



Overcoming Inequalities in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Inequalities are one of today's greatest challenges, obstructing poverty reduction and sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to overcome inequalities, containing two standalone goals—SDGs 5 and 10—and, moreover, an overarching commitment to leaving no one behind. In considering how to reduce inequalities, the time has come to adjust our focus to include not just the bottom of the pyramid, but also the top: elite power and all its ramifications, as well as the sources of these power imbalances, the fractures they have wrought, and the drivers of policy change to level out social stratification and devolve power and resources from elites to non-elites.

Context

The growing divide between the rich and the poor is one of the most pressing global challenges of our time. According to Oxfam, 26 people now own the same wealth as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity, down from 43 people in 2018, with men owning 50 percent more of the total wealth than women (Oxfam 2019).

Income and wealth inequality continues to increase at an alarming rate, despite the fact that some of the fastest growing countries in Asia reduced the gap with developed economies in the first decade of the 2000s (Milanovic 2011). The global top 1 percent of earners captured 27 percent of real income growth between 1980 and 2016, more than twice the amount of the bottom 50 percent (World Inequality Lab 2018). This unprecedented concentration of wealth and income, popularly referred to as the 1 percent economy, and the increase in the share of national income that capital is acquiring compared to labour (ILO 2016), are global processes girded by the dominance of neoliberal policies, rapid technological change, weak global and national tax governance, the erosion of labour rights, and corporate capture of political processes and state institutions. These processes compound inequality within and between countries, which—in its various dimensions—undermines social, environmental and economic sustainability, and fuels poverty, insecurity, crime and xenophobia (UNRISD 2010, Stiglitz 2013).

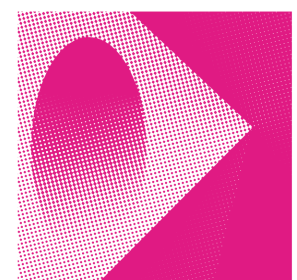
These economic and political drivers of inequality obstruct the concerted efforts from many quarters to promote more inclusive development. As elites gain a prominent foothold in political processes, whether directly or indirectly, they often serve to preserve and perpetuate a system that benefits the few at the expense of the many, halting the possibilities for equitable redistribution. At the same time, as the power of elites grows and societal gaps widen, institutions representing the public good and universal values are increasingly disempowered or co-opted, and visions of social justice and equity sidelined. While progressive reforms strengthened social contracts around the

globe following the Second World War, the current moment is seeing a breakdown of such contracts. Many states are reducing social spending as part of austerity measures, rolling back rights for people and communities while granting privileges and protections to the business sector, supplanting meaningful civic engagement with divisive populist rhetoric, and shrinking public spaces.

As a result, society is fracturing in ways that are becoming more and more tangible, with the growing divide between the privileged and the rest dramatically rearranging both macro structures and local lifeworlds. These cleavages have eroded social cohesion, citizenship practices and trust in public institutions, leaving deep fault lines that manifest economically, politically, socially and spatially. As a consequence, governments increasingly lack capacity to foster inclusive development and to protect the well-being and rights of their citizens in a rapidly changing and increasingly uncertain world.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits all states to be part of a new global compact that will leave no one behind. It explicitly aims to tackle inequality within and between countries (SDG 10) and genders (SDG 5) and to promote peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), three goals that exemplify the scope and depth of the new global development strategy and the strong engagement of a range of actors such as civil society organizations, activists and academics in its making.

In its work, UNRISD explores the drivers of inequalities and the institutional factors that perpetuate them; their consequences at local, national and global levels; and what needs to be done to overcome these challenges in order to deliver the transformative change envisioned in the 2030 Agenda. It does so by creating a new conceptual approach and an interdisciplinary global research network working on inequalities from structural and actor-centred perspectives, emphasizing the politics of transformative change, and bridging across disciplinary and sectoral siloes as well as academic, activist and policy making communities.



