

11th International Forum of NGOs in official partnership with UNESCO

Challenging inequalities to build a just and peace society

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

Background

In accordance with the Directives concerning UNESCO's partnership with NGOs, adopted by the General Conference in 2011, the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee has the responsibility of organizing in close cooperation with the UNESCO Secretariat International Forums of NGOs on UNESCO's priority issues.

Ten Forums have been organized on the following topics: "Which education goals for tomorrow's citizens of the world: Is quality enough?" (Paris, France - 2013); "Access to water for all in Africa" (Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire - 2014); "The role of youth in safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural heritage" (Sozopol, Bulgaria - 2014); "The role of women in fighting poverty" (Paris, France - 2015); "Rapprochement of cultures: One humanity beyond diversities" (Beijing, China - 2016); "From promoting to building peace with NGOs" (Querétaro, Mexico - 2016); "Youth and its social impact" (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - 2017); "Changing minds, not the climate: the contribution of NGOs" (Paris, France - 2017); "Another perspective on Migration" (Tunis, Tunisia - 2018); and "Science as a common good of humanity" (Moscow Russia - 2018).

11th Forum – Challenging inequalities

Around the world, billions of people are excluded from full participation in the political, economic, social and cultural structures that shape their lives. Inequalities are amongst the most fundamental challenges of our time, limiting the potential of all people everywhere, as such, addressing inequalities is at the centre of human dignity and human rights.

Unequal power relations are one of the main underlying drivers of injustice, poverty and suffering. Their transformation is necessary, so that vulnerable men and women have greater influence over the policies, structures, and social norms that affect their lives.

"Inequality corrupts politics, hinders economic growth, and stifles social mobility. It fuels crime and violent conflict. [...] . The rapid rise of extreme economic inequality is standing in the way of eliminating global poverty"²

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, aims at setting new goals to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, tackle climate change, and promote prosperity, peace, and justice. It provides a blueprint to achieve

¹ Final draft of the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, submitted by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona A/HCR/21/29 (UNGA, 2012)-https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/A-HRC-21-39_en.pdf

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

a better and more sustainable future for all. However, the way in which respective institutions or governments translate the Agenda – leaving no one behind - into concrete action remains a noteworthy challenge.

The fundamental drivers of inequality include: **entrenched cultural narratives** that undermine fairness, tolerance, and inclusion; **failure to invest in and protect vital public goods** such as education and natural resources; **unfair rules of the economy** that magnify unequal opportunity and outcomes; **unequal access to government** decision making processes and resources; **persistent prejudice and discrimination** against women, people with disabilities, and racial, ethnic, and caste minorities”³.

The 11th International Forum of NGOs will assess the different factors fuelling inequalities and seek innovative and sustainable ways to tackle inequalities in all its transversal forms in order to ensure an equal and just world where the dignity and human rights of all people are protected, promoted, and fulfilled. Areas of focus include: youth, income, technology, gender, and education.

Youth

The 2030 Agenda seeks to be comprehensive, leaving no one behind, and aiming to reach those furthest behind first. Therefore, sustainable development policies must ensure that the 17 Goals and their targets are met for all people, paying particular attention to youth, especially those facing particularly acute inequalities in access to self and community development opportunities including girls and young women, young people with disabilities, youth from indigenous communities, young migrants, and young people from rural areas.

The results of a survey prior to the Forum shows a significant number of youth are discriminated against simply for being young. There is an inter-generational gap between adults and youth, based on the misconception, and societal norm, that adults hold wisdom and knowledge and that young people must comply with their ideologies and decisions.

Income

Income inequalities has increased, at different speeds, in nearly all regions of the world in recent decades. The fact that the levels of inequalities differ among countries, even when countries share similar levels of development, highlights the important roles that national policies and institutions play in fostering or challenging inequalities. Extreme poverty does not only have an economic impact on the poor, but also comes with social exclusion and the violation of human dignity. It is characterized by "the lasting or chronic deprivation of the resources, capacities, choices, security and power necessary for an adequate standard of living and the enjoyment of full civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights"⁴

Technology

Information technology is playing a more important role than ever before in our global system, yet it presents risks that are also greater than ever before. The digital divide results in increased disparity.⁵ No doubt, the pace of globalization and technology innovations are significantly transforming work. However, education and training systems, having remained mostly static and underinvested for decades, are largely inadequate for new labour markets. The achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) “**ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all**” can serve to bridge the gap in building an equitable society. The world is not on track to achieve SDG 4 as still too many children are excluded from education due to multiple factors including, gender, handicap, migration, marginalisation, deprivation, conflicts, and natural disasters.

³ Ford Foundation

⁴ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - UN ECOSOC, E/C.12/2001/10 para. 8

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

Gender

Additionally, an enduring gender bias is impeding full development and aggravating inequalities at an alarming rate. Gender equality is fundamental to whether, and how, societies thrive. The gaps between women and men in terms of economic participation and pay as well as political empowerment and participation remain wide: only 58% of the economic participation gap has been closed - a second consecutive year of reversed progress and the lowest value measured by the gender gap index since 2008 - and about 23% of the political gap, unchanged since 2018 against a long-term trend of slow but steady improvement.⁶

Adolescent girls and young women continue to encounter and be disproportionately affected by significant legal, cultural, social, and economic barriers affecting their empowerment and opportunities to reach their full potential. These barriers are formed due to discriminatory laws, institutions, attitudes, and harmful practices, such as adolescent pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence, early child and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation, unequal pay for work of equal value, lack of political inclusion, unpaid care work, legal impediments and restrictions in securing employment, lower wages, and added to this age and gender are characteristics that often intersect, add to, and multiply discrimination based on other grounds.⁷

Education

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

Objectives

General Objective

The Forum will seek to identify concrete examples of good practices and grass-root actions as well as develop a set of recommendations to tackle inequalities.

