

21 March 2023

English only

Human Rights Council
Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development
Seventh session
3–5 April 2023
Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Implementation of the mandate and programme of work

Inequality, social protection and the right to development

Study by the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Summary

This study examines inequality within and among states through the framework of the right to development. It examines the political economy of development and explores capacities to enhance universal and comprehensive social protection systems (SPS). In assessing inequality reduction policies and SPS, the study identifies global good practices and practices that are exclusionary or restrictive. It places SPS within the context of *state obligations, international cooperation, and global partnerships* as outlined in the Declaration on the Right to Development and the new social contract as outlined in *Our Common Agenda*. It offers recommendations to States and other stakeholders to address deepening inequalities within and among states by establishing universal social protection systems as a fundamental human right understood through the principle of equality of opportunity for development.

I. Introduction

1. As the world continues to face the seemingly interminable consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic, one striking effect has been a rise in inequality in both scale and pace. Several studies and UN reports signal a historic shift in wealth distribution, a rise in the frequency and severity of climate change-induced natural disasters and increasing political polarisation and conflict. A key result of these trends is the compounding of unequal access to resources, including health care, food, safe drinking water, housing, income, and overall safety and general well-being. These conditions also foster environments of hostility, particularly towards the poor, the vulnerable, and minority groups. Deepening inequality remains a key obstacle to achieving globally agreed ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the promise to leave no one behind. Increasing inequality in income, wealth, and opportunity also presents new threats to human rights globally. The consequences of inequality threaten the enjoyment of the right to development as it undermines economic development and threatens democratic life, social cohesion and resource redistribution.¹ The first step to combatting inequality is recognising that societies cannot reach their full potential if all the segments of the society are excluded from participating in, contributing to and benefiting from economic, social, cultural and political development.²

2. Discrimination and inequality are interlinked. The drivers and manifestations of inequality are deep-rooted in historical inequities, lopsided income and wealth distribution, political marginalisation, and social exclusions. Social inequalities between groups along lines such as gender, race, ethnicity or caste, disability, age, citizenship, and other embodied or ascribed attributes are based on and reproduce hierarchies founded on discriminatory practices. While societal inequalities may arise from explicit legal disparities in status and entitlements, such as those affecting migrants, they can also arise from policies that disregard the needs of particular people or from social values that shape relationships within communities in a manner that discriminates against specific groups.³

3. Discrimination creates horizontal *inequalities* between social groups, such as those along the lines of gender, race and ethnicity. These are connected to *inequality of opportunities* which are disparities arising from ascribed social status over which individuals have no control. Discrimination also reinforces *vertical inequalities* such as income inequalities. Economic disparities in income, wealth and opportunity often intersect with inequalities in access to political rights and participation which are under threat in many parts of the world. “Economic and social inequalities both drive and are driven by political inequalities as elites accumulate influence and power to preserve and perpetuate a system that benefits the few at the expense of the many.”⁴ Data shows that the most vulnerable and marginalised groups face *intersecting* economic and social inequalities and political marginalisation. These include women, particular racial or ethnic groups, elderly or young persons, persons living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ persons, informal sector workers, rural populations, and migrants. These groups are disadvantaged by limited access to employment and education, lower income, and vulnerability to violence.⁵ The absence of social protection worsens these disadvantages.

4. Inequality also has territorial expression, such as in the rural-urban divide in many countries, with rural communities often experiencing the highest levels of poverty due to the

¹ World Bank Group, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2017), 10, 32.

² UN General Assembly, *The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives, and protecting the planet: Synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda*, A/69/700 (New York: UN, 2014).

³ Siddiq Osman, “The human rights-based approach to development in the era of globalization,” UN OHCHR, *Realizing the Rights to Development, Essays in Commemoration of 25 Years of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development* (Geneva: UN, 2013), 120.

⁴ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *Crisis of Inequality: Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2022), 1.

⁵ UNRISD, *Crisis of Inequality: Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract* (Geneva 2022), 1.

lack, or precariousness, of public services.⁶ Related to territorial inequalities are intergenerational inequalities arising from lesser income, job opportunities and special protection for the younger generations. With rising unemployment and extreme poverty, young people with fragile and unstable employment are disproportionately affected. These inequalities also impact the elderly, who require care and migrants, who are susceptible to political exclusions and precarious work in informal sectors.

5. Although inequality had been declining globally in the decades before the 1990s, the past decade witnessed an unprecedented deepening of all dimensions of inequality. COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing inequalities worldwide, as the poorest and most vulnerable were hit hardest by the disease and its profound economic impacts. It is estimated that globally, the pandemic sent more than 120 million people into extreme poverty.⁷ Across the world, absolute poverty grew above even high levels before the pandemic. In many developing countries where most workers are employed in the informal sector, these workers and the unemployed were most affected by pandemic economic disruptions.

6. This EMRTD study examines the impact of growing inequalities within and among states on operationalising the right to development. It examines the right to development as a framework for addressing widening inequality in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the calls to build back better and leave no one behind. It reviews policies adopted by States to address growing inequality and assess their successes and limitations. The study focuses on the role of Social Protection Systems (SPS) in addressing inequality. It assesses SPS design, implementation and impacts, identifying good practices as well as practices that perpetuate exclusions and inequality.

7. This report places inequality and SPS within the context of *state obligations, international cooperation, and global partnerships* as provisioned in the Declaration on the Right to Development (DRTD) and the *new social contract* as outlined in the Secretary General's report, *Our Common Agenda* (OCA). This study frames universal social protection systems as a fundamental human right understood through the DRTD principle of *equality of opportunity for development* and the transformative promise to Leave no one behind (LNOB) outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The study concludes with recommendations to States, international organisations, civil society organisations (CSO) and other stakeholders on strategies to address the widening inequalities within and among states through national and international policies and actions.

II. Addressing global inequality: a right to development approach

8. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed millions of people around the into extreme poverty.⁸ The result is that more people worldwide lacked access to basic sustenance, including food, housing, and healthcare.⁹ Interventions by governments and international organisations to mitigate the economic shocks of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations have proved inadequate with limited impact. Many countries experienced a significant rise in poverty during the pandemic.¹⁰ Projections indicate that inequality between countries rose by 1.2

⁶ Submission of Ecuador.

⁷ UN, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021*, (New York: UN, 2021).

