



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Sustainable  
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international social science council

**Summary**

# World Social Science Report

**2016 | Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World**



United Nations  
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Development Studies



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**2016 | Challenging Inequalities:  
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## Introduction and key messages

### Social science challenges inequalities

The 2008 economic crisis and its long-lasting effects, the popular uprisings of the so-called 'Arab spring', food riots in Mexico, and the Occupy movement are among many developments that have put inequality back on the global political agenda in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Various evaluations have concluded that in 2015, almost half of all the world's household wealth was owned by 1 per cent of the global population,<sup>1</sup> and that the sixty-two richest individuals owned as much as the bottom half of humanity.<sup>2</sup>

This report concludes that unchecked inequality could jeopardize the sustainability of economies, societies and communities. It argues that inequality – and the links between economic inequality and other forms of inequality such as gender, education and health – needs to be better understood to create fairer societies.

It identifies data gaps in social science research into inequality. It argues that we need to invest in and develop meaningful social science research into inequality to develop meaningful policies to reduce inequality.

In short: too many countries are investing too little in researching the long-term impact of inequality on the sustainability of their economies, societies and communities.

1. Credit Suisse. 2015. *Global Wealth Report*. Zurich, Switzerland, Credit Suisse AG Research Institute.

2. Oxfam. 2016. *An Economy for the 1%*, briefing paper. Oxfam, Oxford.

This report looks at seven dimensions of inequality and how they interact to shape people's lives by creating a vicious cycle of inequality. Inequalities should not just be understood and tackled in terms of income and wealth. Inequalities can be economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, spatial and knowledge-based.

The good news is that there has been a five-fold increase in studies of inequality and social justice in academic publications since 1992. Numerous international reports and books on inequality have been published, and some have become international best-sellers. However, we need a lot more research to understand inequality trends and how to reverse them, and a different kind of research, one that is far more interdisciplinary and internationally connected. Unless we address this urgently, inequalities will make the cross-cutting ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to 'leave no one behind' by 2030 an empty slogan.

This report urges governments to end a culture of underinvestment in social science research into inequality. It argues that if we take inequality seriously, we need serious social science research into the long-term impact of inequality on people's lives. We will pay a high price for low investment and limited capacity in social science research into inequality.

The recent increase in economic inequalities seems to find its origin in the 1980s and 1990s, when the neoliberal paradigm became dominant in Western countries.

It later spread gradually to other parts of the world, in the context of the globalization and financialization of the economy after the fall of the Eastern bloc. The assumption behind this shift was that the benefits of the growth generated by market forces would ultimately 'trickle down' to poor and vulnerable populations. This vision, however, was not realized on a large scale. While several countries – both developed and emerging – recorded high rates of economic growth following the liberalization of their economies, inequality, and especially income inequality, increased rapidly within countries.

Figure S.1 highlights the considerable increase in income inequality in northern countries such as the USA, the UK and Canada over the past three decades. Even countries with low levels of income inequality before the 1980s, such as Sweden, have recorded substantial increases. In emerging economies data is scarcer and time series are shorter, but countries such as Colombia, Brazil and India register even higher levels of income inequality than in the North. Today South Africa has the world's highest income inequality, despite a decrease in recent years.

The harms and threats induced by this increase in inequalities are acknowledged at the highest levels. On 25 September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the SDGs, which aim to end poverty, tackle environmental change, and fight inequality and injustice, as part of a new sustainable development agenda that commits to 'leave no one behind'.

