

# Foreword

The world is converging around high levels of inequalities. And they matter.

Inequalities in individual living standards have, on average, declined between countries. Sustaining this progress and extending it to those countries that have not yet benefited is crucial. But this should not come at the cost of neglecting inequalities within countries, the level and progression of which undermine economies, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

The international community is committed to meeting this challenge, which we see expressed in demands for greater equity and inclusion rising all over the world – and which is embodied in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and specifically Sustainable Development Goal 10 to reduce inequalities.

For this, resources are needed, and so is political will. The world also needs improved understanding, which the *World Social Science Report 2016* is designed to provide.

Inequalities are multi-dimensional, multi-layered and cumulative. The Report makes clear that understanding and acting effectively upon inequalities requires looking beyond income and wealth disparities to capture their political, environmental, social, cultural, spatial, and knowledge features. Untangling such complexity is a challenge we must fully take on – if we are to develop policies and solutions that are feasible and sustainable.

The Report also emphasizes that the costs of inequalities are very high and borne by all – not just by the deprived and the excluded, but collectively, by current and future generations, in the form of heightened conflict and instability, economic and fiscal losses, environmental degradation, and political tensions. Reducing inequalities is thus everyone's concern.

Countering inequalities requires robust knowledge – but knowledge alone is not enough. The challenge is to improve the connection between what we know and how we act: to mobilize the knowledge of the social and human sciences to inform policies, underpin decisions and enable wise and transparent management of the shift towards more equitable and inclusive societies. In this sense, investment in knowledge is a down-payment for informed change.

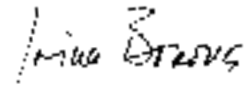
And in some respects, even the knowledge we have is not fully adequate. Social science research agendas equally require revisiting. The Report calls for a step change towards a research agenda that is interdisciplinary, multiscale and globally inclusive, creating pathways for transformative knowledge.

Inequalities are a major concern for social science today. That is reflected by a fivefold increase in studies of inequality and social justice in academic publications from 1992 to 2013. However, the Report highlights two major knowledge divides in research into inequality. Firstly, too many studies are too narrow in focus. There is too little attention to the overlapping inequalities that go beyond income and wealth, such as health, knowledge, and gender. Secondly, the Report shows that the focus of social science research into inequality tends to be concentrated in the countries of the North, where a reliable knowledge base already exists, to the detriment of the countries of the Global South without similarly robust data. Over 80 per cent of publications on inequalities come from the North.

To overcome these knowledge divides, we need more cooperation across disciplines and across borders to help governments develop more effective and inclusive policies, North and South. International networks, open data sources, co-creation of knowledge, open access to publishing and software – these are all vital to achieving this.

UNESCO's longstanding cooperation with the International Social Science Council stands at the heart of our efforts to promote social science to address the world's problems. The World Social Science Reports are a cornerstone of this collaboration, and I wish to thank the Council for its intellectual and editorial efforts to produce the 2016 Report, in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies, based at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

This Report is a wake-up call. Let there be no doubt: investing in and closing the knowledge gap in social science research into inequalities will be vital to achieve the cross-cutting ambitions of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Let's work together now – to 'leave no one behind' tomorrow.



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