

Background note for the 11th International Forum of NGOs in official Partnership with UNESCO

Challenging inequalities to build a just and peace society

“In a world characterized by an unprecedented level of economic development, technological means and financial resources, that millions of persons are living in extreme poverty is a moral outrage.”¹

Extreme inequality corrupts politics, hinders economic growth and stifles social mobility. It fuels crime and violent conflict. [...] . The rapid rise of extreme economic inequality is standing in the way of eliminating global poverty²

We can identify fundamental drivers of inequality—common factors that, worldwide, contribute to inequality’s many manifestations: **entrenched cultural narratives** that undermine fairness, tolerance, and inclusion; **failure to invest in and protect vital public goods** such as education and natural resources; **unfair rules of the economy** that magnify unequal opportunity and outcomes; **unequal access to government** decision making process and resources; **persistent prejudice and discrimination**, against women, people with disabilities and racial, ethnic, and caste minorities”³.

We can see that income inequality has increased in nearly all world regions in recent decades, but at different speeds. The fact that inequality levels are so different among countries, even when countries share similar levels of development, highlights the important roles that national policies and institutions play in shaping inequality⁴. If these rising inequalities remain unchecked, it can lead to various sorts of political, economic, and social catastrophes.

Around the world, billions of people are excluded from full participation in the political, economic, and cultural systems that shape their lives. We view this fundamental inequality as the defining challenge of our time, one that limits the potential of all people, everywhere. Addressing inequality is then at the centre of human dignity and human rights.

Connected technology is playing a more important role than ever before in our global system, yet it presents risks that are also greater than ever before. We talk of digital divide as technology has left many people behind and has increased disparity, while opening a window to the world of its beneficiaries.⁵ No doubt, the paste of globalization and technology innovations are significantly transforming work. However, education and training systems, having remained mostly static and underinvested in for decades, are largely inadequate for these new labour markets. The achievement of SDG 4 (“**ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all**”) can serve to bridge the gap in building an equitable society. The world is not on track to achieve SDG4 as still too many children are excluded from education due

¹ UN Pub on International Day to Eradicate Poverty (<http://www.un.org/en/events/povertyday/>)

² Article by Winnie Byanyima on the World Social Science Report 2016 published by UNESCO; (http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/rising_extreme_inequality_is_a_concern_for_us_all/).

³ Ford Foundation

⁴ World inequality report 2018

⁵ How to rebalance our global system (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/how-to-rebalance-our-global-system/>)

to different and multiple factors (gender, handicap, migration, marginalisation, deprivation, conflicts, natural disasters etc.)

Additionally, a prevailing gender bias is introducing further inefficiency and inequality. Gender parity is fundamental to whether and how societies thrive. The gaps between women and men on economic participation and political empowerment remain wide: only 58% of the economic participation gap has been closed—a second consecutive year of reversed progress and the lowest value measured by the gender gap Index since 2008—and about 23% of the political gap, unchanged since last year against a long-term trend of slow but steady improvement.⁶

Experts and international institutions now recognise that inequality must be tackled. With the adoption of the SDG 10; “*Reduced Inequality*”, every government pledged to reduce inequality within and between countries. However, not much progress is happening and in fact, many countries are even going backwards.

The current shocking levels of inequality and its impact on today’s society and the future generation, calls for deep concern and urgent need for collective action to build a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. The Agenda 2030’s ultimate goal is to leave no one behind. Consequently, the theme of the 2019 UN High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF 2019) which conveys under the auspices of ECOSOC is “*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*”; it will conduct an in-depth review of SDG 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), in addition to SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals) which is reviewed each year.

The 11th International Forum of NGOs will assess the different factor fuelling inequalities and seek innovative and sustainable ways to build an equal and just world where the dignity and human rights of all people is guaranteed

Objectives/Outcomes

- Develop common understanding of the causes and impact of inequalities on societies
- Contribute to UNESCO effort to combat inequalities by analysing the main challenges and finding appropriate solutions through NGO’s contribution.
- Empower young people to take active role in the implementation of SDGs
- Foster a strong grassroots mobilization and initiative to demand accountability and greater equality
- Foster dialogue between NGOs and policy makers to eradicate all forms of inequalities.
- Identify some work interventions to confront inequalities in the field of culture, education, sciences and communication.

Topics

Possible thematic topics to be addressed by the 11th UNESCO International Forum of NGOs include;

- Youth leadership and CSOs engagement
- Economic growth and access to resources
- Inequality based on discrimination and conflicts
- Technology versus humanity?
- Inclusive and equitable quality education for all
- Gender inequalities

⁶ Global Gender Gap Report 2017 (reports.weforum.org)