⁸ Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman et al. *World Inequality Report 2022*, 16. https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2021/12/WorldInequalityReport2022_Full_Report.pdf; World Bank, "COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/07/covid-19-to-add-as-many-as-150-million-extreme-poor-by-2021>

⁹ For example, in 2020, around one in every three people did not have access to adequate food. Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, (New York: UN, 2021), 12

¹⁰ In Ecuador, the number of people in conditions of socioeconomic vulnerability went from 4.3 million to 5.7 million. One million people fell into the category of "extreme poverty" by income. In addition, approximately 431,000 new "multidimensional poor" and 196,000 new "extreme multidimensional poor" emerged in the country (Submission by Ecuador).

percent between 2017 and 2021, the first such increase in a generation. Before the pandemic, between-country inequality was projected to fall by 2.6 percent over the same period.¹¹

9. The devastating economic and social impacts of COVID-19 on the world's most vulnerable populations call for renewed attention to addressing inequality and its effects on human and societal well-being. This study follows numerous studies and reports signalling increasing inequalities at global and state levels, including a widening wealth distribution gap; a growing lack of access to health care; intensifying political polarisation; rising under- and unemployment; food and housing insecurities; and a worsening climate crisis.¹² As one study notes: "The world was unequal before the pandemic. It is even more unequal now. Unless governments and the international community take urgent action, the profound increase in inequality and poverty driven by COVID-19 will rapidly become permanent, and governments will lose a decade in fighting it."¹³

10. The COVID-19 pandemic had contradictory economic and social impacts. Even as pandemic economic shocks and social disruptions devastated vulnerable communities around the world, it brought significant wealth gains for a tiny group of people as wealth concentration among the wealthy intensified. The result was an intensification of inequality which was already widening. Data shows that in the past three decades, the top 1 percent of humanity has captured nearly 20 times the amount of wealth as the bottom 50 percent.¹⁴ This can be attributed to several trends in the global political economy – neoliberal hyper-globalization and the shift toward market fundamentalism, technological advances, immigration, and rapid urbanisation that have produced social disruptions and economic volatility.

11. Deep inequality has far-reaching implications at individual and societal levels. Apart from the impact on the well-being and quality of life of the poorest and most vulnerable members of society, extreme inequality leads to a societal breakdown in trust, solidarity, and social cohesion. It reduces people's willingness to act for the common good. With wide disparities in income, access to education and health care and education, people are more likely to remain trapped in poverty across several generations leading to slower economic growth.¹⁵

12. Equality and non-discrimination are central to the human rights-based approach to development. Inequality matters because it is a fundamental issue for human development. Extreme inequalities in opportunity directly affect human capabilities, that is, what people can be and what they can do. There are also strong instrumental reasons for concern with inequality. Deep wealth disparities hinder economic growth, undermine democracy and weaken social cohesion.¹⁶ Beyond the impact on individuals and immediate societal well-being, there is an emerging consensus that inequality also induces global financial, social,

¹¹ UN, Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality>.

¹² For example, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman et al. *World Inequality Report 2022*, 16. *World Inequality Report 2022*, World Inequality Lab; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *Crisis of Inequality: Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract* (Geneva: UNRISD 2022), 189; Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, (New York: UN, 2021).

¹³ Jo Walker, Matthew Martin, Emma Seery, Nabil Abdo, Anthony Kamande, Max Lawson, *The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2022*, (London: Oxfam DFI, 2022), 5.

¹⁴ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *Crisis of Inequality: Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2022), 2.

¹⁵ Submission by Bella Anis, Juta Mewangi (Malaysia).

¹⁶ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005-International Cooperation at a Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World* (New York, UNDP, 2005), 51.

and political instability.¹⁷ Studies have shown that more global inequality worsens climate outcomes, while less global inequality can improve climate outcomes.¹⁸

13. The Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda provide a comprehensive framework for inequality reduction. SDG 10 targets reducing inequalities within and between countries. The goal is to empower and promote the inclusion of all, irrespective of social, economic or other status. The aim is to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate policies and action. Achieving these goals calls for states to adopt relevant policies, including fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality. However, some scholars have pointed out the limitations of this framework. For example, the dominant discourse with respect to SDG 10 and related goals largely focuses on those marginalised and living below the poverty line. In contrast, little attention is given to the very wealthy at the top of the distribution, the rich and powerful.¹⁹ Addressing the problem of extreme poverty requires consideration of the wealth distribution within and among States as well as the historical and present-day conditions that have concentrated wealth among certain groups and regions of the world.

14. Wealth redistribution and *deconcentration* must therefore be integral to conversations about poverty and inequality reduction. The notion of redistributing wealth to address inequality is no longer as ideologically polarising as it once was. For many decades the standard economic argument held that inequality was part of a necessary incentive for hard work and talent. However, new research and literature have emerged about the destructive and destabilising effects of inequality.²⁰ Some Economists also previously warned that policies to level the economic playing field comes with a hefty price tag in terms of growth and efficiency. This so-called “equality-efficiency trade-off” was a persistent argument against state-led inequality reduction policy intervention. However, recent data suggest that extreme levels of economic inequality are as detrimental to the economy as they are to social cohesion. Moreover, experiments by behavioural economists confirm that most citizens are committed to fairness and are willing to sacrifice to help those less fortunate than themselves.²¹

15. Human rights norms can help to inform policy decision-making and guide inequality reduction strategies, including monitoring mechanisms for tracking progress on state commitments and providing space for accountability.²² The right to development is a comprehensive human rights framework for addressing the various dimensions of inequality and its impact on individuals and communities. The Declaration on the Right to Development (DRTD) positions the human person as the central subject, participant and beneficiary of development. It provides a holistic approach to human rights by requiring that development be carried out in a manner “in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised.”²³

16. The principles of equality, equity, non-discrimination and fair distribution of the benefits of development are critical provisions of the DRTD which states: “Social progress and development shall be founded on respect for the dignity and value of the human person and shall ensure the promotion of human rights and social justice, which requires: *the*

¹⁷ Mark Roe and Jordan I. Siegel, “Political instability: Effects on financial development, roots in the severity of economic inequality.” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 39, no. 3 (2011): 279-309; Pablo Duarte and Gunther Schnabl, “Monetary policy, inequality and political instability,” *The World Economy* 42, no. 2 (2019): 614-634.

¹⁸ Narasimha Rao and Jihoon Min. “Less global inequality can improve climate outcomes,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 9, no. 2, (2018).

¹⁹ Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, “What the Sustainable Development Goals get wrong about inequality,” in UNRISD, *Crisis of Inequality: Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract* (Geneva: USRID, 2022). 78.

²⁰ Birdsall, Nancy. 2001. “Why Inequality Matters.” *Ethics in International Affairs*, 15(2):3–28.

²¹ Samuel Bowles, *The New Economics of Inequality and Redistribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²² Ignacio Saiz and Kate Donald, “Tackling inequality through the Sustainable Development Goals: human rights in practice,” *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21, no 8 (2017), 1029-1049.