Specific Objectives

- Develop basic understanding of the causes and impact of inequalities on societies;
- Contribute to UNESCO's effort to combat inequalities by analysing the main challenges and finding appropriate solutions through NGOs' contributions;
- Empower young people to take an active role in the implementation of the SDGs;
- Promote quality, inclusive, equitable, and vocational lifelong learning education for all;
- Foster a strong grass-root mobilization and initiative for accountability and greater equality;
- Foster dialogue between NGOs and policy makers to eradicate all forms of inequalities.

Forum Outcomes

- Dialogue between NGOs and policymakers on challenging inequalities in line with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development enhanced;
- Concrete actions in confronting inequalities identified;
- Recommendations to tackle inequalities developed.

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

⁷ Lisboa+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes 2019

Participation

Participants of the Forum will include NGOs in official partnership with UNESCO, UNESCO Secretariat, and Member States, as well as other stakeholders and actors.

Date: 23 – 24 September 2019

Venue: UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France

Format

The Forum will start with a general introduction, presenting facts, statistical data, the different faces and trends of inequalities today to create a basis to enter into thematic discussions.

This will be followed by three interactive sessions addressing the different dynamics and dimension of inequalities from thematic points of view, and from the notion of power and public policy.

The thematic panels will be followed by two workshops; one focussed on collecting experiences from the field and another on solutions/policy recommendations for follow up.

To ensure the multi-sectorial and stakeholder dimensions, the two-day discussion will follow a structured dialogue approach with civil society, member states, decision makers, programme experts, and academia.

Panel 1: Inequalities

This session will focus on the different forms and shapes inequalities take in today's society such as in the area of inclusive and equitable quality education for all (SDG 4); social and economic exclusion due to extreme poverty; inequalities fuelled by conflict or vice versa. It will deepen reflection on the how and why inequalities continue to exist and case studies to expand these thematic areas.

Panel 2: Empowering to change the condition of power

Power is a concept that admits diverse interpretations. It is most commonly understood as a form of authority, control or domination. Power is a subtle and pervasive force field connecting individuals, communities, and nations, in a constant process of negotiation, contestation, and change. Power lies at the heart of change or its denial. Unequal power relations are one of the main underlying drivers of injustice, poverty and suffering which create conditions of inequalities especially for those furthest behind. The transformation of power relations is therefore necessary, so that poor men and women have greater influence over the policies, structures, and social norms that affect their lives. Empowering to transform the condition of power is necessary so that individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty. This panel will address power relation from the perspective of poverty, disability, youth and gender.

Panel 3: Challenging inequalities through policy reforms

There have been tremendous reforms both at intergovernmental and governmental levels, yet inequalities still exist and in some cases continue to escalate, what public policies or social norms need to change in order to win the tackle inequalities? How can we draw from mutual success and failure as powerful avenue for progress? What kinds of policy reforms or recommendations need to be in place to ensure that development objectives are met in a sustainable way and improve the general well-being of all people including those furthest behind first?

Workshop 1: Experiences from the field

This workshop will showcase various examples of NGOs actions in tackling inequalities, hence providing a space for mutual learning through among others the exchange of ideas, project, and tools.

Workshop 2: what needs to change and how

This workshop will identify areas of intervention at the level of civil society, UNESCO, member states and decision makers, and propose concrete action as follow up to the Forum.

Draft Preliminary Programme

| DAY 1 23 September 2019 | | |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Time | Activity | Facilitator |
| 08:00 -09:30 | Arrival & Registration | NGO-UNESCO LC |
| 09:30 -10:00 | Opening Ceremonies Forum FP President of NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee UNESCO DG/Representative | |
| 10:00 -10:45 | Inequalities today (Presentation of Statistical data, reports, trends.) | UNESCO/UNDP |
| 10:45 -11:30 | Panel 1: Challenging inequalities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusive and equitable quality education• Inclusive cities• Social and economic exclusion due to extreme poverty• Inequalities based on discrimination in situation of conflicts | |
| 11:30 -13:00 | Discussion | |
| 13:00- 14:30 | Lunch | |
| 14:30 -15:15 | Panel 2: Empowering to transform the condition of Power <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poverty• Disabilities• Youth• Gender | |
| 15:15 – 16:00 | Discussion | |
| 16:00 – 16:15 | Break | |
| 16:15 – 17:30 | Workshop: Sharing experiences from the field | Pre-selected NGOs |

DAY 2
24th September 2019

| Time | Activity | Facilitator |
|---------------|--|---|
| 10:00 – 10:30 | Feedback and recap | Groups |
| 10:30 – 11:20 | Structured Dialogue: Challenging inequalities through policy reforms | Policy makers Intergovernmental Agencies NGOs Enterprise |
| 11:20 – 12:00 | Discussion | |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | Workshop: What needs to change and how? | |
| 13:00 – 14:20 | Lunch | |
| 14:30 - 15:00 | Feedback from Workshop | Groups |
| 15:00 – 15:15 | Short film | NGOs action to combat Inequalities |
| 15:15 – 15:45 | Musical Interlude/Roundtable | People in Situation of Disabilities |
| 15:45 – 16:15 | Networking Break | All |
| 16:15-16:45 | Draft Recommendation | |
| 16:45 – 17:00 | Pitch talk | |
| 17:00 – 17:30 | Closing Ceremonies Conclusion/Vote of thanks President of Liaison Committee UNESCO DG/Representative | Forum FP |