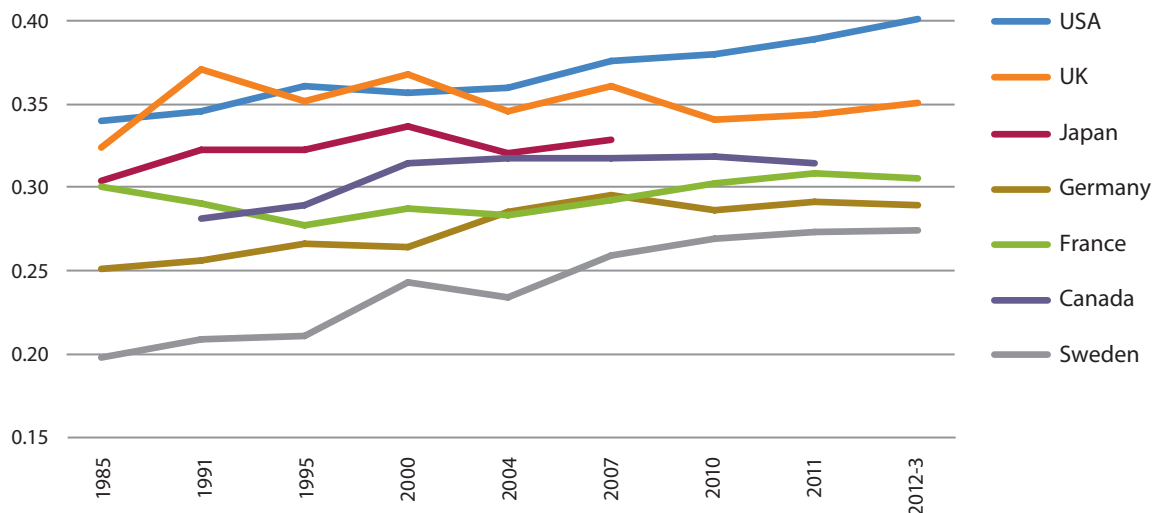
One specific Goal (10) is devoted to 'Reducing inequality within and among countries'. Several other SDGs involve reducing inequalities and promoting inclusiveness by 2030.

## Objectives of the Report

The six objectives of this Report are therefore:

- To look beyond economic inequality to the interactions between multiple dimensions of inequality. This is why the Report often refers to 'inequalities' rather than simply 'inequality';
- To document the trends in inequality in several countries and in all world regions, and to provide data and information on less well-researched nations, notably low-income countries in Africa and Asia;
- To analyse the consequences of inequalities in different countries and regions and for different groups of people;
- To identify strategies to reduce inequalities;
- To provide a multidisciplinary contribution to the study of inequality, with inputs from a large range of social sciences (such as economics, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, legal studies and development studies), as well as from other disciplines and outside academia;
- To identify critical knowledge gaps and propose a global research agenda on inequality.

**Figure S.1 Evolution of the Gini coefficient in advanced economies, 1985–2013**



Source: OECD Income Distribution Database.

## An inclusive analytical framework

The Report recognizes that the issues of poverty, inequality and social justice are very much related. Although inequality is the main entry point to its analysis, issues related to poverty, inequity and injustice are also considered, as are responses to those issues.

The Report covers seven dimensions of inequality, and studies their configurations in different contexts:

- economic inequality: differences between levels of incomes, assets, wealth and capital, living standards and employment;
- social inequality: differences between the social status of different population groups and imbalances in the functioning of education, health, justice and social protection systems;
- cultural inequality: discriminations based on gender, ethnicity and race, religion, disability and other group identities;
- political inequality: the differentiated capacity for individuals and groups to influence political decision-making processes and to benefit from those decisions, and to enter into political action;
- spatial inequality: spatial and regional disparities between centres and peripheries, urban and rural areas, and regions with more or less diverse resources;
- environmental inequality: unevenness in access to natural resources and benefits from their exploitation; exposure to pollution and risks; and differences in the agency needed to adapt to such threats;
- knowledge-based inequality: differences in access and contribution to different sources and types of knowledge, as well as the consequences of these disparities.

By addressing these seven dimensions of inequality, this report captures a large set of unequal dynamics, and the analysis it contains reaches beyond that of many recent studies.

## Why a new report on inequality?

In the past decade or so an important number of studies, some of which became best-sellers, have confirmed that certain dimensions of inequality were reaching levels unheard of in recent decades. This Report adds to this existing literature by filling several important gaps. The first is that recent studies pay too little attention to non-economic forms of inequality. Even when these dimensions are recognized, such as in education, in health or between genders, studies usually focus on one of them, and miss the interactions between them. This partition of research on inequality into specialized sub-fields fails to recognize the potentially broad scope of social science contributions, and of interdisciplinary perspectives on inequality. Another gap results from the dominant research focus on quantifiable indicators, to the detriment of analytical approaches combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Closely linked with this preference for quantifiable data is the focus on countries and regions for which reliable data are available, mainly OECD countries, to the detriment of other countries without similarly reliable statistics and data, typically low to middle-income countries. Finally, studies and reports on inequality usually do not go so far as to identify potential solutions and responses to multiple inequalities that are adapted to specific contexts, and which might help to provide pathways to more equitable futures.