²³ DRTD, Article 1.

immediate and final elimination of all forms of inequality, exploitation of peoples and individuals...”²⁴ States are enjoined to undertake, at the national level, all necessary measures for realising the right to development and equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and fair wealth distribution. States must not only take concrete steps to improve economic, social and cultural conditions but do so in a manner that is democratic in its formulation and equitable in its results.

17. A right to development approach is a practical way to address the challenges of poverty and inequality that have been identified. The DRTD frames development both in terms of state obligations to operationalise the right and duty to states to cooperate to remove obstacles to development. International solidarity is therefore central to operationalising the right to development and relevant to strategies to address poverty and inequality. For example, States have been repeatedly called upon to create universal social protection floors to address growing poverty and inequality. However, in the aftermath of the economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, this responsibility can no longer be left solely to individual States. The World needs to prepare for the next crisis by setting up *Global Fund for Social Protection*.

18. The International Labour Organization has noted that social protection floors as a means of tackling poverty and rising inequality are a joint responsibility which includes the creation of new international financing mechanisms that will help protect their populations from the next economic or public health crisis. Individual countries, particularly low-income ones, need help to prepare. Many developing and least developed countries need help to afford social protection floors recommended to tackle poverty and inequality. A new mechanism at the international level would provide both the right incentives and the financial sustainability necessary to establish robust social protection systems.²⁵ Building back better from the pandemic requires international solidarity and cooperation to create better social protection for all that covers the poorest and most marginalised and those who currently have resources to pay.²⁶ This duty of States to cooperate to remove obstacles to development, which is a key right to development principle, offers a valuable framework for addressing these international dimensions of poverty and inequality that transcend State capacity.

III. Our Common Agenda: towards a new social contract

19. With the UN Secretary-General calling for a new social contract in his report, *Our Common Agenda*, now is the time to vigorously push for global collaboration to alter the present shortcomings and predicted calamitous trajectories. *Our Common Agenda* is premised on the fact that the world has common challenges that can only be addressed by an equally interconnected response through reinvigorated multilateralism and international collaborations. We know these common global challenges can only be addressed through communities working in partnerships that include both state and non-state actors, private enterprise, and civil society organisations. These common global challenges include protecting our planet, promoting global peace and security, preventing conflicts, promoting international law and justice, improving digital cooperation, ensuring sustainable financing for development and youth engagement, reducing poverty and promoting equality.

20. *Our Common Agenda* envisions holistic responses to these global challenges. At the core of these responses is a road map to a sustainable future for people, the planet, prosperity, and peace, united by partnership, international cooperation, and solidarity. At a time when multilateralism is under assault, and parochial and exclusionary nationalism pervades the international order, *Our Common Agenda* represents a vision of the future of global

²⁴ DRTD, Article 1.

²⁵ UN, “World needs to prepare for next crisis by setting up Global Fund for Social Protection now,” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/06/world-needs-prepare-next-crisis-setting-global-fund-social-protection-now-un>

²⁶ International Labour Organization (ILO), “Universal social protection floors are a joint responsibility,” https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_759106/lang-en/index.htm

cooperation and reinvigorating inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism. More than a vision, *Our Common Agenda* is an agenda of action to accelerate the implementation of existing agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Because unaddressed inequalities foster resentments that precipitate social strife and conflicts, more equitable socioeconomic systems within and among states are essential for actualising our common agenda and maintaining peace and security in our world.

21. Reducing inequality is a critical component of *Our Common Agenda* for realising sustainable development goals. This entails promoting political, social, and economic policies that pay attention to the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalised populations. Actualising our common agenda requires a new social contract to reaffirm our common humanity and promote the global common good. The new social contract calls for trust, inclusion, protection, participation, and valuing what matters to people and the planet. These sentiments are vital in creating social and economic policies and programs that reduce inequality, including developing effective universal social protection systems.²⁷

IV. Tacking inequality through Social Protection Systems (SPS)

22. Inequality is a persistent cause for concern, as reflected in Goal 10 of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, which focuses on reducing inequality within and among countries. As instability and insecurity grow between and within states as well as individuals, governments and stakeholders must take resolute steps to counter and prevent ongoing and potential sources of inequality. States and other stakeholders have a responsibility to take active steps to reduce social inequities as well as inequalities in resource distribution and access to economic opportunities. Social Protection Systems (SPS) offer one way of doing this. SPS are aimed at addressing inequality and poverty through a multifaceted approach and are therefore integral in the ongoing pursuit of global equality for all as championed within international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Declaration on the Right to Development (DRTD) and the 2030 Agenda.

23. Universal social protection coverage typically includes the provision of social assistance through cash transfers to those in need, support for people of vulnerable working age, the unemployed, and pension coverage for the elderly. Assistance may also be provided through social insurance, social benefits, social assistance services, public works programs and other schemes guaranteeing basic income security.²⁸ Social Protection Systems, such as pensions, health care, and access to secure jobs, is an integral facet of economic development and the sustainability of every individual's well-being. Inequalities and inequities within these systems often fail to aid the most in-need populations while adding strain to those most vulnerable. Addressing these disparities with SPS has been debated over the last decades, but the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have put these inadequacies into sharp relief.

24. Social protection provides foundations for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. With millions of people falling into extreme poverty due to COVID-19, social protection should be seen not as a cost but rather as an investment with a potentially high return for human capital development.²⁹ SPS promotes inclusive growth and builds societal resilience in times of crisis. Tax-funded SPS can be effective as a wealth distribution mechanism for taking poverty and inequality. Well-designed and implemented SPS can also have significant multiplier effects, including increased school enrolment and success, improved health outcomes, and higher labour market participation rates which benefits local economies at large. In addition, social protection can address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability and the preservation of livelihoods. Studies have

²⁷ Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, 22.

²⁸ "The World Bank in Social Protection," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotection/overview>.