UNRISD International Conference 2018

Overcoming Inequalities in a Fractured World: Between Elite Power and Social Mobilization

In March 2018 UNRISD launched an open call for papers in view of an international conference titled “Overcoming Inequalities in a Fractured World: Between Elite Power and Social Mobilization”. The conference kicked off a new UNRISD research inquiry on this topic.

At the conference, which took place on 7-9 November 2018 in Geneva, nine panels, assembled from over 1,000 submissions, featured scholars and practitioners from over 30 countries with expertise across a diversity of disciplines. The panels represented a wide variety in terms of geographic focus as well as speaker origin, gender and career level, including 18 PhD and Post-Doc researchers presenting their work. In addition to the nine panel discussions, former Chief Economist of the World Bank, François Bourguignon, and renowned environmental activist and feminist scholar, Vandana Shiva, delivered keynote addresses. The University of Geneva joined UNRISD to co-host a roundtable discussion with leading thinkers Naila Kabeer, Saskia Sassen and Jomo Kwame Sundaram, titled “Engines of Inequality? Elites, Politics and Power”. Finally, a panel bringing together UN and civil society actors to discuss the politics of transformative change brought the conference to a practice-oriented close.

These various contributions are part of the global conversation on inequalities leading up to the review of Sustainable Development Goal 10 at the UN High-Level Political Forum in July 2019.

This Brief draws on 41 conference papers, as well as presentations, discussions and a new think piece series.

www.unrisd.org/OvercomingInequalities

Key questions considered through the UNRISD inquiry include the following:

- What role do elites and institutions of power play in the deepening of social and economic cleavages across the globe?
- How have these inequalities reshaped structures from the local to the transnational level, and what consequences (economic, political, environmental, human) do they pose for a city, a country, a specific group, or individual lives, as well as the ecosystems they inhabit?
- What examples exist of peaceful processes of policy change that have made societies greener and more socially just, levelled out social stratification, and devolved power and resources from elites to non-elites, or towards marginalized or discriminated groups, and what were the drivers of those processes?

Engines of Inequality? Elites, Institutions and Power

Inequality as a social, political and development issue has risen towards the top of public agendas, with its damaging impacts on social, environmental and economic sustainability and its links to poverty, insecurity, crime and xenophobia now widely demonstrated and acknowledged (Oxfam 2019, Piketty 2014, UNRISD 2010). Yet conventional development approaches rarely acknowledge the root causes of inequality or pinpoint responsible actors, instead blaming agentless processes such as globalization or free market competition for undesired social outcomes and hardships in an effort to avoid polarizing public debates and provoking the so-called politics of envy. Despite the renewed interest in inequality and the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on inequality (SDG 10: “Reduce inequality within and among countries”) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the continuous focus on the poorest of the poor and the lack of attention being paid to the drivers of inequality and structures that reproduce and reinforce it do not bode well for achieving the aspirations of “inclusive growth”, “shared prosperity” and “leaving no one behind” laid out in the 2030 Agenda.

UNRISD’s work seeks to make the case that to address inequalities, one must look to formal and informal institutions that perpetuate unequal power relations, ranging from electoral rules to education systems, property rights, access to finance and capital, and social norms. These institutions do not exist in a vacuum. They are designed in response to various pressures arising from the global economic system, and tied to political contexts specific in terms of space and time (Korzeniewicz). They are determined by a variety of factors, including the incentives of those who design and manage them, the electoral landscape that brought them into power, and the networks of influential actors—elites—who stand to gain from their success or failure.

