

Lecture 1: Development

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Development

- Development today must be considered in a context of deepening poverty, rising ecological crises, and increasing social unrest across the globe
- The Global South faces particular challenges, with widespread economic deprivation and environmental vulnerability that limit prospects for sustainable growth
- Political responses vary, from nationalist economic strategies in the Global North to transnational countermovements seeking social justice and environmental sustainability



Global crises and destitution

- Many communities face destitution as economic instability and environmental disasters intensify across the world, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable
- International solidarity remains weak, while grievance politics over globalization has fueled populist authoritarian movements in many countries
- The key challenge is to reverse harmful trends and ensure a sustainable and just future for both human societies and ecosystems



Countermovements for justice

- Countermovements across the globe seek to address global inequalities and ecological destruction through advocacy, solidarity, and grassroots action
- Sanctuary cities support migrants, the food sovereignty movement promotes local agricultural control, and Indigenous movements fight to protect ecosystems
- These efforts challenge dominant development models that prioritize economic growth over justice and sustainability

Nationalism vs. globalization

- In response to social unrest, countries in the Global North increasingly adopt economic nationalism and green industrial policies to secure jobs and supply chains
- By contrast, Global South economies often remain dependent on exports of raw materials and labor-intensive goods, reinforcing structural inequalities
- This divergence complicates efforts at global cooperation on development, climate change, and equity



Colonial legacies

- Modern development patterns are deeply shaped by the legacy of European colonialism, which created systems of global resource extraction and labor exploitation
- Colonial economies were organized around providing raw materials and labor for European industrialization and wealth accumulation
- Today, these patterns persist in global trade and investment, perpetuating inequalities between the Global North and South

Relational perspective

- Development is not simply a linear process moving from tradition to modernity as often portrayed in Western narratives
- This view ignores the contributions of non-European societies, including Indigenous peoples who have preserved most of the planet's biodiversity
- A relational perspective recognizes the global power dynamics that shape uneven development outcomes

Colonialism and inequality

- European colonial expansion laid the groundwork for extreme global wealth inequalities that continue today
- The richest 20% of the world's population benefit from systems financed by the labor and resources of the bottom 80%
- Such unequal exchanges remain embedded in global trade and investment practices

Neoliberal globalization

- Neoliberal globalization has promoted deregulation, privatization, and market-driven policies that exacerbate inequalities
- Global institutions encouraged free-market reforms that enriched corporate elites while undermining stable employment and social services
- Environmental degradation has intensified as economic growth models prioritize profit over ecological sustainability

GDP limitations

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures the total economic output of a country—meaning all marketed goods and services
- GDP measures economic output but ignores social and environmental well-being
- GDP does not account for labor exploitation, unpaid care work, or ecological harm
- Despite these shortcomings, GDP remains the dominant indicator used to assess development progress globally



Mass consumption

- Western mass consumption relies on global supply chains that extract resources and labor from the Global South
- Products like clothing, food, and smartphones often originate from exploited labor and degraded environments
- This system sustains inequality while placing heavy ecological burdens on poorer regions