²⁹ Olivier De Schutter, "Can a global social protection fund prevent the next economic crisis?" <https://news.trust.org/item/20210624122546-uf6mn/>

shown that less global inequality can improve climate outcomes.³⁰ Social protection floors can have a transformative role in contributing to long-term inclusive and sustainable growth while also enhancing resilience against natural and manmade disasters, as well as economic and social crises.³¹ Despite these well-established benefits of universal social protection, they remain unavailable to many of the world's vulnerable populations. As of 2019, four billion or 55% of the global population, were excluded from social protection.³²

25. The implementation of universal SPS aimed at reducing inequality is essential to fully realising the individual rights of all, as stated in the UDHR, the ICESCR and the DRTD. It is also crucial to achieving the 2030 SDGs as at least 92% - 11 goals and 27 targets - have a direct relation to social protection. "These goals include the eradication of poverty (Goal 1), healthy lives and well-being for all (Goal 3), gender equality (Goal 5), decent work (Goal 8) and reduced inequalities (Goal 10)."³³ As championed by the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030), "Universal social protection is key to sustained, inclusive economic and social development for individuals, communities, and nations. It is also a human right."³⁴ By considering SPS as a human right, the realisation of a more equitable distribution of global and national wealth, including natural resources (wealth production), is possible. In turn, this forces the restructuring of policies perpetuating existing systemic and social inequalities. Recognising that development aims at the ongoing improvement of well-being for all through economic, social, cultural, and political processes based on their "free and meaningful participation in development and the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom," SPS must therefore be understood as a critical concept in the *operationalisation* of the RTD.³⁵

V. Manifestations of economic and social inequalities in existing SPS

26. Even though many countries have embraced social protection systems, the effectiveness of these systems in reducing poverty and inequalities have been mixed. Critical gaps remain in the design and implementation of SPS. For example, Brazil has established several programs aimed at reducing inequality with uneven results. In 2016, the country was recognised for having assisted 36 million people to leave extreme poverty using a rights-based approach.³⁶ Among the social protection programmes developed is the *Bolsa Família* programme, a conditional cash transfer programme with national coverage that aims to support families living in poverty or extreme poverty, as well as expanding access to education and health services." As of 2015, over 13 million families, or roughly 25% of Brazil's population, had benefitted from the programme. Other social protection programmes in Brazil support vulnerable groups and isolated rural communities allowing data to be collected to serve the poorest sectors of society.³⁷ However, these gains have been reversed in the past few years. Inequality remains rampant in Brazil. In 2019, Brazil had the second-

³⁰ Narasimha Rao and Jihoon Min, "Less global inequality can improve climate outcomes," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 9, no. 2 (2018).

³¹ Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, <https://www.socialprotectionfloorscoalition.org/>.

³² Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030), *Together to Achieve Universal Social Protection by 2030 (USP2030): A Call to Action* (Geneva, UPUSP, 2019); Isabel Ortiz, Isabel, "The Case for Universal Social Protection: Everyone Faces Vulnerability During their Lifetime," *Finance and Development*, 2018, 32.

³³ Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, "Universal Social Protection: End Poverty and Reduce Inequality," (2017), https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/16133Concept_Note_Universal_Social_Protection_July18_2017.pdf.

³⁴ Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030), *Together to Achieve Universal Social Protection by 2030*.

³⁵ DRTD, preamble.

³⁶ Submission by Associação Jadir de Taekwondo (Brazil).

³⁷ OHCHR, "Implementation of the Right to Development at the National, Regional and International Levels," (Geneva: OHCHR), 2016. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/Session17/ReportHCWrittenContributions/Brazil.pdf>

highest income concentration in the world, with around 1% of Brazilians possessing 28.3% of the country's income. By 2021, the income share of the top 1% increased to 59.8%.³⁸

27. Bolivia's social protection programs include the Dignity Income aimed at older adults, *Juana Azurduy Bonus* aimed at pregnant women and children, *Juancito Pinto Bonus* aimed at school-age children and a *Monthly Bonus* for People with Disabilities. In Ecuador, new social protection measures for the vulnerable population include Monetary Transfer Programs aimed at creating social protection floors that guarantee a minimum income for families in a situation of vulnerability and poverty. Ecuador has also established a National Council for Intergenerational Equality, which has developed a National Agenda for Intergenerational Equality.³⁹

28. Cape Verde has established a "Mobilization for the Acceleration of Social Inclusion program" aimed at tackling growing poverty and inequality in the country.⁴⁰ In 2008 Pakistan established the Benazir Income Support program, its first social safety net program, to alleviate the effects of slow economic growth. Similarly, Egypt has introduced an expanded social protection program, the *Takaful wa Karama* (Solidarity and Dignity), a conditional cash transfer program that targets low-income families with children.⁴¹

29. In response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Togo established *Novissi*, a digital payment mechanism and other social safety net projects to relieve vulnerable populations. However, with limited coverage and inadequate investments, these social protection measures have proved insufficient to address growing poverty and inequality in the country.⁴² In 2019 Italy introduced the *reddito di cittadinanza* (citizenship income) as the country's primary policy tool to combat poverty. It was inspired by universal minimum income measures but is tied to a set of conditions. Although the program's implementation has revealed limits and contradictions, it was a valuable means of protecting the most vulnerable citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴³

30. While many countries turned to SPS to mitigate the devastating economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, populations traditionally overlooked in social protection schemes generally remained marginalised. Gaps in these programs are often caused by poor design and management, difficulty in access and severe underinvestment. The latter issue is particularly apparent in countries in Africa, Asia, and the Arab states.⁴⁴ Many governments in Asia and the Pacific consistently spend less than 2% of GDP on social protection. As a result, less than half of the population is protected by a social protection program.⁴⁵ The following discussion outlines some key problem areas and their implications for operationalising the SDGs and the RTD.

A. Targeting within a framework of universality

31. Experts and practitioners have noted the importance of considering vulnerability in creating and executing SPS programs instead of as reactionary tools: "Everyone faces vulnerability during their lifetime."⁴⁶ Further, short-term reforms, such as fiscal consolidation and cuts to social protection spending, undermine long-term development goals. By targeting the poorest of the population for benefits schemes while excluding large swaths of the people, many governments are putting those most vulnerable, such as the middle classes, at considerable risk for economic strain and a lack of ability to recuperate after economic or

³⁸ European Parliament, "Brazil's Economy. Challenges for the New President," [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/738196/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)738196_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/738196/EPRS_BRI(2022)738196_EN.pdf)

³⁹ Submission by Ecuador.

⁴⁰ Submission by Cape Verde.

⁴¹ Submission by Egypt.

⁴² Submission by Togo.

⁴³ Submission by "Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII" (APG23).

⁴⁴ A/HRC/50/38, paragraph 2; Ortiz, "The Case for Universal Social Protection," 32.

⁴⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and International Labour Organization, *The Protection we Want: Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific*, 2021, 14-15..

⁴⁶ Ortiz, "The Case for Universal Social Protection," 3; emphasis ours.

environmental shocks.⁴⁷ For example, in 2006, the Government of Mongolia changed its existing social protection program directed towards reducing instances of children in poverty from a targeted scheme to a universal one. This change resulted in the reduction of child poverty by 21% in just eight years.⁴⁸

32. Many Latin American countries have successfully extended social protection coverage to tens of thousands of self-employed people through a subsidy combined with a simplified tax and social security contribution mechanism.⁴⁹ Bolivia implemented a universal old-age pension program, *Renta Dignidad*, in 2007. The program reduced the poverty rate by 14%, secured the incomes and consumption of beneficiaries, reduced child labour by half, and increased school enrolment to almost 100%.⁵⁰ Conceiving SPS within a universal framework creates stability, ensures everyone receives coverage and is, therefore, a more effective model for economic and social development than targeted schemes that do not address complex exclusionary factors and circumstances of those in need.