Elites constitute a unique social group defined by their disproportionate control over resources—be they economic, political, cultural—and their ability to translate those resources into power and influence. Elites play a key role in the development of policies and institutions, whether directly as elected officials, or indirectly through patronage networks that link these actors across linguistic, cultural and geographic divides often more closely than to citizens of their own nations. While elites frequently engage in significant philanthropic activities, they more often wield their influence to preserve and perpetuate a system that benefits the few at the expense of the many, in the interest of consolidating wealth and maintaining power. Elite influence extends from media to elections to policy making, from the local to the transnational level, halting the possibilities for equitable redistribution. Media capture by business

elites—via lobbying, bribes, ownership or violence—can be used to undermine redistributive agendas through control of information (Cardenas and Robles-Rivera). Research shows that public policy is more responsive to the demands of affluent citizens, and that in general, broad public support for policy change has no impact on the likelihood that policy will actually change (Pontusson).

As a result, across the globe nations are moving further and further away from redistributive platforms and into austerity, and rolling back rights for people and communities while granting privileges and protections to the business sector. Elites keep more of their wealth in their pockets by influencing tax legislation, lobbying against regulations, evading and avoiding taxes (an estimated 10 percent of global wealth is currently held in tax havens [Credit Suisse 2017]), and through the specific culture of the financial sector which distributes huge payouts to individuals and maintains the control of capital within a small group of people and top managers, overwhelmingly white and male (Tobias Neely). Power dynamics also play a key role, as struggles for political power result in the cooptation of institutions meant to serve the public (Danquah).

Shifts towards progressive social policies or tax reforms that address inequality at its roots are few and far between, regularly blockaded by elites who find such redistributive measures contrary to their interests (Atria; Moraes Silva et al.). And when potentially progressive social policies and programmes do get enacted, their impact is often minimized—either in design, filtered through the interests of powerful actors such as donors (Dadap-Cantal, Fischer and Ramos), or in implementation, as power dynamics often determine who gets access to what services (Rocha Coelho Pires). A technocratic approach that neglects politics, the lack of meaningful participation of more marginalized stakeholders, and a failure to clearly identify conflicts and trade-offs were all identified as recurring problems with the design and implementation of innovative programmes and of governance modalities (Geng; Nganje; Mir).

Elites play a key role in perpetuating or deepening inequality, but also have the power to ameliorate it. Elites tend to hold key positions in political, economic and cultural domains of society, which gives them the opportunity to act as enlightened leaders and drivers of progressive change. While research shows that philanthropic donations by rich elites do little to tackle structural inequalities—rather, they tend to maintain their privileged position (Glucksberg and Russell-Prywata)—elites themselves would benefit from more equal societies and stable institutions. Yet they consistently support policies that further entrench inequality. Understanding what drives elite ideology and motivates their interventions can bring us closer to reducing inequality (Lavers; Moraes Silva et al.; Seekings; Krozer).

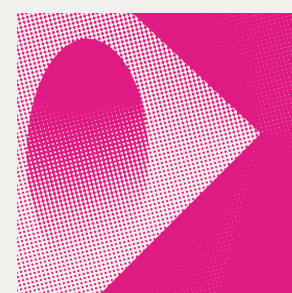
The Consequences of Inequality: From Global to Local

As a result of increasing inequalities, society is fracturing in ways that are becoming more and more tangible, with the growing divide between the privileged and the rest dramatically rearranging both macro structures and local lifeworlds. These cleavages have eroded social cohesion, citizenship practices and trust in public institutions, leaving deep fault lines that manifest economically, politically, socially and spatially.

As the old social contract has broken down, the rights and benefits of citizenship are now up for grabs by the highest bidder. Collective goods have become private, curtailing people's access to formerly public spaces, services and resources (Chiengkul; Köhler).

