



On Promoting Equality for Sustainable Development



I. An overview of the current discourse on inequality

A. Why the discourse on inequalities?

In 2000, the global community came up with the Millennium Declaration, with its vision of social justice and human rights, and vowed to achieve a set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The Millennium Declaration identified equality among fundamental values that must be upheld within and among nations.¹ But this aspiration did not substantially translate into MDGs.

While the pursuit of MDGs helped focus efforts on a simplified set of measurable outcomes that applied to all countries, these targets are averages and aggregates, which gloss over deep-seated social disparities that continue to hinder full and equitable development. In effect, MDGs side-stepped structural barriers—a wide array of economic, social, political, environmental and other inequalities—which are more complicated and difficult to address.

Such inequalities within and among countries have worsened or only slightly alleviated in recent decades, aggravated by multi-layered crises since 2008-2009. Billions of people—indeed, the majority of the world's population—are still mired in poverty and oppression. Nearly all major global actors today recognize that the MDGs have suffered significant failures and shortfalls, and that lessons must be drawn from this process and applied to that of charting post-2015 frameworks and goals. Addressing inequalities is thus a central arena for defining new development strategies and goals beyond MDGs, especially amid rising social movements and urgent calls for system change.

The United Nations system, embarking on such a post-2015 process, has assigned a UN Task Team (UNTT) to coordinate system-wide preparations. Since mid-2012, the UNTT report *Realizing the Future We Want for All*² and national and global-thematic consultations have renewed discourse on inequalities, leading up to a High-Level Panel Report and a UN General Assembly special event later this year. Among the 11 thematic consultations, the one on inequalities conducted

1. United Nations. 2000. "United Nations Millennium Declaration," The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/2, 8 September 2000. Accessed 10 Feb 2013. <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

2. The full text of the UN Task Team June 2012 report is available at http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf.

by UN Women and UNICEF has taken top spot and has recently released a synthesis report.³

B. Why the need to address inequalities holistically?

The Synthesis Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Inequalities (Synthesis Report on the Inequalities Consultation, or SRIC from here on) upholds the centrality of addressing inequalities in the post-2015 agenda. There is widespread consensus, the SRIC states, “that the new framework should be based on the principles of equality, human rights and sustainability.” (p.71)

This is a welcome departure from the MDG approach of targeting specific aspects of poverty and underdevelopment without analyzing the roots and causes of such conditions.

Indeed, the SRIC proceeds in the right direction in emphasizing the structural character of basic inequalities, which perpetuate economic, social, political, and other disparities, and serve as multidimensional barriers to full development. They are rooted in deep social divisions that span whole populations and reproduce across generations. They intersect and reinforce each other in various combinations, creating even more derivative inequalities. They turn natural, ethnic, historical and spatial variations into divisions and antagonisms among countries.

It is thus a welcome opportunity for all development actors, policy makers and policy advocates alike, to contribute to the process of defining a post-2015 framework that holistically addresses the broadest possible range of inequalities. By explicitly recognizing the structural causes, modalities and impacts of inequalities, all states, UN bodies, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders can proceed from a common framework and eventually agree on an integral set of strategies and goals to address these inequalities and realize genuine development.

C. A quick look: inequalities as structural barriers to development

The Synthesis Report defines four distinct but “strongly intertwined” domains of inequalities: economic, social, political, and environmental.

In the **economic domain**, the SRIC notes that economic growth does not necessarily result in poverty reduction. In fact, it acknowledges that globalization and other rapid changes brought about by Washington Consensus policies, which dominated the development agenda in the past decades, have increased

inequalities in income and asset ownership. These in turn are worsening multidimensional poverty within countries and widening the gaps between developed and developing countries.

In the **social domain**, the SRIC surveys the complex and often intersecting patterns of inequalities in social status based on various criteria. Some produce “horizontal” inequalities by virtue of gender or sexuality, and ethnicity, and even based on transient traits such as age or residence, while others produce “vertical” inequalities by virtue of mainly economic but institutionalized disparities such as class and caste. The SRIC recognizes the broad impacts and mutual reinforcement of these inequalities, which range from constitutional and legal exclusion and subtler forms of discrimination, all the way to patterns of behavior that seem self-exclusionary and even self-destructive, such as higher death rates, school dropout rates, substance abuse, domestic violence, and street crime.