33. Migrants and asylum seekers have been disproportionately affected by restrictions and delays in migration and asylum procedures, border closures, reduced emergency funds, a lack of freedom of movement, and highly vulnerable living conditions due to pandemic restrictions and ongoing conflicts. This is compounded by their already vulnerable situations, which results in more restrictive access to health care and essential services and further marginalisation and stigmatisation by those in power and the media.⁵¹ Sustainable Development Goals target 16.9 “calls on States to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030.” Officially sanctioned identification documents are typically required to apply for social protection schemes. Yet, around 1.1 billion people lack legal identity, effectively barring them from receiving social protection benefits.⁵² To reach the most vulnerable populations, the specific needs of migrants and asylum seekers, including removing administrative barriers, should be targeted within universal SPS.

34. Promoting a universalist framework for SPS does not necessitate homogenous benefits and services. Instead, targeting must be used *within* a framework of universal rights-based access in order to ensure the fulfilment of rights for all while providing for different needs.⁵³ Overly specific and complex targeting schemes often result in higher administrative costs and reduced take-up by those who are eligible due to concerns of being considered “undeserving” or a lack of official documentation to prove “deservedness.”⁵⁴ Programs should cover those often excluded from targeting schemes, such as informal and non-traditional forms of employment and migrants. By reducing barriers to eligibility and reframing benefits as a right instead of a privilege, SPS would add to *every* individual’s and state’s overall well-being.⁵⁵

B. The Privatization of SPS

35. Numerous studies have shown that private or market options for social protection systems, such as climate change mitigation developments and health care, regularly result in

⁴⁷ Ortiz, “The Case for Universal Social Protection,” 33; Simone Cecchini et. al. (eds.), *Towards universal social protection: Latin American pathways and policy tools*, ECLAC Books, No.136 (LC/G.2644-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America, and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2015, 33.

⁴⁸ ILO-Unicef Joint Report on Social Protection for Children, “Towards a universal social protection for children: Achieving SDG 1.3,” (Geneva: ILO, 2019).

⁴⁹ Ortiz, “The Case for Universal Social Protection,” 34.

⁵⁰ ILO-World Bank Group, “Universal Social Protection: Universal pensions in Bolivia,” (ILO: Geneva, 2016).

⁵¹ A/76/25, paragraph 23.

⁵² A/HRC/50/38, paragraph 25.

⁵³ Cecchini et. al. (eds.), *Towards universal social protection*, 137.

⁵⁴ A/HRC/50/38, paragraph 25.

⁵⁵ ILO, *Universal social protection for human dignity, social justice and sustainable development*, International Labour Conference, 108th Session, 2019, vi.

fragmented and strained access to State services when not properly managed.⁵⁶ The results of relying on private and market-regulated SPS compared to universal state-implemented schemes were that “coverage stagnated, benefits decreased, gender inequalities were compounded, and administration costs proved very high. Systemic risks were transferred to individuals, and fiscal positions worsened significantly given the high transition costs.”⁵⁷ Further, state-designed and implemented schemes have distinct advantages because they are grounded in legal authority. They are not regulated by market fluctuations or implemented with the intention of profit creation but to improve the quality of life for their citizens. Therefore countries, in consultation with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), communities and other stakeholders, should take a leading role in social protection to recast SPS as a right and not an economic or social privilege.⁵⁸ This approach is in line with Article 8 of the DRTD, which affirms the role of States in undertaking “at the national level, all necessary measures for the realisation of the right to development and shall ensure, among other things, equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income.”⁵⁹ The DRTD also provides that effective measures should be undertaken to ensure that women have an active role in the development process.

36. Similarly, relying on market-based mechanisms to address climate change issues can undermine the right to access natural resources such as land and clean drinking water, thus threatening the RTD. The DRTD explicitly calls for “the right of peoples to exercise, subject to the relevant provisions of both International Covenants on Human Rights, complete sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources,”⁶⁰ Thus, climate mitigation practices must be monitored not only for possible effectiveness but also for their suitability, sustainability and adherence to international human rights laws.⁶¹ Job training for those in highly vulnerable communities where land-based projects are often being developed is crucial to reducing the risks of rising unemployment, poverty and inequality.⁶² In *Our Common Agenda*, the UN Secretary-General calls for a revitalised global economy that does not measure success within the current narrow range of profit and growth – concepts championed within the private sector. *Our Common Agenda* calls for new measures beyond GDP for determining States’ successes in development interventions. The Secretary-General notes how many current standards focus on short-term gains resulting in long-term loss in other areas, such as environmental impact. Rather than a relentless quest for endless growth, the focus should be to make the global economy “sustainable and equitable.”⁶³

37. Developing robust SPS is essential to building inclusive and equitable economics at both domestic and global levels. Countries such as Chile and Mexico have implemented the System of Universal Access with Explicit Guarantees and Seguro Popular, respectively, to provide health care access to those not covered by private or contributory schemes. As of 2018, the Seguro Popular program covered over 51 million individuals previously without formal sector insurance.⁶⁴ In light of a global health emergency and an ageing population in many parts of the world, universal access to healthcare is paramount to realising human rights, including poverty reduction.

⁵⁶ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Jennifer Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 2013.

⁵⁷ Ortiz, “The Case for Universal Social Protection,” 34.

⁵⁸ Cecchini et. al. (eds.), *Towards universal social protection*, 34.

⁵⁹ DRTD, Article 8, paragraph 1.

⁶⁰ DRTD, preamble.

⁶¹ A/76/154, paragraph 30.

⁶² A/76/154, paragraph 97.

⁶³ Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, 53-54.

⁶⁴ SW Parker, Saenz J, Wong R. “Health Insurance and the Aging: Evidence from the Seguro Popular Program in Mexico,” *Demography*, 2018 Feb;55(1):361-386; Cecchini et al. (eds.), *Towards universal social protection*, 98.

C. Universal and equitable access to health care

38. When we consider proximity, financial feasibility, and communication abilities, access to healthcare providers and facilities often falls short of equitable access across populations. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has attributed health disparities among varying groups to inequalities of gender, age, social status, ethnicity, and race.⁶⁵ Equal access to quality healthcare is crucial to social protection and the enjoyment of rights. It must be crafted concurrently with other effective public policies, including those relating to employment and social well-being. Healthcare policies must be universal in coverage *and* seek to identify and target those in marginalised groups and vulnerable situations to ensure equitable care through participatory and consensual relationships with communities. Comprehensive health care is critical to achieving SDG Goal 3 to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.”⁶⁶

39. *Our Common Agenda* calls for a global vaccination plan, greater autonomy and authority in the World Health Organization (WHO) for the future, and an investment in general pandemic preparedness that takes into consideration international needs and the connections between all life on the planet.⁶⁷ To remedy inequalities in health care, initiatives and programs should also consider health education. For many groups, there is a lack of comprehensive educational initiatives available to them that focus on health at all stages of life. Preventative education, including sexuality education, is an essential tool for every individual’s understanding of potential risks and their rights to care and how to access them.

