. With low school enrolment and retention rates, low class attendance and gender disparity characterising West African educational systems, lack of access to education is a clear impediment to the region's development. Pervasive gender gaps in the educational system are the result of deeply embedded, harmful traditional practices, evident in much of the region. Even Ghana, which has made the most significant progress in educational advancement, is affected by these practices, and the lack of education access for many girls in poorer regions remains the single biggest impediment to universal primary education in the state.

While government interventions have yielded some results, in much of the region the goal of universal primary education has not been achieved. In most cases, the lack of government resources to prioritise education prevents maximum primary school enrolment and retention. In others, the absence of sufficient political commitment to is a barrier to universal primary education.

In realising the objective of universal primary education among West African children the UN is found to play its roles as instrument, arena and actor to varying levels. Instrumentally speaking, the UN plays a minimal role. Its role does not stretch much further than the portrayal of member states' commitment to the second MDG in West Africa. This is for three reasons: firstly, lack of member states' political will to implement rhetorical expressions of support for normative goals; secondly, the lack of institutional capacity to make efficient use of funds donated and finally because the dominant role of the UN as actor in accomplishing the goal of universal primary education, stifles the UN's use as instrument. While specific bilateral attempts may be made through the means of educational interventions, these are for the most part aligned with the ends of national interests of the states involved, such as the fight against terrorism and the attainment of economic advancement.

Originating from its role as arena, the UN facilitated the initial cooperation towards the goal to achieve universal primary education. Offering a forum for sharing responsibility, in order to prevent abdication by entities such as national governments, was a purpose of the UN's role as arena when it hosted the 2000 Millennium Summit. Since this initial forum for cooperation, the UN has been the focal point for various discussions towards the actualisation of this MDG in West Africa and elsewhere. The opportunity presented by the UN is crucial in that it has served as a catalyst for funds to be pledged towards this goal. Its benefits broaden, incorporating chances to discuss methods towards achieving quality education, and include the direct and indirect facilitation of forums for cooperation towards access to education for all children in the region. It is however important to note that the aim of this forum — the sharing of responsibility — has not translated into the achievement of the goals of the forum, namely achieving universal primary education.

The most expansive role of the UN in achieving universal primary education is its position as actor. Herein, UNICEF plays a substantial part. Under the dual themes of basic education and gender equality, UNICEF's role primarily falls into four spheres: norm setting, advocacy, policy analysis and partnerships (UNICEF 2006c). Within



partnership, whether internal (UN interagency) or external collaborations, the UN's actions cover capacity building and financing, but also occupies an advisory position. UN partnerships are also forged for the purposes of girls' education and providing quality education.

As mentioned, in efforts towards achieving universal primary education the UN's role as instrument is nominal, and overshadowed by its role as actor. As actor, the UN's role is continuous and unlimited by its other roles. While the UN's role as arena in attaining universal primary education is unhindered by its other two roles, its neutrality limits it to a forum for discussion and cooperation and prevents it from playing a more proactive role therein. The UN's role as actor is therefore more expansive than the other two, and could be the most effective role in achieving the goal to achieve universal primary education. This would present an argument for a more proactive UN role played in the actualisation of universal primary education among West African children.

In the next chapter, conclusions based on the analysis of the UN's general child developmental role will be discussed. This will be combined with an assessment of the role played by the UN in achieving both of the first two MDGs in West African children as expounded on in this chapter and the preceding one.

## Chapter 6

### **CONCLUSION: CHILDREN IN WEST AFRICA AND THE UNITED NATIONS' TRIADIC ROLE AS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION**

*'The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children — their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born'*

(UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2007:1).

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

As the above quote reflects, it is no coincidence that developed nations invest substantially in education and child care. More so the quote explains why developing nations — with little investment capability — have low global standings in terms of human development performance. Shortcomings in the ability of developing states to execute their child development mandate have created an opening for IOs to fill, thus enabling the latter to fulfil the role traditionally filled by states.