In the **political domain**, the SRIC explores the various aspects of inequality in representation and participation in decision-making and dispute-settling processes. Such inequalities are rightfully attributed to a range of factors: constitutions and laws, culture and language, social attitudes, and disparities in power and wealth. Nevertheless, the SRIC points out that, at least in some instances, political inequalities “are driven by the differences in power and wealth between the elite classes and the majority population,” and hence the “capture of both economic and political power going hand in hand” becomes the source of so much unrest. (p. 29) This tight linkage of elite economic and political power must be seen as a powerful driver of many other inequalities, and must therefore be addressed most forcefully.

In the **environmental domain**, the SRIC identifies two kinds of structural inequalities: (a) those relating to discriminatory access to natural resources, and (b) those that allow particular groups of people undue exposure to environmental hazards and disasters. These clearly intersect with other inequalities, as is evident in the case of indigenous peoples and least developed countries. There is also a third (however indirect) form of environmental inequality, in which future generations are made to suffer the impacts of today’s abuses inflicted on the environment.

Although the SRIC does not list **inequalities among countries** as a separate domain, it does expound on this as a major area of structural inequalities, and describes the situation in no uncertain terms: “The dominance of economically powerful countries in global decision making in virtually all contexts is mirrored by the power and reach of transnational private sector companies ...

3. UN Women and UNICEF, “Addressing Inequalities: Synthesis Report of Global Public Consultation,” 7 February 2013. Accessed 18 Feb 2013. <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/299198>.

The structure of the global economy is particularly unfavourable to developing countries..." (p.15)

Indeed, many economic, social, and political indicators of inequality within countries translate globally as fundamental disparities between developing and developed nations. Such obvious and persistent inter-country inequalities are evidenced in nearly all UN reports. They represent a fundamental structural barrier to full development at the global level, and must therefore be dealt with as a fifth domain of inequality.

II. Framework issues in addressing inequality

A. Development, democratization, and national sovereignty

1. Full and sustainable human development.

Inequalities are structural barriers to full human development. As the SRIC states: "Addressing inequalities is fundamental to the realisation of human development goals." Resolving inequalities must directly result in enhancing the quality of people's lives and enlarging people's choices, which is what human development is all about.

Addressing inequalities must cover all relevant domains, precisely because human development has numerous dimensions, including better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, greater security against crime and physical violence, more satisfying leisure hours, greater political and cultural freedoms, stronger sense of community, greater access to knowledge, and more meaningful participation in decision-making.⁴

Equality ensures that all development outcomes are beneficial in a universal way: that is, they benefit not only a few privileged groups but all humanity, not only in key indicators such as employment and education but across a broad spectrum of basic human needs, not only for the present generation but also for future generations in equal measure.

2. All-round democratization. Democracy rests on the fundamental principle of equality: that everyone in society should have the same rights and opportunities in making or influencing decisions that affect that society. Democracy and equality are reciprocal concepts that both encompass not just the political but also economic, social, and cultural realms of society. Political institutions and processes, which relate to the management and distribution of power, cannot but intersect and interact with other institutions and processes in other domains, in ways that can reinforce or hinder equality. Thus, democratization must also go beyond political and governance institutions into the other realms of societal life.

Democracy must advance equality in all domains. In turn, achieving equality on all fronts reinforces democratization in ever-expanding aspects of society. In other words, the process of achieving equality in all domains, at the core, is also a process of all-round democratization. Democratization weaves the strands of equality, social justice and human rights into the complex fabric of a society's economic, social, and cultural life.

Curiously, the SRIC does not explicitly address the issue of democratization—while it upholds the primary responsibility of the state in addressing inequalities (see "D. The roles of states, CSOs and social movements), and particularly at a time when entrenched autocratic and plutocratic regimes, as obvious hindrances to equality, are being challenged by popular movements in many parts of the world on the very issue of democracy.