40. In the last two decades, many countries have started or expanded education on sexuality. By setting standards in sexual and reproductive rights policy and education, some States are closing the gap of unequal access to education, work, and health care for those in marginalised and racialised communities, rural areas, and especially for women and girls. As “no meaningful social contract is possible without the active and equal participation of women and girls,” these initiatives work towards achieving SDG Goal 5 of promoting gender equality and empowering all women and girls.⁶⁸

41. Further, sexuality and reproductive health education programs decrease the instances of child and adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and the intergenerational poverty cycle. Argentina has implemented a National Programme for Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation to promote knowledge and access to contraceptives as well as a National Programme for Comprehensive Sex Education, which “seeks to encourage healthy habits and promote awareness about personal care, interpersonal relationships, sexuality and the rights of children and young people, and to ensure the right of all students to receive sexuality education in their schools.”⁶⁹

42. Identifiable good practices provide a model for these kinds of healthcare initiatives. Put in place in 2011, Cuba’s Sex Education with a Focus on Gender and Sexual Rights seeks to incorporate sexuality education at all levels of schooling. The results of these programs and educational initiatives have demonstrated a delay in the age of sexual initiation, a rise in the use of contraceptives and STI protection, and a decrease in gender violence. The Dominican Republic and Chile have also implemented programs along similar sexual educational lines.⁷⁰ These public health interventions are critical components of effective poverty and inequality reduction programs.

⁶⁵ United Nations Development Program(UNDP), “Human Development Report 2019: Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century,” 2019, 58.

⁶⁶ International Labour Office, *Universal social protection for human dignity, social justice, and sustainable development*, vii; A/RES/70/1.

⁶⁷ Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, 52-53

⁶⁸ Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, 30; A/RES/70/1; World Health Organization, “Universal social protection floors for better health and well-being for all children and adolescents,” 7-8 December 2016.

⁶⁹ Cecchini et. al. (eds.), *Towards universal social protection*, 138.

⁷⁰ Chancel et al. *World Inequality Report 2022*, 15, 11

VI. The right to development as a framework for universal SPS through *equality of opportunity for development*

43. The global rise in income and wealth inequalities reflects inequalities in development opportunities. The 2022 World Inequality Report shows that in just fifteen years, billionaires' share of global wealth grew from 1% to over 3%, with the sharpest increase occurring in 2020. Despite this trend, inequality within states has outpaced inequality between them. Social and economic inequality within states has not been uniform as countries including the United States, Russia, and India have seen dramatic increases. In contrast, others like China and many European countries experienced relatively small rises. These global trends should guide the quest for strategies to address inequality. What are the States that have been fairly successful in reducing inequality doing right that the rest of the world can learn from?

44. The EMRTD affirms the claim that “inequality is not inevitable; it is a political choice.”⁷¹ As a political choice, it is up to governments and policymakers to implement comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable programs and political platforms to address these growing disparities. States must also affirm their commitments to international human rights principles such as the RTD equality of opportunity for development provisions and SDG Goal 8, which advocates “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”⁷²

45. A rights-based approach to public-policy design and implementation is central to realising social and economic development and creating just, equitable societies. Expanding the rights of those in marginalised groups and framing policies, including social protection systems within those rights, will decrease systemic inequalities within States. This, combined with global collaboration and knowledge sharing of best practices, will narrow the inequalities gap between countries. This is in line with Article 3 of the DRTD, which states: “States have the duty to co-operate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development.”⁷³ Universal SPS aimed at reducing inequalities also align with the DRTD provision that urges States to realise rights and fulfil their duties in such a manner as to promote *a new international economic order* based on sovereign equality, interdependence, mutual interest and cooperation among all States.

46. The DRTD clarifies that “the human person is the central subject of the development process, and that development policy should therefore make the human being the main participant and beneficiary of development.”⁷⁴ Considering the individual and communal aspects of social protection as a human right and not a privilege, shaping policies and implementation as such would minimise the social stigmatisation of benefit program recipients. Strengthening the social fabric using a right-based approach would ultimately reduce the phenomenon of “non-take-up”, wherein those eligible to receive benefits do not because of administrative obstructions, a lack of clear information from the institutions offering benefits, or feelings of personal failure to take care of oneself or family members due to cultural frameworks of acceptability.⁷⁵

VII. Building the capacities of states to enhance universal SPS

47. Effective universal SPS must be constructed within a nationally defined system of policies and programming that considers the right of all to “life, liberty and security of person,” as stated in Article 3 of the UDHR. Governments and policymakers should craft programs and policies that guarantee a basic level of income security, install SPS floors, and expand access to essential health care for all. The EMRTD affirms the Secretary-General’s recommendation that states utilise a multilateral approach to designing and implementing SPS that is transparent, participatory and peer-driven, and geared at solving problems by

⁷¹ Chancel et al. *World Inequality Report 2022*, 15, 11.

⁷² A/RES/70/1; A/RES/41/28, preamble.

⁷³ DRTD, paragraph 3.

⁷⁴ DRTD, preamble.

⁷⁵ A/HRC/50/38, summary.

drawing on the capacities of all relevant actors rather than being driven by mandates or institutions alone. Multilateral engagement will foster more effective, sustainable, and inclusive development frameworks to promote prosperity and address challenges relating to human rights, such as poverty, racism, sexism, climate change and resource scarcity.⁷⁶

48. The action points that USP2030 recommends that States and international partners adopt to create and implement effective SPS offers a helpful framework for global inequality reduction. These points include providing social protection throughout the life cycle, which requires establishing SPS anchored in national strategies and legislation; providing universal coverage that ensures universal protection and leaves no one behind; and developing social protection policies and procedures based on national priorities in partnership with all relevant stakeholders. This underscores the importance of *state obligations* to reduce domestic social inequities and economic inequalities.