These disparities often come to a head most visibly at the local level, spaces in which those at either end of the spectrum engage with each other on a daily basis, mediated through various forms of power relations as well as social, spatial and economic barriers. From transportation reform that divides cities and limits access to specific groups (Glodes Blum); to new models of security and policing that render illegal certain kinds of actors and engender social exclusion; to displacement as a result of mega-infrastructure development projects or urban resettlement projects (Portella and Pereira; Borsuk Eroglu), urban policy interventions are drawing new lines and erecting new barriers. Inequalities are increasingly playing out spatially, as access to public space and social services is curtailed along lines of income, race, ethnicity, religion and gender. One's place in the city determines one's ability to access services and opportunities, which further perpetuates these inequalities (MacLeavy and Manley). Women are often disproportionately affected by processes of displacement or resettlement, as loss of access to economic and employment opportunities reinforces domestic inequalities and unequal care responsibilities (Borsuk Eroglu). In addition to this process of closing out, a process of opting out is simultaneously occurring, as those with the means are making use of them to shield themselves from the worst effects of poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, violence and insecurity, often creating walled off private worlds (Krozer). Even middle classes are opting out of processes for the public good, motivated by various incentives including personal security, access to consumer credit or private social services (de Paulo). Those without have been left to get by with underfunded and under-functioning public services, administered by states growing less and less accountable to their citizens.

As the distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities becomes more and more unequal, people are adapting, engaging for example in new forms of labour via digital platforms, co-producing



Online Resources

Download all papers at
www.unrisd.org/Conference2018

Think Piece Series
www.unrisd.org/OvercomingInequalities-Series

Playlist of Conference Highlights
www.youtube.com/unrisd



social services, or attempting in other ways to stabilize livelihoods dependent on natural resources such as agriculture or fishery (Meagher; Alfery; Sudeesh). However, while offering some opportunities, alternative approaches can also be captured by stronger groups, and new forms of work can be precarious, with few protections and employers or the state not held accountable. Inequalities related to class, caste, race, gender or location are intersecting and compounding negative effects for those who accumulate disadvantages, while affecting capacities to adapt and secure decent livelihoods and participate in growth processes (Sudeesh).

One of the most profound ways in which inequalities are felt at the local level is through the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Vital natural resources such as water, land or air are often destroyed or polluted through activities of big companies, for example extractive industries (Geng). Those least responsible for global warming incur the highest social cost, and further, are often either left out of or negatively impacted by policies meant to stem the impacts of climate change, constituting a triple injustice (UNRISD 2016). Renewable energy projects can result in new inequalities and uneven social effects, for example if they build on existing patterns of land ownership, reinforcing land concentration and exacerbating rural social differentiation (Torres Contreras). Climate change-related weather events such as flooding regularly affect vulnerable populations, such as slum dwellers in flood-prone areas in cities, while real estate developers have sometimes replaced the state in addressing grievances and problems of affected groups, which tends to reinforce inequalities and undermine state legitimacy (Monteiro Jayasankar).

A New Social Contract: Alliances for Transformative Change

To truly achieve social justice requires an approach that attacks inequality at the structural level, addressing root causes and rearranging power structures (UNRISD 2016). Such a transformative approach is necessary to achieve lasting change and the paradigm shift envisaged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite many barriers, innovative policy approaches and reforms with progressive outcomes can be found from the local to the national level in many countries. In those places where they have been successfully implemented, they have curbed inequalities, shared costs and benefits of reforms more fairly, and made societies more just and green.

In the past, progressive policy change in industrialized democracies was often steered by broad cross-class coalitions between popular and middle classes that effectively pressured elites; in countries of the Global

South, enlightened leaders and liberation movements often played a similar role. However, social and economic forces that underpinned progressive policy change of the past, such as workers movements and trade unions, take a very different shape today, as economic systems have evolved, identities have shifted, new forms of politics have unfolded, and new conceptions of class have arisen. Neoliberal policies, economic crises and natural disasters have taken a toll on middle classes, reversing decades of social struggle for an inclusive development model (Nicolas), while parts of the new middle classes in emerging economies in the Global South are still highly vulnerable and living in precarious situations (de Paulo). Technological change, reflected in the global proliferation of the gig economy, has been promoted as a solution to complex employment challenges in the Global South. Yet, research shows that the livelihoods created tend to resemble an adverse incorporation of the informal labour force, rather than a sustainable solution (Meagher).

