

Check against delivery



**Statement by the Special Rapporteur on the right to development, Mr.
Saad Alfarargi**

Nineteenth session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Right to Development

Interactive Dialogue

The right to development and inequalities

Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room VII, 24 April 2018



Dear Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group, Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, representatives of the United Nations and the NGO community, I am honoured to be with you today in my capacity as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to development and to participate in this distinguished panel.

My intervention today will focus on the challenges that inequalities - both within and among countries - pose for the realization and effective implementation of the right to development for all. I have chosen to dedicate my upcoming report to the September Session of the Human Rights Council to this topic.

The Declaration on the Right to Development emphasizes in article 1 that “every human person and all peoples” are entitled to the human right to development. Although the Declaration was adopted more than 30 years ago, no one can deny that it remains an aspirational statement of good intent for a large part of the world’s population.

Systemic and structural inequalities based on income, sex, gender, age, disability, race, class, ethnicity, religion, opportunity, social status and other criteria continue to persist across the world. Inequality permeates various aspects of peoples’ lives, threatens long-term social and economic development, harms poverty reduction, and adversely affects people’s sense of fulfilment and self-worth. It is therefore a major obstacle to the realization of the right to development.

Of course, some progress in the reduction of inequalities was achieved within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. Progress was even significant in some fields, especially with regards to extreme poverty reduction. However, a number of human rights gaps were identified in both the design and implementation of the MDGs. This includes the failure to adequately address discrimination and increasing inequalities, and to ensure inclusiveness and active participation of all relevant stakeholders. Especially minorities and indigenous peoples have progressed at a slower rate, meaning that existing inequalities have been exacerbated for already disadvantaged groups while others have benefited from interventions. At the same time,

international and national efforts to implement the right to development have not been successful in eliminating gender inequality.

Today, persistent poverty and rising inequalities remain among the major threats to development, human rights, peace and security worldwide. It is well documented that growing economic growth and wealth are often accompanied by growing inequality. Income inequality, for example, is on the rise with the richest 10 percent earning up to 40 percent of total global income. And while significant progress has been made in the reduction of poverty, in 2015, an approximate 800 million people across the world still lived in extreme poverty. In many regions, women and youth are disproportionately affected.

Even in countries where human rights track records have been generally positive, mounting inequalities and social precariousness have jeopardised the realisation of the right to development for many, regardless of their countries' level of development. Uncertainty and fears of social decline and exclusion have also reached the middle classes in many societies.

However, I strongly believe that the 2015 policy framework for sustainable development provides a new impetus, reiterating the need to reduce inequalities and combat discrimination in order to fully realize the right to development for everyone. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda commits “to leave no one behind” in order to ensure that targets are met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. The reduction of inequalities and elimination of discrimination is enshrined in all of the SDGs, with two dedicated goals: Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and Goal 10 on reducing inequalities, as well as Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies. Concern for inequality is also mainstreamed in other goals and targets across the Agenda and there is a cross-cutting commitment to disaggregate data in order to monitor and ensure that no one is being left behind.

Key areas of action

What are the steps necessary to effectively reduce inequalities within and across countries? While this is a complex question that requires context-specific answers, it is nevertheless possible to identify some key areas of action:

(1) Identifying those left behind: One issue that needs to be addressed urgently is the limited availability of adequate data that is disaggregated, inter alia, by gender, age, disability, income, race and ethnicity. Such disaggregated data is needed to accurately assess a situation, to make inequalities visible, and to identify those who have been left behind. Only based on such data can we develop evidence-based policies that specifically target those most in need. Disaggregated data is also important for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programs, as well as for the overall tracking of progress in the implementation of the right to development on an equal basis for all segments of society. I would like to underline that the collection of data to assess levels of inequality and discrimination -or progress in this regard- has to be done in accordance with a human rights based approach. This means that the process should be based on the principles of participation, informed consent and self-identification. During my recent consultation in Addis Ababa, it was suggested that civil society with relevant expertise could engage in data collection exercises at community levels. This could not only contribute to reducing the cost of data collection, but also empower communities to participate in the process of informing development policies at the local level.

(2) Identifying and combatting root causes of inequality: Another crucial question in ensuring that no one is left behind is to identify, acknowledge and address the root causes of inequality and discrimination. Only when we know why some groups or countries are left behind, can we develop appropriate policies and strategies. Understanding how various forms of discrimination intersect is key in this regard.

(3) Ensuring inclusive and participatory processes: Once those who have been left behind are identified, efforts need to be geared toward systematically reaching and

empowering them. Evaluating how this can best be accomplished is a critical first step in the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The success of targeted policies and programs will depend largely on the level of participation and consultation of the beneficiaries.

Since the right to development entitles all persons and peoples to “participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development”, a key task is to ensure inclusiveness and meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders at all levels of decision making. Enabling disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups to actively participate in decision making processes is essential to overcome structural inequalities and discrimination; to ensure their place as key actors in the development of countries; and to ensure the equal sharing of benefits. During the recent consultation in Addis Ababa, it was highlighted that effective access to information is an important prerequisite in this respect. To this end, it was suggested that detailed information/consultation schemes should be integrated in all development policies and activities at the international and domestic levels.

At the international level, ensuring inclusiveness and participation means that countries facing the greatest difficulties in implementing the right to development – especially the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small-island developing States – must be granted equal negotiating power in relevant international fora.

(4) Accountability mechanisms: Inclusion and participation should also be accompanied by adequate accountability mechanisms. Again, access to information is paramount in this regard. States must ensure that affected individuals and communities understand what their rights are and how they can claim them when they have been violated in the context of development processes. In Addis, it was highlighted that one way to ensure accountability is for States to provide avenues to claim economic and social rights through courts and/or quasi-judicial mechanisms.

(5) Identifying, sharing, and replicating good practices in the reduction of inequalities:

The identification, sharing and replication of good practices is an important step in finding innovative ways to reduce inequalities. I believe that South-South cooperation has great potential as a platform and tool for the promotion of good practices as it enables countries of the global South to exchange necessary knowledge, skills and expertise. I am hoping that the regional consultations I will be convening throughout 2018/2019 will provide an opportunity for relevant stakeholders to exchange views and discuss how relevant good practices can be adapted and replicated at the local level. In order to inform my thematic report on the topic of inequalities, my mandate has also issued a call for submissions from different stakeholders on positive measures taken by States to reduce inequalities within countries.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the reduction of structural inequalities will only be possible with the full cooperation and support of Member States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Only through concerted efforts can we ensure that the right to development will become a reality for all. In this regard, I see my role as bridge builder between relevant stakeholders at international, regional and local levels.

I thank you all for your kind attention.