The study set out to focus on IOs, a crucial variable within the structural dynamics of global politics. On a systemic level, the effect of IOs' introduction into a system comprising of a collection of states alters the configuration of the system. However, as the study aimed to depict, the effect of IOs' enclosure to global politics extends to reflect certain functional aspects, which address contemporary challenges of international society that states are unable or unwilling to address on their own. As an IO, with universal representation and global development objectives, an evaluation of the UN is timely as well as relevant.

In concluding the evaluation of the UN as an IO with specific reference to its goals to eradicate extreme child poverty and hunger and achieve universal primary education in West Africa, this chapter aims to achieve a number of objectives. Firstly, it outlines key

points and arguments from the various chapters. This provides context for the assessments to be made in the chapter. Secondly, it pinpoints the most pertinent issues specifically relating to the UN's triadic role, as investigated in the study. Drawing on Archer's evaluation of an IO, the aim of this is to highlight the degree to which Archer's framework for analysing IOs is compatible with the UN's role in achieving its first two MDGs in West African children. Thirdly, it reconciles the initial presuppositions of the study with the findings of the research. This third objective revisits the preliminary research questions and the hypotheses proposed. Lastly, the chapter reveals challenges encountered during the research, as well as possible recommendations for future research.

## **6.2 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH**

The development-centred nature of the eight MDGs — which represent the most recent development objectives of international society — necessitated the study's pivotal focus on global development. More specifically, the pervasive socio-economic predicaments posed by extreme poverty, hunger and the lack of access to universal primary education were examined by focusing on the two MDGs that respectively aspire to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and the achievement of universal primary education. Clive Archer's analysis of IOs in terms of their triadic roles as instruments, arenas and actors was the analytical framework used to evaluate how the UN seeks to accomplish these two goals.

The achievement of MDGs in more developed regions is not necessarily equivalent to overall or noteworthy advances in the realisation of the UN's most recent development objectives. However, widespread poverty, hunger and high levels of illiteracy in the West African region render this region a particularly compelling case study. The case study thus presented the opportunity to gauge the compatibility of Archer's framework of analysis with the implementation of the contemporary UN development agenda. Firstly, however, it sought to conceptualise the place of IOs within the discipline of IR.

IOs' prominence within IR is partly as a consequence of their proliferation over the past century, denoting a certain utility to international society, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of states belong to one or more IOs. Moreover, the UN has specific relevance because it is the first IO in the history of mankind that has universal

membership. Within the theoretical sphere of IR, IOs have drawn criticism from realist thinkers; understanding from the liberalist view and conformity with the constructivist outlook. The variation in reactions is linked to the realist perspective of states being the central players of world politics; the liberalist view of cooperation as a necessary mechanism of interaction between actors, and constructivists' argument that the intricacies of world politics, including IOs, are a construct of changing societal ideas and interests. The various stances provided by the theoretical schools do not obviate the pervasiveness of IOs as a unit of analysis within IR. Their position in world politics remains unmistakably central. However, beyond the differing perspectives of IR theorists on the primary role of IOs, the failure of the latter to occupy a preset theoretical position is arguably a result of their ability to play various roles — that of instrument, arena and actor.

A measure of ambivalence exists in determining the most suitable and vital role for IOs in the global sphere. This becomes more apparent against the backdrop of a need to constantly accommodate the changing configuration of the society of states. IOs' ability to assume different roles permits that, despite them essentially being one grouping of the role-players in the society of states, they can be perceived as three different phenomena. The three roles IOs play modify the character of world politics, adding a distinctiveness which stems from the threefold dimensions added to the international domain — as opposed to the sole position of actor traditionally occupied by states.

The arguments reveal that possessing a one-dimensional view of IOs' role would signify an incomplete — and essentially flawed — assessment of their contribution to global politics. As such, the view that IOs are merely instrumentalist in their global role, or are simply actors, is myopic and fails to consider their broader effect on the global system. Indeed, Archer underscores all three roles as pivotal in assessing the role of IOs in international society. The role of the UN in the global community, for instance, is perceived to be compatible with the parameters of his classification. Following this conclusion, IOs' various functioning as instruments, arenas and actors is utilised as a blueprint for evaluating the UN's role in the implementation of selected MDGs in the subsequent chapters.