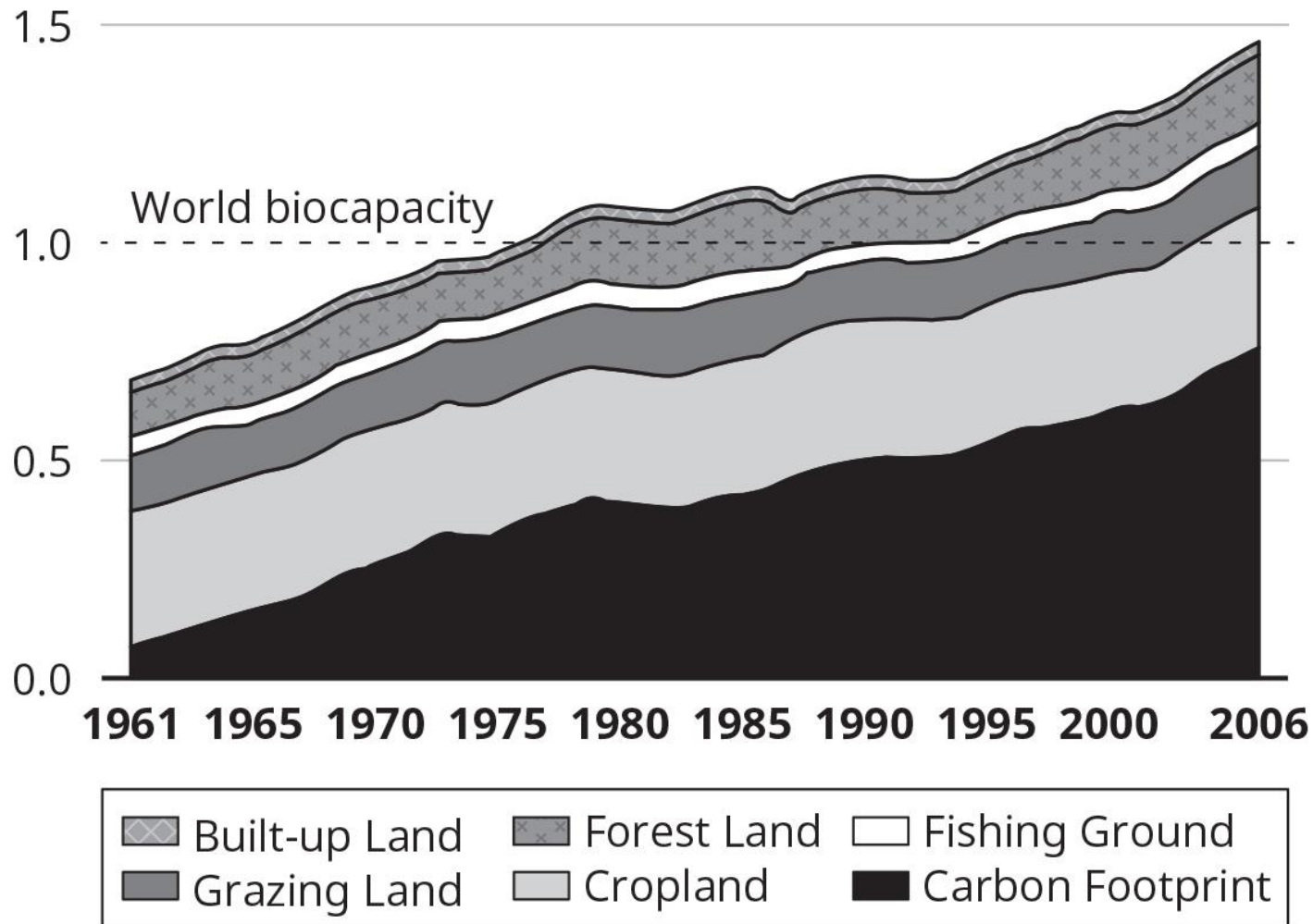
Ecological footprint

- Humanity's ecological footprint exceeds Earth's capacity, as global resource consumption accelerates beyond sustainable levels
- The carbon-intensive lifestyles of wealthier nations is responsible for the grossly uneven greenhouse gas emissions
- This Western lifestyle disproportionately drive climate change and environmental destruction
- These impacts fall hardest on vulnerable populations least responsible for causing them