Democracy must be seen as an overarching principle that gives solid institutional guarantees to development and equality, instead of being narrowly seen as a mere catalyst or as just one of many development outcomes. We must also reject the notion that the pursuit of democratization is limited to installing formal (i.e., electoral and legal) guarantees of political equality. Rather, democratization must uphold substantial political equality and be mutually reinforced with economic equality and corresponding changes in social attitudes and norms.

At the core of political democratization and equality, there must be inclusive representation and participation of people in all decision-making and dispute-settling processes, in various appropriate and effective forms, and guaranteed by a universal set of civil and political rights. These democratic processes must be expressed, not just in the electoral, legislative, administrative and judiciary work of national governments but also in local or community governance, and should also harness the constructive role of social movements. Parallel and supportive to this, economic democratization and equality must be achieved, in which the people can exercise and enjoy equal access to their country's common wealth and natural resources, as well as to knowledge and cultural legacy. There must also be an analogous process of democratization in the various aspects of social life, especially in the field of information and education.

The democratization process remains a complex of political, economic, and social reforms that will vary from country to country. At the same time, its continuation and completion require a supportive international environment that stresses peaceful conditions, respect for national sovereignty, and mutually beneficial development cooperation.

4. IBON. 2010. IBON International Primer on the Climate Crisis: Roots and Solutions.

3. Respect for national sovereignty. While the SRIC sees the need to address inter-country inequalities, we reiterate that the effort must be guided by the fundamental and universally accepted principles that guide international relations, if only as an antidote to neoliberal globalisation that undermined these principles in recent decades. These include the equality of all nations, respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the right to political self-determination, and peaceful resolution of international disputes. The Ten Bandung Principles must also be promoted, as they further emphasize the rights of nations in the context of the post-World War II efforts of former colonial countries to assert their independence and resist neo-colonial intervention and aggression.

B. The human rights framework of addressing inequalities

A comprehensive set of international human rights instruments is now in place, enjoying near-universal acceptance as normative principles (as in the case of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), and as legally binding treaties in the case of international conventions to which majority of UN member-states are signatories.

These instruments must guide the post-2015 process. Many of their principles, standards and mechanisms are sufficiently developed to serve as a ready framework for addressing specific inequalities affecting particular groups. As the SRIC explains: "The achievement of universal human rights and the elimination of inequalities are thus two sides of the same coin, at the centre of what we understand by equitable, just and inclusive human development," adding that "the equalities highlighted by [these conventions] ... reflect the areas where countries have agreed that concern about inequalities should be greatest." (p. 13, 14)

We strongly support the SRIC in reiterating the well-defined obligation of states, as duty bearers, "to respect, protect and fulfil human rights," while "all non-state actors should respect and promote human rights, and private sector actors should also respect promote rights-based practice with regards to labour, environmental standards and the legitimate actions of their operations..." (p. 14)

On the other hand, the SRIC misses out in giving special attention to collective rights as distinct from individual rights. A number of UN documents such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples⁵ and the Declaration on the Right to Development,⁶ which explicitly recognize collective rights, must therefore more directly inform the inequality discourse.

Invoking rights held by specific groups as a whole rather than as individuals—the right to self-determination, the right to development, collective ownership and control of resources are some examples—plays a central role in addressing distinct inequalities suffered by nationalities, minorities, and indigenous peoples.

C. Sustainable living in the context of sustainable development

The SRIC mentions sustainability as the third component of a new post-2015 framework (with equality and human rights as the first two), and sustainable development as one of several concepts that provide "broadly acceptable approaches to tackling inequality." However, it does not further elaborate on sustainability's broad applicability in addressing inequalities.

Neoliberal academics and policy-makers often justify inequalities as the result of external factors (such as different communities and nations having different natural endowments) or as the necessary but eventually self-correcting side effects of a market-dependent system. But experience shows that much of these inequalities will not self-correct, and will even worsen if left alone. At the same time, growing evidence shows that they could be minimized and resolved if society adopts more rational, scientific and sustainable systems of production, distribution, consumption, and management of resources and wastes.