49. USP2030 also recommends ensuring the sustainability and fairness of social protection systems by prioritising domestic financing complemented by international cooperation. This highlights the significance of international cooperation and global partnerships in reducing global economic inequalities. In line with the provision of the DRTD, USP2030 emphasises the importance of participation and social dialogue in designing and implementing social protection programs. It calls for the strengthening governance of social protection systems through institutional leadership, multi-sector coordination and the participation of social partners to generate broad-based support and promote the effectiveness of services.⁷⁷

50. The present study confirms the urgent need for universal SPS interventions in national and global governance. With the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing resource scarcity, increasing instances of natural disasters caused by the climate crisis, and widening social and economic inequality within and among states, governments must work together to support and implement a global standard for SPS. These interventions must be targeted at poverty and inequality reduction. Weaving the notion of the RTD concept of the *equality of opportunity for development* into the existing calls for a rights-centred approach to social protection policies with globally set standards will position the international community closer to realising the 2030 SDGs as well as a more sustainable and equitable way of life for all.

VIII. International solidarity and cooperation

51. Although we live in a world of plenty, millions of people worldwide still live in appalling conditions of deprivation. In the famous words of Mahatma Gandhi, “the world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.” This reality calls for global solidarity in tackling poverty and inequality. “In an increasingly integrated world where transnational issues are becoming more important, national policy reforms can only go so far. Current global challenges necessitate new development models and reformed global governance systems grounded in “reimagined multilateralism and strengthened solidarities that recognise the interdependencies of all people and between humans and nature.”⁷⁸ Addressing deepening global inequalities and persisting poverty requires “reshaping international cooperation policies and global partnership models in a solidarity-based, action-oriented and people-centred perspective.”⁷⁹ Such global partnerships are essential to

⁷⁶ Report of the Secretary-General, *Our Common Agenda*, 66-67; Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030), *Together to Achieve Universal Social Protection by 2030*; International Labour Organization, “Universal social protection for human dignity, social justice and sustainable development,” x-xi; International Labour Organization, “Employers’ contributions to the Global Social Protection Week 2019: Achieving SDG 1.3 and Universal Social Protection (USP2030) in the Context of the Future of Work,” 2019.

⁷⁷ Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030), *Together to Achieve Universal Social Protection by 2030*.

⁷⁸ UNRISD, *Crisis of Inequality: Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract* (Geneva 2022), 24.

⁷⁹ APG23, “Statement on Right to development and inequalities,” submitted for the 39th session of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/39/NGO/85).

inequality reduction because international cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels strengthens national capacities to implement public policies aligned with SDGs and the right to development.⁸⁰

52. From a right to development perspective, building institutional and financial capacity to support social safety nets, particularly in addressing the effects of external shocks on the well-being of people, entails an international dimension. The international dimension of the right to development requires justice for the globally vulnerable, especially those in developing and least developed countries.⁸¹ “In times of crisis and in the context of chronic poverty, States must ensure, with the help of international cooperation when necessary, that everyone enjoys economic, social and cultural rights. Failure to do so would be detrimental to attaining the Goals and implementing the right to development.”⁸² The DRTD mandates States to adopt concrete measures to fulfil the right to development by formulating international policies and measures and establishing a just international order *based on equality*, mutual advantage, and strict observance of and respect for national sovereignty.

53. Most of the States, international organisations, civil society organisations and academics who made submissions to the present study agreed that international cooperation and global partnerships are essential to reducing poverty and inequality in our world. Calls for international cooperation in the efforts to reduce inequality stem from a recognition that individual countries, particularly low-income ones, have limited domestic capacities to implement necessary social protection measures. Therefore, new mechanisms are required at the international level to provide the right incentives and financial sustainability essential to establish robust social protection systems.⁸³ The establishment of social protection floors as a means of tackling poverty and rising inequality is ultimately a joint responsibility. Building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure greater resilience against future crises requires international solidarity to build universal SPS that cover the poorest and most marginalised, as well as those who currently have resources to pay.⁸⁴ This is in line with the DRTD provisions on the duty of States to cooperate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development.

54. These areas of cooperation include the exchange of experiences and technical assistance for developing countries in formulating poverty and inequality reduction policies.⁸⁵ Collaboration also takes the form of financing programs that provide resources and capacities to low- and middle-income countries to support post-pandemic recovery initiatives. These include debt renegotiation and better conditions for access to financing, among others.⁸⁶ A promising initiative in this regard is the historic resolution on international tax cooperation adopted by the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly in 2022. The resolution outlines a roadmap for an intergovernmental tax process under the auspices of the United Nations. This initiative promises a democratic and transparent approach to reforming global tax architecture, which is central to tackling global inequalities and enhancing domestic capacity to implement social protection. The goal is to strengthen the inclusiveness and effectiveness of international tax cooperation, including the possibility of developing an international tax cooperation instrument.

55. Another initiative that promises to foster international cooperation for inequality reduction is the call for Global Social Protection Fund. This new international financing

⁸⁰ OHCHR, *Implementation of the Right to Development at the National, Regional and International Levels* (2016) <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/Session17/ReportHCWrittenContributions/Brazil.pdf>

⁸¹ UN OHCHR, *Realizing the Rights to Development*, 189.

⁸² UN OHCHR, *Realizing the Rights to Development, Essays in Commemoration of 25 Years of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development* (OHCHR: Geneva, 2013), 471.

⁸³ UN, “World needs to prepare for next crisis by setting up Global Fund for Social Protection now,” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/06/world-needs-prepare-next-crisis-setting-global-fund-social-protection-now-un>

⁸⁴ ILO, “Universal social protection floors are a joint responsibility,” https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_759106/lang--en/index.htm.

⁸⁵ Submission by Ecuador.

⁸⁶ Submission by Ecuador.

mechanism will complement and support domestic resource mobilisation efforts to achieve universal social protection.⁸⁷ There has been support from several States for this position and further support for the Fund at the UN Human Rights Council.⁸⁸ A global fund for social protection would allow increased support to low-income countries, helping them to establish and maintain social protection schemes for the benefit of their population and to improve the resilience of social protection systems against shocks.⁸⁹

56. In making a case for a Global Fund on Social Security, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights has noted that the crisis of poverty following the COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to strengthen international solidarity in favour of social protection.⁹⁰ The Global Fund for Social Protection will serve as means to close the financing gap faced by low-income countries to provide for social protection floors and protect the resilience of those countries from future shocks. The fund will also support the increased domestic resource mobilisation for social protection.

57. International cooperation for inequality reduction can also take the form of knowledge sharing. Shared learning may include information exchange on experiences, transfer of practical knowledge transfer and technical assistance for developing countries in formulating public policies for sustainable development. Such shared understanding can expedite the development process while creating accountability mechanisms and exerting pressure to influence positive change.⁹¹

58. In its 2021 report on “Operationalizing the right to development in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals,” this Expert Mechanism stressed the importance of domestic action in realising the right to development and the 2030 Agenda.⁹² The Mechanism also highlighted the need for national development efforts to be supported by an enabling international economic environment. “The 2030 Agenda records the commitment of States to pursue policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors, and to reinvigorate the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.”⁹³ The Expert Mechanism reiterates its call for renewed State commitment to international cooperation and global solidarity, essential to addressing the deepening inequalities within and among states.