FIGURE 1.1 ■ Humanity's Ecological Footprint

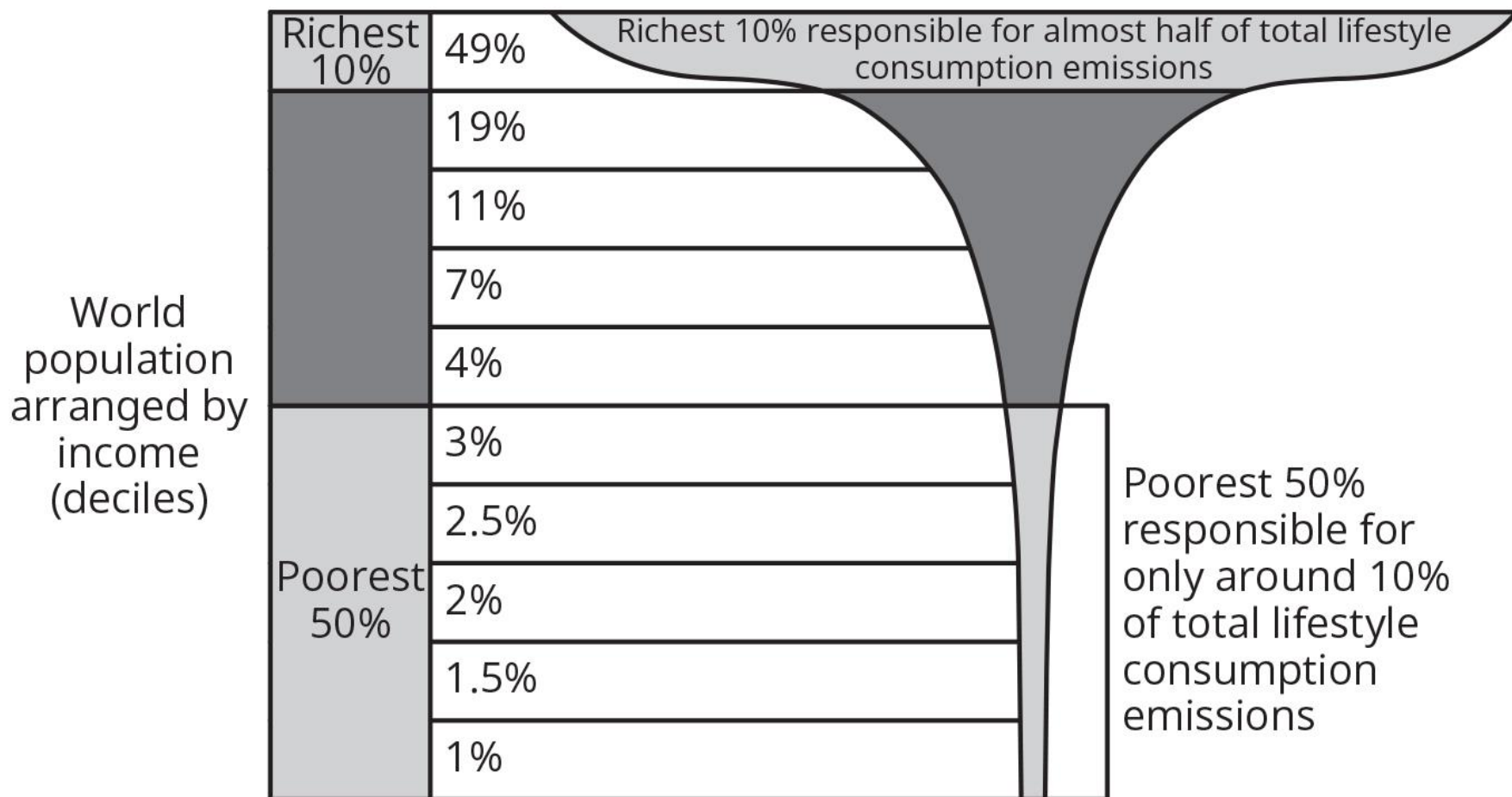
Ecological Footprint (number of Earths)



Source: Global Footprint Network, 2010 National Footprint Accounts.

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Global Income Deciles and Associated Lifestyle Consumption

Percentage of CO₂ emissions by world population



Source: Oxfam, reproduced in Beuret (2019).