In response, new forms of social movements, alliances and coalitions are emerging to counteract these tendencies: digital workers, for example, are developing new forms of collective resistance involving social media, creating digital workers unions or alliances with established unions, making use of social media to organize strikes and protests, but also resorting to legal mechanisms to lobby for their rights (Meagher). Marginalized groups of workers are cooperating and collaborating in new ways, applying multiple strategies to stabilize their livelihoods in a rapidly changing environment. They engage in innovative strategies to increase their capital base for investments (Rao and Manimohan), or actively seek to change their relations with state and market providers by co-producing social services (Alfers). Domestic workers organizations are building networks with different types of actors within and across countries, and applying context-specific strategies to improve their wages and working conditions (Rojas-Scheffer). Labour legislation, including minimum wages and occupational safety and health, has improved as a result of alliances between trade unions and other workers associations, through social dialogue mechanisms and the constructive contribution of experts (Torres-Tova; Valodia and Francis).

Activism and protest movements for climate and gender justice, refugee rights, and wider civil rights are growing fast, particularly in the Global North, but while these different movements and alliances are promising in their advocacy for an eco-social turn, they are weakened by a lack of analytical cohesion, bargaining power and sustainability, and can be susceptible to cooptation (Köhler). A combination of broad and encompassing social mobilizations, protests, and movements using institutional channels into the political system can explain progressive

reforms such as inclusion of outsider groups into social protection schemes (Ciccia and Guzman-Concha; Plagerson; Ramalho Tafoya) or more effective “right to the city” claims-making, for example (Iglesias; Nganje). Understanding the political drivers of transformative change therefore requires harnessing the opportunities that arise in very specific contexts and moments in time. The characteristics of political regimes—for example, the balance of power and resource distribution among elites and vis-à-vis non-elite groups, the beliefs and paradigmatic ideas that bind together diverse actors and coordinate their activities (Lavers), the possibility of overcoming processes of “othering” by social mobilizations that create a new “we” without obscuring internal differences (Roman-Alcalá), electoral dynamics, and economic contexts—all determine the policy space for more equality and social justice.

Social movements and civil society organizations alone cannot trigger the necessary changes to overcome inequalities and discrimination; their demands need to be taken up by political actors, governments and the business sector. Inclusion of marginalized or underrepresented groups such as women or ethnic minorities in parliament and government, for example by increasing the number of women in decision-making positions or devising formal power-sharing mechanisms, has proven to increase equality (An; Cederman and Hug; Mir). International actors, including donors, multilateral organizations, experts and NGOs, can play positive roles by supporting national actors advocating for more progressive and rights-based policies (Rojas-Scheffer; Valodia and Francis). Ultimately, governments and political leaders must play the leading role in the implementation of equality-enhancing policies, through public spending, progressive taxation, promotion of decent work, anti-discrimination legislation and programmes, as well as regulation and monitoring of markets and the political system (Oxfam 2018, UNRISD 2016, Schorr).

Recommendations

Achieving sustainable and inclusive development by 2030 requires economic, social and political transformations. A substantive understanding of the processes and actors that drive inequalities and pose obstacles to transformative change must be grounded in a rigorous evidence base which, itself, can grow out of research (including alternative knowledge systems and inclusive participatory research) that explores the effects of inequalities on a range of sustainable development objectives as well as the political factors, including elite power, that foster or hinder paradigmatic and policy shifts. Knowledge production also requires better measurement of inequalities—including vertical, horizontal, and intersectional—as well as new methodologies and conceptual approaches for measuring power, perceptions, influence, voice and

meaningful participation. Finally, evidence must be shared through appropriate public communication strategies, and informed public debate fostered through access to quality education, and pluralistic and independent media.

Though there is no shortage of resources or appropriate policy proposals, income, assets, opportunities and power are distributed in an unequal way, while policies that would effectively reduce inequalities are not necessarily adopted or implemented. UNRISD research on the politics of transformative change aims to improve understanding of the political drivers of poverty, inequality and unsustainable practices. Shining a spotlight on actors and institutions that produce, reinforce or reduce inequalities, on the consequences of inequalities for sustainable development, and on ways to counteract these trends can guide actors in their strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda more effectively.

