



**TOGETHER**  
*for a sustainable future*

# Building ideas from data and practice **The intellectual history of UNIDO**



UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

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Those who cannot remember  
the past are condemned to repeat it.

– George Santayana

# FOREWORD



It is my great pleasure to celebrate this year a half century of UNIDO contributing to the eradication of poverty through industrial development. The Organization was founded In November 1966 to promote, assist and accelerate the industrialization of developing countries, with a special emphasis on manufacturing. During this spell, UNIDO has contributed greatly to building stable economic competitiveness, safeguarding the environment and creating shared prosperity in its Member States.

This juncture represents an ideal time to take stock of what has been achieved thus far, and what challenges lay ahead for industrial development. This 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary history outlines the intellectual contribution made by UNIDO to international development thinking during this period.

Some of these contributions have been UNIDO's own creation and have broken new ground: most notably the annual Industrial Statistics Handbooks, which have become a vital support for researchers, policymakers and statisticians in the field of industrialization. At other times, UNIDO had adapted established knowledge and practice to conditions on the ground to bolster the effect of our interventions.

As we can see herein, UNIDO has been resolute to move with the times, streamlining and adapting its services to the changing needs of the world's poorest, without ever compromising its core mandate and commitment.

For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Organization drove much of its activities towards technology transfer and increasing the economic self-sufficiency of countries through industrialization. In the 1980s, UNIDO placed a greater emphasis on promoting investment and export-led growth, and embraced challenges of sustainability and South-South cooperation. The 1990s brought a fresh approach to private sector empowerment and diversification of funding sources for the Organization, while more recently UNIDO devoted substantial resources to the problems of the new Millennium, chiefly youth unemployment, increasing inequality and climate change.

Though it faced many obstacles over the past five decades, industrial development has proven a resilient antidote to the fused challenges of poverty, inequality and associated social and environmental maladies. This is most vividly demonstrated through the return of industrial policies in several developed countries which opposed industrialization during the zenith of Washington Consensus thinking in the 1990s.

This endurance is also proven in the Organization’s transition from promoting import substitution to a more free-market variant of industrial development, and in its greater emphasis on environmental and social sustainability since the early 1990s. This new departure was augmented in 2013, when UNIDO Member States adopted the Lima Declaration, endorsing inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID) for the implementation of their industrial development. ISID advocates that industrial output be underpinned by a robust social and environmental framework, ensuring that all people, whether they are men or women, young or old, urban or rural dwellers alike can reap the cross-dimensional benefits of greater industrial productivity.

The continuing relevance of industrialization to the wider multilateral objective of sustainable development was underlined at the 2015 Summit on Sustainable Development, at which United Nations Member States endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among them Goal 9, “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development and foster innovation”. This recognition of UNIDO’s mandate of ISID is essential to the achievement of the whole SDG framework, considering the overarching applicability of ISID to every goal within the 2030 Agenda.

We remain committed to the implementation of this ambitious Agenda, and thus look forward to working with traditional and new partners—including UNIDO Member States, counterpart organizations in the United Nations system, development finance institutions, the private sector and academia—to tap into the full spectrum of resources and expertise necessary to leverage the potential benefits of ISID for all people.

Today, UNIDO is making the necessary strides, jointly with our development partners, to make ISID a reality in the 2030 era. We look forward to joining hands with all sectors and partners to achieve this, and to continue providing the cutting-edge research and thought leadership underpinning our technical cooperation and programmatic activities.

LI Yong  
UNIDO Director General

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