### *Audiences*

The Report was prepared with multiple audiences in mind. For students and experts on inequalities, the Report provides an up-to-date review of influential approaches and data; it is a comprehensive portrait of the state of inequalities worldwide through multidisciplinary insights from several countries and all world regions. To decision-takers, policy-makers and practitioners from developed and developing countries, the Report offers a series of key messages as well as an analysis of the main policy solutions and responses to inequality that have been developed and implemented worldwide. Research councils and agencies organizing, financing and evaluating social science research everywhere will find a proposed research agenda for the next decade. Finally, civil society and all potential users of social science knowledge – including NGOs and other organizations, the media and the general public – will find studies exploring some of the consequences of inequality at different levels and in various parts of the world, as well as forward-looking essays about inequality's possible futures.



# Challenging inequalities: pathways to a just world – key messages

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*'We pledge that no one will be left behind'* Preamble to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

*'Inequality is one of the key challenges of our time. ... Ranking second in last year's Outlook, it was identified as the most significant trend of 2015 by our Network's experts'*

World Economic Forum Outlook on the Global Agenda 2015

*'Rising extreme inequality is a concern for us all'* Winnie Byanyima, Oxfam International

*The issue of rising inequality and what to do about it looms large in the minds of governments, businesses, civil society leaders and citizens around the world. Reducing inequality is first and foremost a question of fairness and social justice. It is also key to eradicating extreme poverty, fostering transformations to sustainability, promoting social progress, reducing conflict and violence, and developing inclusive governance. The next few years are a key moment in which social science must raise its game to address and challenge inequality, in alliance with other actors who are already raising their voices. The time is now.*

## Key messages

- Economic and political power are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small number of people. This can threaten growth, social cohesion and the health of democracies;
- Global economic inequality declined during the first decade of this century, largely because of the reduction of poverty in countries such as China and India. This favourable trend could, however, be reversed if inequality within countries continues to increase;
- Reducing inequalities is a requirement for human rights and justice, and is essential for success in other global priority areas, such as environmental sustainability, conflict resolution and migration;
- Inequalities should not be understood and addressed only in relation to income and wealth. They interact across seven key dimensions: economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, spatial and knowledge;
- In recent years, some countries have succeeded in reducing or at least halting rising inequalities. Simultaneous, integrated policy actions in different spheres are needed to tackle multiple inequalities, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution;
- Responses to inequality must recognize and address the specific historical legacies and deep-rooted cultural practices that shape inequalities;
- While reducing inequalities is important everywhere, a clear priority for action lies in the poorest countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This is the region in which poverty will be concentrated in the coming decades if inequalities remain as high as they are;
- Collective action by citizens is opening up space for novel solutions to inequality that can inspire inclusive policy innovation;
- A step change towards a research agenda that is interdisciplinary, multiscale and globally inclusive is needed to inform pathways toward greater equality.



## Part I

# Current trends in inequalities

*After decades of neglect, inequality is now firmly at the centre of research and policy agendas. New data, and the reanalysis of existing data, are revealing substantial increases in income and wealth inequality in a number of industrialized and developing countries, while persistent – and in some cases increasing – levels of inequality call into question the sustainability of our dominant models of economic development.*

### The evolution of global inequalities: diverging trends

Global inequality of individual living standards – that is, the inequality between individual members of the whole human population – has declined in recent decades, although it remains at a very high level. This positive trend is largely due to the decline of inequality between countries, following rapid economic growth in China and India. At the same time, economic inequality within many countries has increased, and today threatens to reverse the trend of declining global inequality.

Many drivers, operating at different levels, interact to create the scale and shape of inequality that we observe in different regions and countries of the world. These include processes operating at the global level, such as financialization and changes in trade patterns, as well as the reduction or absence of national regulations governing the limitations of markets or determining access to health and education.

### Making sense of trends in economic inequality

In the context of globalization, the wise management of change in some countries has facilitated the catching-up of Asian emerging economies with developed economies, and

with it the reduction of poverty in some of the world's most populous countries. This process has led to the emergence of a new global middle class, who have benefited from an increase in real wages in developing countries. Yet at the same time, economic liberalization measures introduced since the 1980s have led to increases in inequality and to the benefits of growth being unevenly distributed.

These processes have coincided with the stagnation of real wages for middle earners in developed countries from the 1990s. The rise in the incomes of the top 1 per cent of earners in the past three decades, and the increasing dominance of financial capital over labour income, have contributed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small elite. This has meant an increase in inequality, especially in developed countries.