Social engineering

- Development in Europe began as a project of social engineering, managing the disruptions caused by industrialization
- Development became an extension of modern social engineering in the colonies, justified through ideologies rooted in racism
- Elites promoted policies to stabilize society while fostering capitalist growth
- In colonies, development meant imposing forced labor, segregated settlements, and exploitative infrastructure projects



Political project

- Development is not just an unfolding of social change, but a political intervention shaped by power
- It reflects ideological beliefs about progress and improvement, often linked to European or Western values
- Development policies manage technological change and social transformations, frequently reinforcing existing inequalities

Naturalizing development

- Development is often equated with rising consumption, privileging markets as engines of change
- This view, rooted in neoclassical economics, assumes humans are naturally self-interested
- Karl Polanyi argued this ignores values like cooperation, redistribution, and reciprocity
- For Polanyi and other social theorists, pursuit of individualism via an economic calculus is quite novel in the history and organization of human societies, rather than inherent in social life



Development project

- Development Project as a consensus: 1940s–1970s
- The mid-20th century saw development linked to decolonization and nation-building
- Newly independent states adopted national economic plans inspired by Western models
- International institutions promoted growth through industrialization and consumption, often sidelining local priorities

Rostow's stages of growth

- Rostow's model depicted development as a linear process with stages from traditional society to high mass consumption
- It positioned the U.S. consumer society as the ideal end point for all nations
- This model ignored historical exploitation and structural inequalities that shape development paths

Dependency theory

- Dependency theory argues that European wealth was built on the underdevelopment of colonized regions
- Former colonies continue to supply cheap resources and labor to wealthier nations, maintaining dependency
- Development and underdevelopment are interconnected in a global system of unequal exchange

World-system theory

- World-system theory sees the world as a single economic system divided into core, periphery, and semi-periphery zones
- Core regions concentrate capital and high-skill production, while peripheral regions provide raw materials and cheap labor
- The system reproduces inequality and reinforces global hierarchies

Agrarian change

- Industrial agriculture displaces small-scale farming, often with harmful ecological effects
- Small farmers produce most of the world's food but face discrimination in global markets
- Agribusiness benefits from subsidies and policies that marginalize traditional farming cultures

Ecological blind spots

- Development theories have often ignored the environmental costs of industrialization and urbanization
- Large-scale agriculture, mining, and manufacturing contribute heavily to climate change and biodiversity loss
- Sustainable alternatives are needed to address these ecological crises

Development paradoxes

- **Environmentalism's paradox:** Rising well-being despite worsening ecosystems
- **Development paradox:** Universalization of U.S.-style high mass consumption economy would require several planet Earths
- **Ultimate paradox:** Environment is not equipped to absorb exploitation of endless accumulation
- Environmental costs fall hardest on the poor
- These topics raise questions about frugality, cultural values, and how we define “progress”



Post-war development ideals

- After World War II, development was framed as a pathway to modernization and peace
- Institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations promoted national planning and industrial growth
- These ideals often masked geopolitical interests and reinforced unequal global structures

The Cold War

- During the Cold War, development became a tool of ideological competition
- The United States promoted capitalist modernization
- The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) offered socialist alternatives
- Many countries in the Global South navigated these tensions while pursuing their own national goals

National development planning

- Newly independent states embraced development planning to assert sovereignty
- These plans emphasized infrastructure, industrialization, and education
- However, external debts, unequal trade, and internal inequality often undermined their success

Development planning critiques

- Critics argue that top-down planning often ignored local needs and knowledge
- Projects frequently displaced people or failed to deliver promised benefits
- Dependency theorists highlighted how such planning reproduced colonial patterns of exploitation

Shift to neoliberalism

- In the 1980s, development strategies shifted toward neoliberalism
- States were encouraged—or forced—to reduce spending, privatize services, and open markets
- This transition weakened public institutions and increased vulnerability among the poor

Structural Adjustment Programs

- Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank cut public services and removed subsidies
- These programs disproportionately affected women, farmers, and the urban poor
- Critics argue SAPs deepened poverty and undermined long-term development

Rise of global finance

- Development became increasingly shaped by global financial markets
- Investment decisions were driven by profit, not social or environmental outcomes
- Volatility in capital flows exposed developing countries to frequent crises

