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Fit for whose purpose?

Private funding and corporate influence
in the United Nations



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“Follow the money” is the recipe for good investigative journalism and Fit for Whose Purpose does precisely that for the institution created to defend global public goods.

Digging into the numbers behind the funding of the United Nations, Adams and Martens uncover a trail that leads to corporate interests having a disproportionate say over the bodies that write global rules. This book shows how Big Tobacco, Big Soda, Big Pharma and Big Alcohol end up prevailing and how corporate philanthropy and private-public-partnerships twist the international agenda without governments overseeing, but it also clearly spells out some practical ways to prevent it and rescue a citizens-based multilateralism.

Roberto Bissio, Coordinator of Social Watch

This is a thoroughly researched study that brings together the authors’ long personal and professional involvement in the United Nations with their insightful analysis and strong recommendations. It is timely indeed as our global challenges urgently needs a United Nations that is faithful to multilateralism and the values enshrined in its founding Charter. The authors make an irrefutable case that “We the peoples” and the responsibilities of governments cannot be replaced by a corporate agenda governed by corporate interests. It rings the alarm for governments and civil society to regain ownership of the UN.

Chee Yoke Ling, Director of Programmes, Third World Network

Using specific cases, this study illustrates the adverse impact of decades of the “zero growth doctrine” in the regular budget of the UN on its ability to fulfil its international mandates. Without core funding, UN managers scramble to design activities and accept projects of interest to private companies. This stance facilitates the creation of agencies and decisions that sustain the magnanimity of donors by giving them undue control over the setting of norms and standards. This has been distorting UN priorities. This inhibits the UN from being fit for the purpose of serving its real constituents.

Manuel (Butch) Montes, Senior Advisor, Finance and Development, South Centre

A most timely study that ought to concern all those who believe in the United Nations as a global public good. As an inter-governmental organization, the UN needs to preserve its own independence—financial as well as political. UN relations with the corporate sector deserve to be scrutinized and made more transparent so that important public functions do not risk becoming compromised by private interests. Many parliamentarians are unaware of the deterioration of UN funding highlighted in this well-researched report. I hope it will catch their attention.

Alessandro Motter, Senior Advisor, Inter-Parliamentary Union

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”
(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*)

This incisive and thoroughly researched report shows how the United Nations has become rather Humpty Dumpty’ish in its use of the word ‘partnerships’. By sanitizing the deep inroads that the private sector has made into global governance and agenda-setting, and already weakened by unstable financing, the UN runs the risk of becoming unfit for any purpose other than alignment to private corporate agendas as governance and democracy are fragmented, and become ever less transparent and accountable.

Gita Sen, General Coordinator, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)

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