In the past many decades, the world reeled from unsustainable (even destructive) modalities and levels of production and consumption, driven by the unrelenting monopoly capitalist motives for accumulation and superprofit, and made worse by untrammelled financial speculation. These have fuelled increasingly intense competition for markets, natural resources, and cheap labour, among others. The results in terms of worsening inequalities are for all to see: corporate giants grabbing farmers' and indigenous peoples' lands and natural resources while exploiting \$2 a day labour; big banks bailed out while workers suffer cuts in wages and social protection; food crises and widespread hunger amidst a world market awash in agricultural commodities; and so on. Clearly, these gross disparities, which are over and beyond the simple inequality due to differences between nations and communities, are rooted in unsustainable production and consumption systems.

Switching to a more sustainable and equitable economic system should include redefining "good life" to shift from dominant lifestyles obsessed with more wealth and greater consumption, towards an alternative set of lifestyles consistent

5. United Nations. 2007. Declaration on Indigenous Peoples' Rights. Accessed 16 Feb 2013. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

6. United Nations. 1986. "Declaration on the Right to Development," the United Nations General Assembly resolution 41/128, February 4, 1986. Accessed 8 Feb 2013. <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r128.htm>

with sustainability and equitability. In such a fundamentally different system, all needs of the whole population can be met equitably, such that individual and collective human potentials are given equal opportunities to develop through education, culture, and participatory community life. Apart from achieving a dynamic equilibrium with the planet's carrying capacity, this approach at the same time provides a deeper and sustainable basis for human equality across all domains.⁷

D. The roles of states, CSOs, and social movements

Reflecting on the submissions to the global thematic consultation, the SRIC notes "the diverse efforts of individuals, communities, civil society, Governments and international actors around the world" to address inequalities. It proposes a "framework for transformative change" to tackle inequalities at four levels of action (p.50):

- a. pro-equality legislation, policy formulation and implementation;
- b. safeguards to protect people "from discrimination, exploitation and harm by others";
- c. "levelling-up measures" such as social protection and affirmative action to support individuals and groups made more vulnerable to inequalities and their impacts; and
- d. strengthening the "capacity of rights holders to make valid claims."

Rightfully, the SRIC explicitly assigns to the state the primary responsibility for (a), (b), and (c), and an implicit role in (d). States and government agencies, and by extension, the UN and other international bodies constituted by states, must indeed fully exercise and even legitimately expand their mandates in this regard.

The big challenge, however, revolves on the quality of state intervention, which eventually determines failure or success. It remains to be seen to what extent and how effectively can states and international bodies exercise their mandated roles on (a) and even (b) and (c) – given current shortcomings in advancing even fairly straightforward MDGs. In short, achieving pro-equality transformative change requires the combination of political will of governments and effective actions by other stakeholders.

The SRIC also mentions the role of civil society organizations (CSOs), although in rather narrow and specialized areas such as microcredit and social development (p. 66) and accountability mechanisms (p. 72). We must reiterate a more expanded role for CSOs on all four levels of action, especially since a wide section of the global community—which includes a broad range of governments, multilateral organisations, and other development organisations

advocating aid and development effectiveness—have already recognized their status as independent development actors in their own right.

In a welcome move, the SRIC also recognizes the roles of poor and marginalised peoples and disadvantaged groups in tackling inequalities by claiming their own rights. In fact, it implicitly endorses the constructive role of social movements in engaging governments (even changing governments) to secure a wide array of pro-equality reforms (p. 65). This role must be explicitly recognized and supported.

