

World Bank

Role

With an early (1968–1980) focus on countries in the developing world, the World Bank increased the size and number of loans to such borrowers. There was a policy move towards building schools and hospitals, improving literacy and agricultural reform. From 1980–1990 lending was made to service the debt of the developing world. Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) aimed to streamline the economies of the developing nations. From 1990 onwards policy was aimed towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Criticisms:

- Adoption of too many western practices and the abandonment of traditional economic structures.
- Assumption that low-income countries cannot modernise without monetary advice from abroad.
- The institution is run and governed by a small number of rich countries but should be representing more than 180 countries fairly.
- Too much focus on GDP and not enough on living standards.

IPCC

Role

Its purpose is to provide policymakers with an objective opinion on:

- causes of climate change
- potential environmental impacts
- possible response options

The IPCC collects and assesses the best available scientific, technical and socio-economic information on climate change. Its reports are policy-relevant not policy-prescriptive.

Criticisms:

- A lack of specific guidance on how countries should lower emissions.
- It has allegedly diluted the impacts of climate change due to political pressure from industrialised nations such as China, Brazil and the USA.
- The process of reporting has been called into question after errors in some reports.

IMF

Role

The primary role is to stabilise international exchange rates and facilitate development. More than 180 members contribute to a pool; member countries with a payment imbalance may borrow on a temporary basis and G20 countries contribute the most. Members with a balance of payment problem can request loans to help fill gaps.

Criticisms:

- A lack of concern for democracy and human rights – some military dictators have been supported.
- Advocates ‘austerity programmes’ for weak economies.
- Slow to react to crisis situations.
- Mostly controlled by western economies.

WTO

Role

The WTO deals with rules of trade between nations as well as being a forum for governments to negotiate trade deals and acting as a place for settling trade disputes. In 2001 the organisation launched talks (the Doha Development Agenda) to enhance the participation of poorer countries. The aim was to make globalisation more inclusive and help the world’s poor by removing trade barriers and subsidising farming.

Criticisms:

- Mostly controlled by western nations, especially the USA.
- The rights and democracy of poorer nations are not represented enough.
- Some large corporations are successfully reversing environmental protections, attacking them as barriers to trade.
- Some say the WTO is not doing enough to achieve equitable distribution of food.
- The Doha trade talks eventually collapsed due to disagreement between the USA, China and India, which would not reduce tariffs.