Free trade and development

- Free trade agreements promised growth but often favored large corporations
- Small farmers and local producers struggled to compete with cheap imports
- These agreements undermined food sovereignty and domestic industry

Global commodity chains

- Modern production is organized through transnational supply chains
- Resources are extracted in one region, processed in another, and sold elsewhere
- These chains concentrate profits in the Global North while externalizing costs to the South

Race and development

- Development projects often reproduce racial hierarchies from the colonial era
- Communities of color are more likely to face displacement and environmental hazards
- Anti-racist approaches call for redistributing power and recognizing historical injustices

Gender and development

- Women have historically been excluded from development benefits and decision-making
- Development projects often increase women's unpaid labor without addressing inequality
- Feminist scholars advocate for gender-sensitive policies and recognition of care work

Labor exploitation

- Low-wage labor underpins global development, especially in export industries
- Labor rights are often weak in developing countries, exposing workers to abuse
- Development should prioritize decent work, fair wages, and safe conditions

Migration and development

- Migration is both a consequence of uneven development and a strategy for survival
- Migrants often send remittances home, sustaining local economies
- Yet they also face exploitation and exclusion in destination countries

Environment and extractivism

- Many development models rely on extractive industries like mining and logging
- These industries generate revenue but also cause ecological destruction
- Sustainable alternatives require shifting away from extraction toward regeneration

Indigenous alternatives

- Indigenous movements propose alternative ways of living and organizing society
- Concepts like *buen vivir* (“living well”) emphasize harmony with nature and collective well-being
- These alternatives challenge Western notions of progress and growth

Food sovereignty movement

- Food sovereignty promotes local control over food systems and agricultural policies
- It opposes corporate agribusiness and supports small-scale, sustainable farming
- This movement links environmental sustainability with cultural and economic autonomy



Climate change

- Climate change poses a major threat to development gains
- Poor countries contribute least to emissions but suffer the most
- Development strategies must align with climate adaptation and mitigation goals

The green economy

- The green economy seeks to decouple growth from environmental harm
- It emphasizes renewable energy, efficient technology, and low-carbon infrastructure
- Critics warn it may reproduce inequalities unless paired with justice-based reforms

Technology and inequality

- Technological advances can widen gaps between rich and poor
- Unequal access to the internet and digital tools limits opportunities
- Equitable development requires investing in inclusive technological infrastructure



Urbanization and development

- Rapid urban growth strains housing, water, and transportation systems
- Informal settlements often lack basic services and legal protection
- Urban development must include marginalized populations and prioritize affordable housing

Health and development

- Access to healthcare is critical for development but remains unequal
- Structural adjustment often reduced public health spending
- Global health programs must address underlying social and economic determinants

Education and social mobility

- Education is seen as a path to opportunity but varies in quality and access
- Neoliberal reforms have commercialized education in many regions
- A just development model invests in universal, equitable, and culturally relevant education



Debt and dependency

- Many developing nations are trapped in cycles of debt repayment
- Debt limits spending on health, education, and infrastructure
- Calls for debt cancellation argue it is essential for real development

South-South cooperation

- Countries in the Global South are forging new alliances and partnerships
- These aim to reduce reliance on Western aid and investment
- Examples include BRICS and regional development banks

Development indicators

- Beyond the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), new indicators assess well-being, equity, and sustainability
- The Human Development Index combines income, education, and life expectancy
- Gross National Happiness and ecological indicators offer alternative visions

Rethinking progress

- Progress need not mean more consumption or growth
- Well-being, ecological balance, and cultural integrity are alternative measures
- Development must be redefined to reflect these broader goals

Development and democracy

- Development often occurs in undemocratic contexts, raising concerns about accountability
- Large-scale projects may exclude public participation and suppress dissent
- Democratic development requires inclusive decision-making and respect for human rights

Authoritarian models

- Some regimes pursue rapid development through centralized control and repression
- While these models may achieve growth, they often silence opposition and harm communities
- Long-term development must balance efficiency with democratic legitimacy