III. Specific policy proposals on addressing inequalities

A. Addressing economic inequalities

The SRIC correctly states that economic policy should not merely aim for growth, but "integrate and clearly express interventions to reduce inequalities." The document asserts: "If inequalities are to be reduced, the fair distribution of wealth should become the core business of economists and decision-makers." It then calls for inclusive economic policies that "combine a focus on work with progressive taxation, provision for pro-poor social policy, and social protection." (p.52)

Generate enough jobs in the context of genuine development. The SRIC expresses its focus on work in terms of "improved access to decent work." But the big questions remain unanswered: Why are there not enough jobs? Why is there a big informal sector (especially in developing countries), and why is there such a huge gap in labour conditions between the formal and informal sector? What structural barriers must be dismantled to sustainably create jobs? The SRIC appears to skirt these central issues and limit itself to measures such as skills training and reforming employment and wage practices that discriminate against women, minorities, and other disadvantaged groups—which are important measures too but must be linked to the core issues.

It is thus imperative that macro-economic policies address the root problems behind jobless growth and chronic unemployment. Development strategies must redirect economic growth into building truly productive and rationally balanced industries that create decent, sufficient and sustainable jobs. In the context of developing countries, these strategies must include national industrialization and agrarian reform. Such strategies and policies can greatly reduce and eventually eliminate the gap between the formal and informal sectors, and also eliminate economic reasons for discriminating against women, minorities, migrants and other disadvantaged groups.

7. For a more detailed discussion of sustainable living (which overlaps with the concept of "buen vivir"), see Part 2 of the IBON Primer on System Change (2012), pp. 25-30.

Ensure workers' rights in the context of pro-labour policies. It is not enough to state ambivalently (as the SRIC does) that labour market policies be "revisited." We must reject the neoliberal tagging of pro-labour policies as "rigidities" that supposedly result in gross inefficiencies, job creation deficits, and inequities in opportunity. Rather, policies that protect labour and defend workers' hard-won rights, including laws on minimum wages, collective bargaining mechanisms, the right to unionize, and the like, must be upheld. These are in addition to the need for states to enforce international labour standards and to oblige the private sector to comply with them.

Equitable asset ownership systems. The SRIC devotes an entire page discussing disparities in asset ownership and control as one of three factors "driving distributive inequalities." (p.23-24) Oddly, it does not follow up with a clear-cut policy recommendation on effectively bridging such huge disparities—whether in the context of giant industrial and financial monopolies in the developed countries, or in the context of extensive landlordism in the developing countries.

We welcome the SRIC proposal to equalize asset ownership rights of women (i.e. by reforming discriminatory inheritance laws and indigenous customs), and similar measures to benefit other disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities. There is however no mention of measures to democratize entire asset ownership systems and to break up monopolies, but merely to set up institutions that "prevent exploitation by local or national monopolies." (p.53)

There is in fact a need to adopt and implement asset redistribution and democratization as the core strategy for achieving economic equality and democracy. Private monopolies or oligopolies over land, finance, technology, services and strategic industries must be broken up, while other practices tending towards monopolistic abuse must be closely regulated. In key sectors of the economy where public interest is paramount, public ownership and stakeholder management must be reinstituted and increased. Particularly in developing countries, agrarian reform must encompass big privatized lands and benefit the mass of small tillers. More public, cooperative and community-based forms of ownership and management of productive resources must also be promoted.

Adopt progressive income redistribution systems. Income redistribution means getting money from those who earn more (principally through state taxes and other public revenue) and redistributing the money to those who earn less, thus reducing big income disparities and promoting equality. We support the SRIC's call for states to adopt and implement policies on

effective redistribution, on the basis of increasingly progressive tax and other fiscal measures. Income disparities must be reduced by giving priority to raising incomes at the bottom, by raising the share of wages in national income, and by closing gender, ethnic, and regional wage gaps.

States must establish and maintain a nationwide and universally applied social protection floor, with the principles and parameters of the UN Social Protection Floor Initiative⁸ as a good starting point. In particular, states should allocate adequate funding to achieve universal provision of education and healthcare, with affirmative action measures for girls, women and disadvantaged groups. State protection of the poor and marginalised should go beyond the cash nexus of public transfers and targeted expenditures, to include other human rights-based state obligations and guarantees, especially to the extremely poor and disadvantaged as listed in the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.⁹

B. Addressing social inequalities

The SRIC makes an excellent presentation of the main strands that comprise the wide range of social inequalities, which should greatly help promote a common understanding of these inequalities: their roots, their complex forms and interactions, and effective approaches in tackling them. Nevertheless, we need to ensure a holistic approach in addressing social inequalities, especially those hardened by the same dominant structures of economic and political inequalities and therefore cannot be resolved decisively through disparate and incremental measures.