In chapter three, the UN's historical role in child development was broadly outlined. Despite the fact that children may not have originally constituted a priority focus of UN operations, the development of the 'child' has been incorporated into the UN mandate, as the need for this became apparent. The explicit inclusion of child rights in the international human rights agenda and the normative promotion of IR attention to children are two milestones actualised by the UN's involvement in promoting the interests of children. The extension of the UN's mandate to the developing world was also significant in that it laid the foundation for UN child development focus in these areas. This foundation broadens scope for evaluation of the UN's global role. The acknowledgement on the global agenda of education as an indispensable element of child rights was furthermore noteworthy due to the opportunity to foment efforts towards achieving this objective, especially in the developing world.

Events such as the *Jomtien World Summit for Children* in 1990 and the 2000 Millennium Summit stand out for inserting child-related priorities onto the global agenda. They also emphasise the UN's ability as an arena to gather stakeholders and key actors for the prioritisation of children. The MDGs remain the boldest UN move in ensuring children are key priorities in the international human security agenda. Their influence on the global framework is evident in that they have been used as a benchmark for gauging child survival and development. The UN's role in combating child mortality, for example, has been significantly enhanced with the inclusion of this aspect as one of its MDGs.

The UNs' role in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among West African children was discussed in chapter four against the background that the organisation considers itself to play various roles in the achievement of development. The chapter uncovered the depths of underdevelopment experienced in West Africa, which is ensnared by poverty, disease and hunger on a level second to none. Underdevelopment has a significant effect on children due to their susceptibility to the harsh effects of poverty and the crippling effect of malnutrition and disease on their development. Individual governmental and regional incapacity to tackle these issues necessitate a UN responsibility to address these ills, and the organisation's global centrality in this quest manifests in its triad of roles.

The UN's role as instrument in achieving poverty and hunger eradication in West Africa is one that comprises of the organisation being used as publicist of its member states' support for the twin goals of extreme poverty and hunger eradication. This is not equal to the UN being used as instrument in achieving these goals. Therefore, it plays a minimal role as instrument in this regard. The organisation is seen to play more vigorous roles as arena and actor in achieving this MDG.

Chapter four yielded the following main conclusions pertaining to the UN's triad of roles in addressing extreme poverty and hunger eradication in West African children; firstly, the utilisation of the UN as an instrument of its members, is linked to a perceived need by its members to achieve the objectives of the organisation. However the absence of this need may be due to two possibilities: either that other global actors are meeting these objectives, or that the UN members have no *bona fide* interest in achieving them. Secondly, the UN's role as actor entails it pro-actively and independently engaging in acts towards the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger among West African children. Despite its shortcomings, this role signifies its most targeted attempt in achieving these goals. Linked to the first conclusion, therefore, is that if this objective is being met by the UN's role as actor, the need to embody an instrument is therefore non-existent. It thus negates the need for the UN to serve as an instrument of its members in achieving poverty and hunger eradication among West African children. This is distinguishable from the UN's role as arena, which does not interfere with its role as instrument or actor. Resultantly, the IO exists successfully as both arena and actor in eradicating poverty and hunger facing the children of West Africa.

Education has long been established as an indispensable element in the eradication of extreme poverty, but the institutional incapacity of many governments obfuscates this prioritisation. This again presents the UN with a niche, in terms of the need for the IO to provide quality education and access to it in areas of West Africa. Chapter five attests to the host of crises confronting the region's educational systems and the UN's assumption of a triad of roles as it addresses these issues.

In meeting the objective of universal primary education among West African children, the UN plays its roles as instrument, arena and actor to varying degrees. As instrument,

the UN plays a token role, limited to the portrayal of its member states' commitment to the second MDG in West Africa. As arena, the UN's role is more quantifiable, but the most expansive role of the UN in achieving universal primary education is its position as actor.

### **6.3 THE UNITED NATIONS AS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION: A GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF ITS TRIADIC ROLE**

As an organisation comprised of sovereign states, the extent to which the UN is used as instrument of its members for general child development largely depends on two aspects: the level to which such interventions impact on individual state sovereignty and the level of political traction to utilise the organisation accordingly. As an important caveat to the above, it should be noted that the instrumental use of the UN could potentially have negative and positive repercussions.