Environmental justice

- Environmental justice links development with equity in the distribution of environmental harms and benefits
- Marginalized communities disproportionately face pollution, displacement, and resource loss
- Justice-oriented development prioritizes the rights of these communities

Development and displacement

- Infrastructure and resource projects frequently displace people from their homes and lands
- Displacement causes long-term economic, social, and psychological harm
- Responsible development must minimize displacement and ensure fair compensation



Cultural impacts

- Development projects can erode local cultures, languages, and traditions
- Modernization often promotes homogenization and marginalizes Indigenous knowledge
- Sustainable development must protect cultural diversity and autonomy

Global governance

- Global institutions like the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO) shape development policy
- Their decisions often reflect the interests of powerful countries and corporations
- Reform is needed to make global governance more equitable and responsive

Participatory development

- Participatory approaches involve communities in defining and directing development
- This improves project relevance, ownership, and outcomes
- It contrasts with top-down models that impose external agendas

Rise of civil society

- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), social movements, and grassroots organizations play growing roles in development
- They advocate for accountability, rights, and alternatives to mainstream models
- Civil society is a key force in democratizing development

Technology transfer

- Technology transfer can support industrialization and innovation in developing countries
- However, patents and trade rules often limit access
- Equitable transfer mechanisms are essential for technological inclusion

Aid and conditionality

- Foreign aid is often tied to political or economic conditions
- Conditionalities can undermine national sovereignty and priorities
- Many call for more transparent, needs-based, and unconditional forms of aid

Rise of China

- China's development trajectory challenges Western models
- The Chinese model emphasizes infrastructure and state-led growth, which has attracted interest globally
- However, its approach also raises concerns about debt and dependency

Digital development

- Digital technologies can drive development but also increase inequalities
- Marginalized groups often lack access to internet, skills, or infrastructure
- Dealing with the digital divide is essential for inclusive growth

Youth and development

- Young people are central to future development but face increasing precarity
- Education and job opportunities remain uneven
- Youth-led movements are demanding climate justice, equity, and meaningful participation

Sustainable development

- The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to integrate equity, environment, and economy
- Progress toward SDGs varies widely by country
- Critics highlight gaps in enforcement, funding, and political will

Role of social movements

- Social movements resist harmful development and propose alternatives
- Examples include landless workers' movements, climate justice groups, and Indigenous coalitions
- These actors redefine what development should look like

Resilience and adaptation

- Resilience focuses on the capacity to cope with shocks and change
- Development must build adaptive systems that protect vulnerable populations
- This includes infrastructure, health systems, and social safety nets

Regenerative development

- Regenerative development restores ecosystems and communities rather than depleting them
- It emphasizes circular economies, agroecology, and cultural renewal
- This model challenges extractive logic and embraces long-term thinking



Epistemic justice

- Development often privileges Western knowledge and marginalizes others
- Epistemic justice means valuing diverse worldviews and knowledge systems
- Co-creating knowledge with communities improves outcomes and accountability



Development education

- Development studies must critically engage with power, history, and inequality
- Teaching should include voices from the Global South and marginalized groups
- Education can be a tool for transformation and solidarity

21st century development

- Development is at a crossroads amid climate crisis, inequality, and geopolitical shifts
- Future paths must be democratic, just, and ecologically sustainable
- A reimagined development process centers human dignity, planetary health, and global solidarity

Summary

- This chapter introduced development as a contested and evolving concept
- We examined its historical roots, dominant paradigms, critiques, and emerging alternatives
- Key themes included inequality, sustainability, power, and participation
- Understanding development requires a relational lens—connecting local and global, past and future, people and planet

Questions for reflection

1. How have historical legacies shaped current development challenges?
2. What are the strengths and limits of mainstream development models?
3. How can we center justice and sustainability in development?
4. Whose voices are missing in dominant narratives?
5. What does development mean to you—and how might it be reimaged?