Promoting gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights. We call on all states and international bodies to fully enforce international instruments on gender equality and women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979),¹⁰ the Beijing Declaration and Program for Action of the 4th World Conference on Women (1995),¹¹ and relevant gender equality provisions found in other conventions and declarations. The international community must also build on the UN Human Rights Council's June 2011 resolution (A/HRC/17/L.9)¹² on rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and work for the adoption of an international instrument that explicitly recognizes and protects LGBTI rights.

At the national level, we call on states to amend or reverse laws and policies that discriminate against women and LGBTI, and to take decisive action to curb all forms of violence against them, with particular focus on sexuality-related violence. Laws that penalize homosexuality and foment

8. The text of the UN SPF-I is available at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/secsoc/downloads/spfibrochure-en.pdf>

9. The text of the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, adopted in September 2012, can be accessed at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/154/60/PDF/G1215460.pdf?OpenElement>

10. The text of the Convention is available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/index.html>

11. The texts of the Declaration and its accompanying Platform of action are available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

12. The text of the UNHRC Resolution 17/L.9 is available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G11/141/94/PDF/G1114194.pdf?OpenElement>

homophobia must be revoked. Laws and policies that uphold gender equality and rights relating to sexuality and reproductive health must be fully implemented, with the help of adequate resource support, accountability mechanisms and legal remedies. Widespread education must heighten public awareness on the rights of women and LGBTI and help reverse negative socio-cultural practices (including customary laws) that foment discrimination and violence against them.

Through inclusive and progressive economic policies, equal access and opportunities (including effective affirmative action) for women must be ensured in employment, land tenure, education, health, social protection schemes, and service facilities that lighten domestic work and childcare. These should include universal and full access to quality health care for women and girls throughout the life cycle, including access to sexual and reproductive health services. States must also ensure women's equal representation in all areas and at all levels of governance and decision-making. They must ensure as well equal access and opportunities for LGBTI people in employment, education, health and other basic services.

Promoting equality for minorities, migrants, and similar disadvantaged groups. We call on all states to fully implement international instruments on the rights of minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants, and other groups similarly disadvantaged by reasons of ethnicity, nationality, language, and religion. These include the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 1969),¹³ the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007),¹⁴ and the UN Convention on Migrants' Rights (2003).¹⁵

At the national level, we call on all states to amend or reverse laws and policies that institutionalize or legalise discrimination, exclusion, and oppression in any form against minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants and similar social groups. Decisive state action must be taken to curb all forms of violence, racist practices, and xenophobic propaganda against them.

Legal as well as customary or informal restrictions against these disadvantaged groups must be dismantled to ensure equal access to asset ownership, employment, housing, education, health, social protection, social interaction, political representation, civil participation, and freedom of movement. Caste-based abuses must be combatted.

States as well as international agencies must also adopt additional policies to combat distinct types of discrimination and inequalities suffered by other uniquely disadvantaged and marginalised groups

such as migrant workers (especially domestic workers), the long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities, street children, the homeless, urban slum dwellers, and refugee camp dwellers. In particular, they must accord special protection to migrants, especially women employed as domestic workers, against multiple forms of abuse (including verbal, physical and sexual) and slave-like living and working conditions.

C. Addressing political inequalities

We call on states to uphold fully inclusive democratic governance by ensuring fair representation and participation of poor and marginalised (including currently disenfranchised) people in decision-making and other governance processes, and by ending patently undemocratic laws, constitutional provisions, and political practices (including pseudo-democratic electoral practices) that perpetuate inequalities, discrimination, exclusion, and the rule of tiny elites.

