

Third world countries in search of an identity

For the third world countries, economic security frequently takes on highly specific aspects. The problems faced by the oil-based economies in launching a broader industrialization process, together with the failures of intra-arab economic cooperation, are telling examples. A brief analysis of the four year old Iranian revolution is a good reminder of the importance of value systems in defining the goals and nature of development and, therefore, of international economic relations. In this context, the rise of Islam fundamentalism in the vast region that extends from Morocco to Pakistan should receive more careful attention. Western economists too often fail to consider the importance of the many variables—cultural, religious, or political—that do not fit into their econometric models.

In a similar fashion, any analysis of development in Africa should consider the context of political and strategic insecurity in which it usually takes place. This is particularly true of the countries in Southern Africa. Economic priorities, such as efforts at regional cooperation, cannot be divorced from their fundamental dependence on a powerful South African Republic that most African countries perceive as a threat to their dignity and, more often than not, to their physical security.

The halting progress of the North-South dialogue, in spite of the encouraging results recorded at the Paris Conference on the least developed countries, therefore has a twofold significance. It testifies to the inadequacy of international cooperation but at the same time to the inability to set suitably pertinent goals for such cooperation. An agenda built around the contemporary challenges of economic insecurity rather than around ideological world views would certainly hold greater promise for revitalizing this cooperation.