States' wielding of power over the UN empowers them to utilise the IO as an instrument for the extension of their national policy objectives. The extent to which UN organs will be used for child development is therefore determined by individual states, who have the ability to use the UN as they deem fit. The bulk of UN child development projects is aimed at the developing world, but the onus to 'instrumentalise' the UN rests on member states that possess substantial influence over the organisation and have the political resolve to commit aid and resources towards the development of children — in other words the developed member states.

The UN's passive role as instrument denies it the full capacity to act towards the achievement of its developmental objectives. The organisation is thus incapacitated and unable to operate in autonomously formulating the required objectives, let alone implement them. Delay in incorporating important issues such as child survival in its development agenda, can be linked to its inability to prioritise key objectives without the initiative of its leading member states. Extensive reliance on member states for manoeuvring in the field of development is a considerable impediment to achievement in the area of extreme poverty and hunger or universal primary education. The fact that the

UN and its developmental agencies remain intermediary organisations between the legally sovereign states for which they work and the target groups for which they advocate and negotiate, is part of the reason that UN socioeconomic undertakings with regard to West Africa's children are delayed.

Because the UN's role as instrument is determined by its member states, the organisations' role in this regard is limited. However, other issues additionally come to play in limiting the UN's role to that of instrument in the first MDG. Lack of member states' political will to implement their rhetorical expressions of collective support for normative goals; weak institutional capacity to make efficient use of funds donated and a dominant UN role as actor in accomplishing the goals, all restrict the UN's role as instrument.

Based on these considerations, Clive Archer's argument that the UN is used as an instrument of its members, finds little pertinence with regards to more powerful UN members and the realisation of the goal to achieve universal primary education in West Africa. The UN's role however expands to include the facilitation of cooperation between states and other actors towards the achievement of the second MDG and this is embodied in its role as arena.

As arena, the UN assembles states in order to secure their commitment to the advancement of an agenda for children's development. In fulfilling this role, the UN convenes the necessary actors for cooperation towards addressing a variety of development challenges facing the child. For instance, it provides a setting for states and INGOs to synchronise advocacy and to strengthen partnerships for achieving other child development objectives. As arena, the UN's duties are quantifiable in that it serves as the forum for a myriad of child-development cooperatives.

The UN has been the primary arena for discussions on the goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and it has set the scene for subsequent collaborations and discussions between stakeholders, including national policy advisers of West Africa states, on this subject. Similarly, the forum created by the UN facilitated the initial cooperation towards the goal to achieve universal primary education. More so, the UN serves as a venue for



enhancing the channels of contact between states in order to ensure that these goals are reached. Its position as arena for discourses surrounding child poverty, child hunger and primary education is therefore one that serves as a catalyst for subsequent dialogue. Consequently, the contribution made by the UN as arena in achieving its development goals is a continuous and pivotal one.

Despite the fact that a meeting place or venue implies a measure of neutrality, this same neutrality is not observable in the UN's role as arena for the achievement of its MDGs among West African children. This is because the UN's image as a strong proponent of child development is difficult to separate from its aim of providing a forum for discussion. Therefore, despite the fact that the UN is an arena for cooperation, calm reasoning and dialogue, it is also an 'opinionated arena' or an arena with normative underpinnings, in favour of child development. For this reason, it creates a forum for discussion and collaboration towards objectives, which are in line with its principles and goals. In this regard, the UN provides a medium for the other actors and stakeholders to cooperate towards children's development but it does not accommodate a discourse on issues that contradict child development or welfare. As such, the role it plays as arena involves its implicit endorsement of efforts that promote child development. The UN has indeed been the focal point for various discussions towards the actualisation of the MDGs in West Africa and elsewhere. It has repeatedly played host to discussions on development projects and initiatives. As arena, the opportunity presented by the UN is crucial in that it has created appropriate settings for funds to be pledged towards development goals.

The UN's role as arena is inseparable from the organisation's other two roles in the achievement of the first two MDGs. This is primarily because the UN provides member states, which utilise the organisation as an instrument for their own objectives, with an arena for discussion. Also, as actor towards achieving the MDGs, the UN is 'present' in General Assembly meetings with other actors and stakeholders where it simultaneously facilitates child development through its role as arena.