Globalization, liberalization and financialization have also intersected with changing realities at local, national and regional scales to produce differing trends in inequality. In a country, inequalities are typically distributed unevenly between regions, and between urban, peri-urban and rural areas. History, culture and norms also affect the level and reproduction of inequalities. They often maintain and even reinforce social exclusion based on gender, race, class, caste, ethnicity, disability and other axes of difference.



*'Seven of the ten countries with the highest growth rates worldwide are in Africa. However, growth has been concentrated in particular sectors of the economy and in specific geographical areas within countries. The benefits of this growth have not been broadly shared.'* (Adesina)

## Understanding the impacts of inequality: beyond the numbers

Critical to understanding these trends is an understanding of inequality itself, across its multiple dimensions: economic, social, cultural, political, spatial, environmental and knowledge-based. Discriminations and injustices may operate across these dimensions in differing ways in different contexts. Social norms, values and cultural practices continue to affect levels of inequality, and how they are experienced by individuals, even when discrimination is outlawed.

*'To understand the persistence of racial inequality in the absence of state-approved discrimination, we have to unravel everyday social practices which seem "race neutral" but which produce racially unequal outcomes.'* (Harris)

## Multiple, intersecting inequalities exacerbate each other across scales

People belong to multiple groups, and so may be affected by multiple, intersecting dimensions of inequality and injustice. Some of the most enduring forms of inequality are those associated with identities, such as race, caste and ethnicity, which are themselves facets of 'cultural' inequality.

The treatment of groups affects the well-being of individuals and their uptake of services that may help to reduce inequality, such as health and education. This means that reducing group-based inequalities can improve life chances for individuals, and increase the effectiveness of direct and indirect measures intended to address specific aspects of inequality.

Gender provides a lens through which to view the multidimensional nature of inequality. In many countries, women face socioeconomic disadvantage, misrecognition as a result of discriminatory social norms, and violence and constraints on voice and participation.

*'Old socio-cultural divisions, such as gender and caste, have been strengthened, because the new economic drivers build on them, posing a real challenge for the future.'* (Ghosh)

## Inequality's vicious circles

There are connections between different dimensions of inequality across time. Children from low-income families and other marginalized groups, especially those living in rural areas, often have less access to quality education than others; later on, their inequality in learning achievement leads to inequality in employment and earnings. This illustrates the vicious circle of inequality and the mechanisms of its reproduction. In the same way, socio-economic inequalities interact with political inequality in terms of voice, representation and influence, so that those most affected by inequality often have the least power to respond to and change their situation.



## Part II

# The consequences of inequalities

*What are the consequences of present and future inequalities? Multiple, intersecting inequalities have multiple, intersecting consequences, and the interconnectedness of different dimensions of inequality means that it is often difficult to distinguish the causes and effects of inequalities. Nevertheless, some patterns do emerge.*

### Understanding the consequences of inequality

First and foremost, inequality raises fundamental questions of fairness and social justice. Inequalities contribute to a lack of material resources for some, but also have psychological and intangible consequences for overall well-being. There is increasing evidence that inequality affects everyone, and reduces the efficiency of efforts to meet other global priorities.

### Leaving no one behind: challenging inequality through the 2030 agenda

The SDGs, launched in September 2015, mark a critical moment for global action on inequality. Governments worldwide have committed to act on inequality through multiple, interconnected goals, requiring combined policy action in order to meet an overall commitment to 'leave no-one behind'.

### Understanding how distribution affects poverty and growth

There is vigorous debate on how inequality relates to growth. Recent research is moving towards the conclusion that inequality can impede growth, and that redistribution towards greater equality is not an impediment to economic growth. High inequality also reduces the impact of growth on poverty reduction. In fact, the higher the level of inequality, the more

difficult it is to reduce poverty. Conversely, if economic growth is accompanied by a reduction in inequality, growth has a stronger effect on poverty reduction.

*'High and rising inequality dissipates the impact of growth on poverty; it can act as an impediment to growth; and it is ethically objectionable in itself.'* (Kanbur)

**Figure S.2 Interaction of Inequality Goal 10 and the other SDGs**



Source: See Gaventa, figure 22.1 in the main Report.

## Understanding the links between inequality and conflict

There is a growing consensus that although inequality between individuals does not seem to affect the risk of conflict significantly, perceived systematic economic disparities between identity groups do.