Selected websites

- Global Exchange

www.globalexchange.org

- New Internationalist

www.newint.org

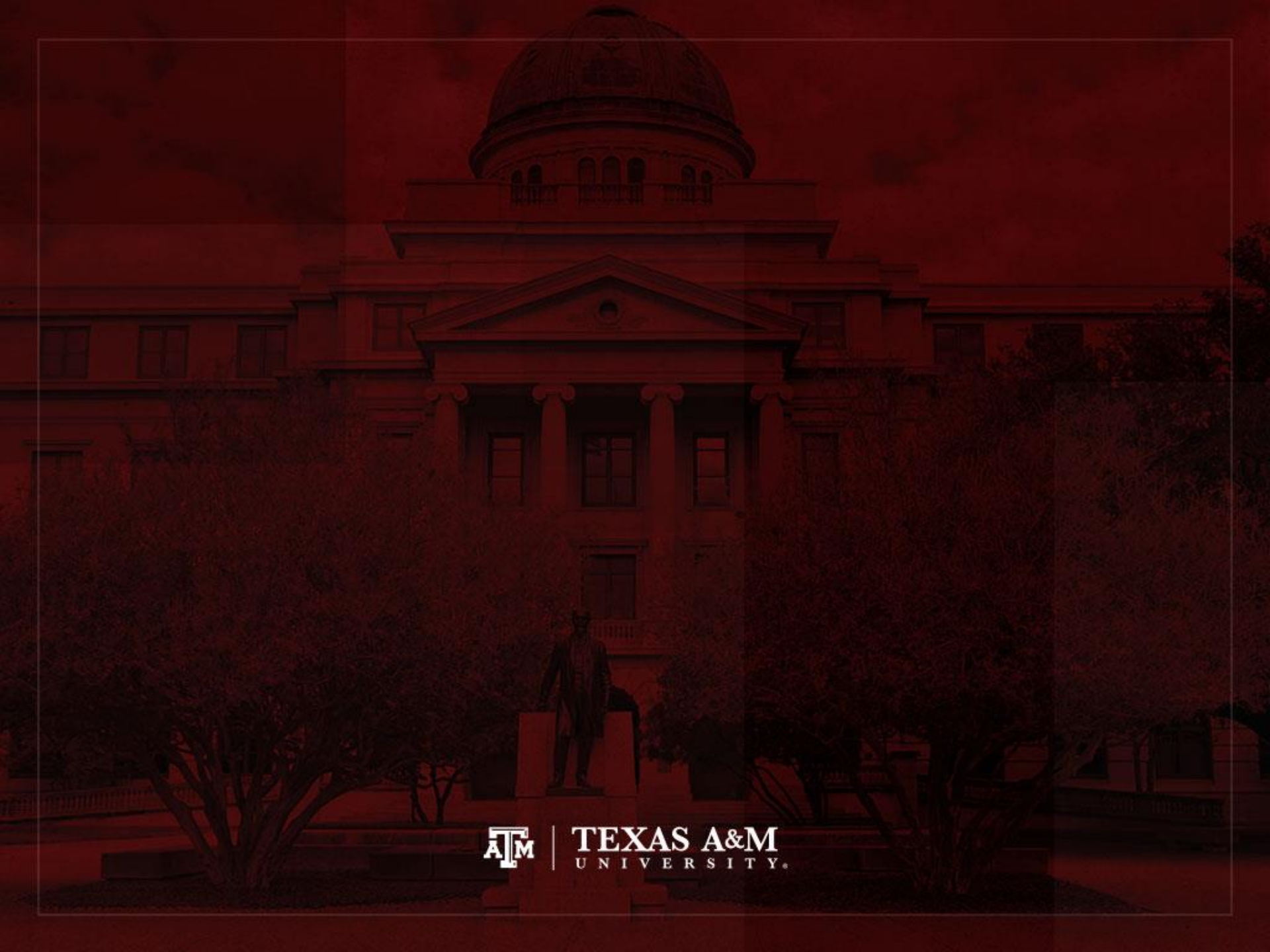
- UNDP Human Development Reports

hdr.undp.org

- World Bank, World Development Report

www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr/wdr-archive





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