Two sets of recommendations that can be derived from the research findings summarized in this brief relate to building and sustaining fair institutions and to designing and implementing equality-enhancing policies.

○ *Building and sustaining fair institutions*

Institutions define the rules of the game for economic, political and social actors. As such, fair and effective institutions grounded in ethical values and a common development vision are key for more equal and just societies. Empirical evidence shows that institutions can perpetuate or curb inequalities; that they can be captured by special interests, undermined, or dismantled for economic or political reasons; and that formal and informal institutions interact in complex ways. A technical approach to institutions is clearly insufficient, as it ignores political and social relations within them and vis-à-vis the broader eco-social system they are part of: institutions are often highly politicized, reflecting prevailing power structures with mixed impacts on their effectiveness.

Institutions that promote equality and equity should be:

- **transparent, inclusive and accountable** to the public;
- **equipped with enough resources to fulfil their mandate**, for example delivering high-quality services to the population, and guaranteeing decent work conditions and continuous learning for their staff;
- **adequately designed and governed** to avoid reproduction of inequalities in implementation processes, ensuring that interactions between bureaucrats and beneficiaries are fair and empowering;





- grounded in common principles and values such as **human rights, democracy and sustainable development**;
- **shielded from undue political interference**, while at the same time being relevant and important for the political leadership in order to maintain high-level support; and
- exemplary in their **use of internal equality and empowerment policies** regarding gender, minorities, age, work status, wage differentials, worker participation, etc.

○ **Designing and implementing equality-enhancing policies**

Transformative policies can be defined as those that reduce structural inequalities and address the root causes of poverty and unsustainable practices, a long-term endeavor that requires changes in social relations and social institutions (UNRISD 2016). Equality is a cross-cutting issue, and all policies should be evaluated in view of their impacts on equality.

Equality-enhancing policies that are also transformative are those that address the structural drivers of income, wealth and group-based inequalities. These drivers are associated with a global economic system that produces economic inequalities as market outcomes, leading to ever-increasing profit shares in the hands of big companies and wealthy individuals, while the share of smallholders and average workers in global wealth creation is shrinking. Additional drivers of intersecting social stratification compound the economic inequalities, causing some groups to fall furthest behind. Unequal political power structures within and between countries also reproduce and increase inequalities through policies and governance that favour elites and dominant economic actors, as well as rich countries in the Global North.

- **Labour market and employment policies** that are rights-based and productive, guaranteeing fundamental labour rights, social protection, decent wages and life-long learning for all workers, can redress entrenched inequalities in the workplace and beyond, and allow workers to share the benefits of growth and adapt to structural change. Specific attention should be paid to groups such as women, ethnic or religious minorities, migrants, informal workers, rural workers, disabled or elderly workers, LGBTQI+ persons and youth, as they are often particularly disadvantaged, lacking voice, rights, protections and equal career opportunities. Reporting on the gender pay gap, minimum wage legislation and affirmative action for disadvantaged groups are proven tools to enhance equality in the labour market.
- **Progressive tax policies** (including wealth and inheritance tax) and improved tax governance (reducing tax avoidance and evasion) can result in more equal distributional outcomes and more fiscal space for governments to fund equality-enhancing public expenditure. They need to be combined with efforts to mobilize domestic resources in line with sustainability criteria, and reforms of global tax governance and instruments (for example elimination of tax havens and illicit financial flows, implementation of a global financial transaction tax, transparency reforms to access data, and information on the top tier of the wealth and income distribution, both at company and individual levels).
- **Business and market regulation** is crucial to prevent market concentration and monopolistic or oligopolistic structures, excessive profit accumulation to the detriment of wage shares, as well as inequalities at the firm level, for example between CEO and average workers' earnings,

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_20698