IX. Coordination, monitoring and evaluation

59. Achieving comprehensive social protection that reduces inequalities and leaves no one behind requires multi-stakeholder coordination that includes the government, the private sector, civil society, academia, and vulnerable communities. Policy coherence across different levels of government is critical to developing integrated implementation strategies. This requires proactive engagement with stakeholders in all phases of the policy cycle and strategic intervention, including exchanging knowledge and expertise.⁹⁴

60. A key limitation of existing poverty and inequality reduction programs, including SPS, is the need for local, national, and international coordination. For example, the UNDP

⁸⁷ De Schutter, “Can a global social protection fund prevent the next economic crisis?”

⁸⁸ Michael Cichon, “The Global Fund for Social Protection and the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection: can these two initiatives be strategically combined?” <https://socialprotection.org/discover/blog/global-fund-social-protection-and-global-accelerator-jobs-and-social-protection-can>

⁸⁹ De Schutter, “Can a global social protection fund prevent the next economic crisis?”

⁹⁰ Olivier De Schutter, “Global fund for social protection: international solidarity in the service of poverty eradication,” Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, 2021. A/HRC/47/36

⁹¹ OHCHR, “Implementation of the Right to Development at the National, Regional and International Levels, 2016,” <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/Session17/ReportHCWrittenContributions/Brazil.pdf>

⁹² A/HRC/48/63

⁹³ A/HRC/48/63

⁹⁴ Submission by Bella Anis, Juta Mewangi (Malaysia).

has noted that a critical weakness of Brazil’s social protection network, which comprises several programs designed to guarantee basic living standards for all families and ensure income stability for vulnerable populations, is that it was not built based on coordinated efforts. “While each element might be internally consistent when assembled, they create overlaps and major gaps. Consequently, although the network supports formal workers with a range of benefits, it often fails to protect the most vulnerable individuals outside the formal economy.”⁹⁵ Such lack of coordination undermines the capacity of States to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of inequality reduction programs.

61. Some countries have developed policy coherence and coordination tools that can provide a model for others. One example is Italy’s National Action Plan on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development which is connected with the country’s National Sustainable Development Strategies.⁹⁶ The plan aims to build stronger policy coherence and coordinate interventions to tackle poverty and inequality within the broader national development policy frameworks. Likewise, Italy’s National Forum for Sustainable Development serves as a platform for consultations between government institutions and civil society to strengthen the country’s National Sustainable Development Strategy and enhance participation in the 2030 Agenda implementation and monitoring process.

62. At the regional level, good practice in poverty and inequality-reduction policy coordination is the European Regional Policy on Poverty and Inequality, which builds on the European Social Charter and its provisions for the right to social security, the right to social protection, and the right to social welfare services. The Charter is the only international treaty which recognises that everyone has the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion.⁹⁷ It requires State parties to adopt an overall and coordinated approach consisting of an analytical framework, a set of priorities and corresponding measures to prevent and remove obstacles to access to social rights, particularly employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance.⁹⁸

X. Beyond social protection systems: decent work agenda

63. Social protection programmes can enhance human capital and productivity, build resilience, and reduce inequalities. However, to be effective, they must be complemented with other policies and strategies that address macroeconomic drivers of inequality, such as unemployment and income disparities. Beyond SPS, tackling poverty and inequality requires strategic policy intervention to break the cycle of poverty. One such policy intervention is the decent work agenda to break the cycle of poverty by creating new cycles of opportunity and local wealth formation. The Decent Work Agenda rests on four pillars – employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue. It calls for setting priorities to tackle different aspects of poverty and groups of poor people. It involves “opportunities for work that are productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity.”⁹⁹ As a poverty and equality reduction and social protection strategy, the Decent Work Agenda furthers the right to development in its focus on participation, representation and employment.

XI. Conclusions and recommendations

64. ***Investments in Social Protection Systems: Poverty and inequality remain critical challenges for States and the global community. Reducing inequality within and among***

⁹⁵ UNDP (2021). Social Protection Response to Covid-19 in Brazil. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/latinamerica/undp-rblac-CD19-PDS-Number27-Brazil-En.pdf>

⁹⁶ Submission by “Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII” (APG23).

⁹⁷ Submission by the Department of Social Rights, Council of Europe.

⁹⁸ European Social Charter, Article 30.

⁹⁹ ILO “Decent Work,” <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>.

countries is essential to achieving the SDGs and constructing a more equitable and shock-resistant global economy.¹⁰⁰ Success in reducing inequality worldwide will require State investments in social protection programs and sustained international partnerships to support these programs in resource-constrained developing countries and regions. Such partnerships must take a holistic approach to inequality reduction, including addressing global challenges that deepen inequality, such as pandemics, climate change, economic volatility, fragility and vulnerability to shocks and natural disasters. These inequality-intensifying shocks can only be resolved through “large-scale system change that entails rebalancing existing power structures and building alliances that can effect transformative change.”¹⁰¹

65. *Multisectoral approaches:* Addressing global inequalities requires a concerted multisectoral approach to economic policy design and financing for sustainable and inclusive development. This encompasses fiscal policy reforms, domestic resource mobilisation, private sector investments and global governance reforms to ensure fair international trade regimes. Fiscal reforms should be geared towards increased resource mobilisation to strengthen domestic capacity to implement and sustain universal social protection programs.

66. *Multi-dimensional approaches:* States should adopt multidimensional approaches to inequality reduction in public policies and strategies to address the complexity of political, social and economic factors that entrench and widen inequality. To be effective, inequality reduction measures such as SPS must be complemented with other poverty reduction and wealth redistribution such as those expanding decent employment opportunities.

67. *Domestic monitoring and Evaluation:* States should strengthen the monitoring, evaluation, and accountability processes of inequality reduction policies and implementation with inclusive citizen participation. To be effective, monitoring and evaluation tools must be aligned with specific poverty and inequality-reduction targets.

68. *Universal benchmarks:* Beyond individual country benchmarks for inequality reduction, there is also a need for universal guidelines that provide qualitative and quantitative indicators for assessing the effectiveness of social protection systems and other inequality reduction programs.

69. *Cooperation and coordination:* States should promote greater coordination between the interventions of national institutions and subnational governments in developing and implementing poverty and inequality-reduction programs. States and international organisations should partner with civil society organisations and other representative groups to develop comprehensive and universal social protection systems where they do not yet exist and strengthen them where they do, with an emphasis on supporting historically excluded and marginalised populations.

¹⁰⁰ Submission of Cape Verde.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *Crisis of Inequality: Shifting Power for a New Eco-Social Contract* (Geneva 2022), 2.