Whether relevant to general child development, or specifically regarding the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger or achieving universal primary education, the UN's role morphs into that of an actor when it partners with other actors in achieving these objectives. As actor, the UN sets benchmarks and then influences West African governments as well as other stakeholders to actualise developmental objectives. It does so *inter alia* through partnering with key role players, monitoring their progress, advocating for children and building capacity in local governments and communities. Beyond this, the UN serves as the primary global counsel towards child development. Part of its role herein is to link children's needs to macroeconomic policies, emphasising a need for governments' explicit inclusion of children in poverty reduction initiatives.

However, the UN additionally serves as a global manager and as a global coordinator of the different roles to be played by global actors in MDG achievement. UNICEF, in particular, is a pivotal coordinator of approaches towards the development of West African and other children

An observable characteristic of the UN's role as actor is the multitude of UN partnerships with different sectors. These joint ventures could have a two-fold impact on the aims of poverty eradication and universal primary education in West Africa. A myriad of partnerships may ultimately advance the goal of universal primary education, through the synchronisation of efforts and sharing of resources and knowledge. Conversely, numerous collaborations could impede the development goal of universal primary education, through the overlapping of development projects and a failure to adequately coordinate such projects. Could a further drawback of widespread partnering be the inhibition of constructive criticism? This would be on the basis that by strategic partnering with potential critics, notably NGOs, the UN would increase its number of collaborators and thus reduce its critics. This is an area of inquiry that warrants further research.

As mentioned earlier, the UN's role as instrument in efforts towards extreme poverty and hunger reduction and the achievement of universal primary education is nominal, and overshadowed by its roles as actor and arena. As actor, the UN's role is continuous and proactive. While the UN's role as arena in attaining both goals is quantifiable, it remains

essentially limited to that of offering a forum for discussion and cooperation. The UN's role as actor is resultantly the most expansive of the three, and could be the most effective in achieving these MDGs. The role of the UN as actor in child development affairs is overwhelmingly prominent; in fact it is so broad, that it is spread thinly in its duties towards children. The scope of its mandate creates difficulty when gauging the effectiveness of the UN, because its numerous activities within the various UN specialised agencies are not sufficiently harmonised. Competition among the numerous, and in some cases parallel development programmes within UN agencies, has resulted in less output and efficiency (Gregg 1972: 244). Analysts argue that this has been, and still is, a barrier in the maximisation of the UN's developmental role as concerns children and more generally.

Moreover, the UN's role towards child development is paradoxical in that it may advise governments and assist when requested to, but it has no authority over internal state matters. It also lacks authority to override government decisions on child welfare and development. Any influence it possesses in adjusting national policies to UN norms is therefore purely as a result of voluntary shifts in governments' policies.

#### **6.4 SUMMATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The broad hypothesis was that in supporting West African states' achievement of certain child-related development goals, the UN plays a role that is triadic in nature, with each of these roles being interactive with each other and in turn impacting on the achievement of its child-related MDGs, in West Africa. After evaluating the UN's role, it can be said that this supposition is accurate. To varying levels, the UN plays three roles, which are not only inextricably linked but also affect the actualisation of its first two child-related MDGs in West Africa. This is to the end that the UN's role as actor plays a central part in bringing about development policies and actualising them. Similarly, the UN's position as arena facilitates cooperation between actors for the realisation of these development objectives. However the UN's role as instrument adversely influences the actualisation of these MDGs primarily because the organisation is not essentially used as an instrument towards their achievement.

The primary sub-hypothesis noted that the projected role of the UN as IO is to fulfil a triad of duties namely to serve as instrument, arena and actor, in meeting its responsibilities to the society of states, as the need arises. However in IR theory the role of IOs is not consistently conceptualised according to this framework, and a different emphasis is detectable depending on whether the issue is reflected upon by liberalist, realist and constructivist scholars.

The arena dimension of IO's role can be attributed to liberalist inclinations, which emphasise the importance of IOs in facilitating cooperation. The IO role as actor towards the achievement of goals, which enhances human development and mitigates conflict, is also accommodated by liberalist thinking, which places a premium on peace advocacy, collective conflict prevention and human security.