States must end policies, laws and institutional practices that unjustly persecute or discriminate against poor, marginalised and disadvantaged groups, against CSOs that work among them, and against social or political movements calling for reforms. Rather, states must actively engage full citizen participation in policy formulation, implementation and accountability at local and national levels, and ensure the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups such as women, basic sectors (workers and farmers), youth, disabled persons, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. The freedom of speech, a free press, the right to assembly and association, and the right to vote and be elected in public office must be fully guaranteed.

Other political reforms that can greatly contribute to the removal of inequalities in representation and participation include: (a) limiting the influence of big money in elections; (b) recognition of grassroots-based customary laws and processes whenever appropriate, including the exercise of free prior and informed consent as a right among indigenous peoples as well as others; (c) increasing awareness about people's rights to participate in public affairs; (d) enacting and enforcing laws on the public's right to information; and (e) effective accountability mechanisms of various kinds.

States and affected non-state actors must be urged to engage in peace talks towards a just and lasting political settlement of domestic (national and sub-national) armed conflicts, thus contributing to the resolution of long-standing inequalities and injustices.

13. The full text of the CERD is available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/cerd.pdf>

14. The full text of the UNDRIP is available at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

15. The complete name of the treaty is the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Its full text is available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/cmw.pdf>

D. Addressing inequalities among nations

The SRIC recognizes the need to address the issue of international or inter-country inequalities, although the report falls short of treating it as a fifth domain of inequalities. Consequently, we propose a more comprehensive policy framework and filling up the critical policy gaps to adequately address the most persistent and severe inequalities especially between the developed North (especially the wealthiest countries) and the developing South (especially the poorest countries).

We call on states and global bodies to formulate a new international development framework based on respect for national sovereignty and equitable sharing of benefits, while recognizing the need for the special and differential treatment of poor and developing countries. In this regard, reform of the international trade, financial and monetary architecture is necessary and urgent. Poor countries must be able to refuse unfair policy conditionalities, and assert their sovereign right to choose appropriate trade, investment and industrial policies, along with social and environmental policies. The voice of poor countries and poor people in international economic bodies must be enhanced.

Trade relations must promote equality among trade partners, uphold special and differential treatment of developing countries, and help economic development in poor countries. Unfair trade barriers and inhuman embargoes against poor countries must be lifted.

Financial speculation must not be allowed to run amuck, undermine the real economy, and reinforce economic inequalities within and between countries, but instead must be tightly regulated by taxing financial transactions and similar other measures. Banks and corporations must be subjected to human rights, transparency, and accountability standards. Corporate monopolies should be curtailed. International development cooperation must redound to the benefit of the developing South by further operationalizing the principles of development effectiveness. Systems for renegotiating foreign debt in favour of poor countries must be put in place.

E. Addressing environmental aspects of inequalities

The SRIC calls for global action against climate change, and reflects on concerns that “failure to reach an ambitious global agreement on climate change” is likely to greatly entrench present patterns of inequality, in the face of “unequal positions of power in global decision making.” (p.62) We share the same concerns, and reiterate the widespread call for states and global bodies to urgently and adequately act to arrest the drivers of climate change and greater environmental decline.

In line with the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR),¹⁶ developed and developing countries must achieve fair agreements on financing, knowledge-sharing and technology transfer for climate adaptation and resiliency, eco-efficient industries, and agro-ecology—especially those that benefit the developing South and the poorest sectors who are most vulnerable to environmental impacts.

In the broader context of equality but still invoking the principle of CBDR, the international community must continue to explore fair arrangements for all states to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions—for example, by considering the practicability of setting a universal per-capita quota on GHG emissions.

At the national level, states must ensure that resource extraction such as water use, fishing, logging and mining are within sustainable levels while protecting the livelihoods and access to resources of communities who depend on them, including fisherfolk and indigenous people; and promote community-based stewardship of natural resources. Governments and civil society alike must enhance national capacity to implement environmental regulations. Economic and educational programs must be put in place to discourage overconsumption and waste and to influence ecologically smart behaviour. ■

16. For a summary discussion of the CBDR principle, see: “The Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities: Origins and Scope,” A CISDL Legal Brief. Accessed 22 Feb 2013. http://cisdl.org/public/docs/news/brief_common.pdf

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