The IO classification that likens IOs' role to that of instrument of other actors — notably states — is most evident within the realists' conceptual framework. Realists consider states as primary and unitary actors on the world stage and assume that they have an inclination towards utilising IOs in the pursuit of national self-interest.

Because constructivists adhere to the line of thought that IOs influence a society's interests and ideas, as well as reflect a society's evolving interests and ideas, their theoretical framework is linked to all three components of Archer's classification. According to constructivists, an IO is resultantly used as instruments of states and other actors, due to the perceived need to pursue desired objectives. IOs are also considered to become arenas in response to a pervasive interest that requires them to facilitate interaction and cooperation towards certain ends. Similarly, IOs are transformed into important actors in global politics in response to the need for global actors to address needs that states are incapable of addressing individually. These actors in turn, influence the identities and interests of member states.

The second sub-hypothesis presupposed that the UN has historically possessed the practical ability to promote sustainable children's development and security, but that its actualisation of these goals has often been problematic. One reason provided for this was

that the UN succeeds only partially in its endeavours because its use as instrument by its member states renders it dependent on them for funding and policy direction. In addition the conflict between the furtherance of socio-economic developmental objectives and the principle of non-interference in states' domestic affairs interferes with the UN's freedom to implement its goals.

As observed, weak political traction in realising some child development objectives impedes the robust implementation of UN goals towards child development. Furthermore, because the UN has no jurisdiction over matters considered canonically intra-state, it is not granted total freedom to implement the necessary policies for the achievement of goals relating to child development. The UN is therefore dependent on states to create a favourable environment for the actualisation of child-related objectives.

The UN's role as evaluated against its achievement of its MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger among children in West Africa would be found to be inhibited by various obstacles of a political, economic and climatic nature.

Firstly, the lack of donor funding to assist the UN in its objective to achieve the MDG of eradicating poverty and hunger remains a major economic obstacle in West African states. A related aspect is the UN's dependence on development aid for the achievement of this MDG in West Africa. Because aid is subjected to much political posturing, the challenge it presents is not only of an economic but of a political nature. It is for this reason that the developmental credentials of development aid have been subjected to so much IR debate.

The barriers faced by the UN in achieving the first MDG in West African children are entrenched by the considerable measure of antagonism it encounters as an entity, whose leadership does not accurately represent the political demographics of global relations. The visible absence of developing states among the permanent members of the Security Council projects an imperialist image to the developing world, and inhibits West African and other developing nations from fully cooperating with the entity in its child development role (Miljeteig-Olssen 1990: 151). The absence of developing world representatives, and specifically West African states, within the permanent core of the Security Council subtracts from the Council's inclination to view the needs of children in

West Africa with the urgency that would result in the allocation of resources towards child development in this region, as part of broader human security interventions. The profile of the UN's political leadership therefore impedes its ability to act maximally as advocate for children from more disadvantaged regions.

However, weak political will or unfavourable policy within some West African governments was also found to hamper the achievement of this MDG.

By the same token, the UN's role as measured against its MDG to provide universal primary education for children in West Africa is dependent on a myriad of political, cultural and economic factors. Inadequate funding for UN development projects and unfavourable policy environment within state bureaucracies are some of the most prevalent variables that impact negatively on the achievement of the UN's MDGs. An interplay between national, regional and international factors was shown to impact on the achievement of both MDGs.

On the national level, weak political will within governments was found to be an overarching impediment to the realisation of both MDGs assessed. On the regional level, the spill-over effects of civil war within countries in the region, as well as the incapacity to adequately manage these challenges was an overarching obstacle to the achievement of both these MDGs. At the international level, the organisational impediments discussed within the UN, and the selective instrumental use of the UN by its stronger members, were found to pose significant barriers to the achievement of both the MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and that of achieving universal primary education.

While the challenge posed by traditional practices, specifically concerning the girl-child's role in society, is evident in both MDGs, it is particularly glaring and inhibitive in the MDG to achieve universal primary education.

## **6.5 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE COURSE OF THE RESEARCH**

Gaps are visible in aligning the UN's first two MDGs in West Africa, to Archer's classification of IOs. This is for various reasons. Firstly because although the aspects of

instrument, arena and actor are evident at first glance, the varying levels to which these aspects exist raise the question as to whether or not there is room for a theoretical framework that fits closer to the mould of the UN. For instance, the UN plays a more robust role as actor than it does as arena. It also has a more apparent role as arena than it has as instrument.

Another pertinent reason is the conflict that exists between the UN's roles of instrument and actor. The fact that as actor, the UN's role expunges the organisation's role as instrument, the compatibility of the UN's role as instrument as well as independent actor in achieving the two MDGs in West Africa is questionable. Due to the fact that a conflict in the interests of the state could jeopardise the UN's endeavours in advancing child development, critics have argued that the UN's position as an instrument of states will always constrain its ability to play a constructive child development role, especially as actor. In addition, the independence of the UN as an actor comes into question due in large part to the fact that the UN may achieve the objective of child development as actor only if a given government does not object to its approach. As such, its ability to act independently remains constrained by the government in whose territory it intends to act.

A third problem is linked to the UN's authentic neutrality as arena. This is on the basis that the UN espouses a normative core, which cannot be separated from its identity as arena. The issue of neutrality and the UN as arena therefore co-exist with some difficulty.

Certain difficulties in gathering information to pursue the research objectives also presented. These stemmed from the absence of reliable or recent data with which to assess the individual governments' responses to the pandemic of extreme poverty and hunger or the challenges of decrepit primary education systems. The extent of these challenges poses a significant threat to the availability of sufficient and up to date data. While this weakness is not endemic to statistics on all West African states, its existence in the more challenged areas of the region represented a fundamental problem in addressing the research questions.

## **6.6 PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

As predicted, the inductive nature of the research provided information that may contribute to the field of existing knowledge, but also revealed the lack of information in certain areas and imperative for further research therein. One such aspect is the UN's general role towards children. As an IO, the UN aims to foster cooperation towards the achievement of certain ends. Although children and their development are on the UN's agenda, this prioritisation is not substantially reflected in the research available within the field of IR. Areas such as child protection, especially as it relates to the UN's responsibility and duty should be delved into in greater depth. While the research provided a brief overview of the UN's historical and evolving role in child development, not enough ground was covered to provide an holistic perspective on this crucial responsibility of the IO.

The nature of the UN's role in collaborating with other IOs and regional organisations towards achieving its MDGs, is also a theme that warrants specific investigation. This would elaborate on the UN's role in ensuring that other IOs prioritise the MDGs to the same extent. In Africa, this would specifically probe the UN's relationship with the AU and various sub-regional communities such as ECOWAS and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Similarly, the UN's role in achieving its MDGs in other sub-regions of Africa or its role in working with African governments within a sub-region towards achieving the MDGs, are grounds for research. The horn of Africa, for instance, is another sub-region in Africa with a precarious socio-economic condition. Research done in this area would take account of the depths of the socio-economic malaises and underline the UN's undertakings to address the challenges. Such research is important because the success of the UN achieving its own MDGs cannot be adequately gauged without thorough investigation into all developing areas of the world.

## **6.7 CONCLUSION**

IOs' contribution to the sphere of IR is dynamic and far-reaching. Their relationship with and involvement in states transcends inter-state interaction, in that it impacts on global



human development. This contribution to states and the development of their citizens has additionally moulded the perception of IOs' role. IOs have come to be perceived as encompassing a threefold role, and this is illustrated most aptly by Archer, who argues that IOs fulfil different roles in one. Applying all three roles to the UN's goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and achieving universal primary education among West African children can be viewed as a litmus test for Archer's conceptualisation. In many respects, Archer's framework is relevant. However the existence of all three roles in the same functional space has notable, and often contradictory implications.

The UN clearly has a key role towards the development of children and specifically towards children in West Africa. However while the UN generally plays its roles as actor and arena in achieving its first two MDGs among West African children with relative ease, its role as instrument is typically dependent on the agendas of other actors. It can be surmised, in conclusion, that the UN is a prominent actor, an effective arena and a versatile but under-utilised instrument in the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and the achievement of universal primary education among West African children.

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