## Understanding the links between inequality and health

The cumulative effects of deprivation and lack of education contribute to striking inequities in health outcomes. Access to health care also intersects with inequalities related to gender, socio-economic status, education levels, employment status and geographical location, with the most marginalized being the least able to access quality healthcare. Inequitable access to health care can be a source of social and political discontent.

*'This makes it incumbent ... to adopt a more expansive concept of health, one that incorporates an account of the social determinants of health and which explicitly aims to reduce health inequalities.' (Bayoumi)*

## Inequality and environmental sustainability

Inequality and sustainability are each key challenges of our time, and are linked in ways that make it impossible to address one without considering the other. An attempt to tackle either in isolation is unlikely to succeed. The poorest and the most vulnerable are also those most affected by climate change and environmental disorders; and inequalities compromise efforts to address environmental challenges. Inequalities and discrimination push the poorest and most marginalized into unsustainable practices, while powerful elites can continue with unsustainable practices without fear of recrimination.

*'Inequalities also undermine sustainability, and compromise the addressing of environmental challenges' (Leach)*

## Consequences for whom? Who is most affected by intersecting inequalities?

Multiple inequalities affect and accumulate for some groups more than for others. For many, the lived experience of inequality affects their well-being and access to social services, and also their aspirations to challenge inequality or better their situation. Gender, race and ethnicity operate in many societies as strong axes of exclusion and discrimination. Inequality between genders remains one of the most difficult dimensions to overcome.

## The future of inequalities?

Just as inequalities have intersecting consequences, transitions to greater equality may also have effects that cascade across multiple domains. Reductions in economic inequality can lead to gains in other areas, such as health, education, social well-being and sustainability.

*'Many future evolutions are possible. The baseline scenario would see the world go back to a nineteenth-century pattern of large social inequalities. Less unequal scenarios could involve political intervention to reduce inequalities domestically, or quicker convergence between countries.' (Fleurbaey and Klasen)*

In recent years, the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have driven economic growth in the poorer regions of the world, altering patterns of inequality in different countries. Given that the BRICS account for a huge proportion of the Earth's population, how they choose to tackle inequalities has global significance, and their responses to inequalities may be heterogeneous.

In developed Western countries, growing inequality in a globalized world has put pressure on the middle class. The polarization of incomes as a result of rapid technical change may lead to a 'malaise of the middle classes', which could entail economic decay, a reduction in social cohesion, and support for extreme political movements.

There is significant uncertainty about the future effects of the current wave of technological change. Automation will significantly reduce demand for workers, particularly for low-skilled workers, and mean that industrialization in emerging economies creates fewer jobs. At the same time, the internet and social media are facilitating mobilization against inequality.





## Changing the rules

The Report presents examples from around the world of rule-changing measures that can contribute to reducing inequalities. Some have been implemented recently in countries and regions that wish to reduce or stabilize rising inequalities. From the 1960s to the mid-1990s, countries such as the Republic of Korea and Taiwan, China, experienced rapid economic growth accompanied by a reduction of inequality, often referred to as the 'East Asian miracle'. Likewise, Latin American countries recorded extraordinary rates of growth, and a substantial decline in poverty and inequality, during the first decade of the 2000s. China has adopted a similar multipronged policy which has led to a reduction of levels of economic inequality since 2008. These countries benefited from positive conditions including economic growth, political stability and a shared concern for rising inequalities. But more importantly, they have targeted several dimensions of inequalities at the same time through combinations of measures. The overall effectiveness of the measures adopted seems to depend on their coherence and coordination. To be effective, a policy mix developed in a specific context will require adaptation to the conditions of the country to which it is transferred.

## Part III

# Transformative responses, transformative pathways

*A central challenge is to understand how inequality futures could become 'equality' futures, and how action by governments, civil society, businesses and citizens can make a difference. This Report points to a number of transformative pathways which can help move us towards a fairer world.*

### Macroeconomic policy, education, work and decent pay

The most effective and sustainable route out of poverty for the working-age population is a decent, fairly paid job, supported by effective labour market institutions. In order to support people to access jobs, access to quality education is critical, and offers synergies with reduced social and knowledge inequalities.

### Wealth and resource redistributive policies

Examples provided in the Report highlight the importance of policy mechanisms geared towards enabling the redistribution of resources, such as progressive income tax policies to narrow income gaps and make state finance available for social protection.

*'Although each context is different and has specific peculiarities, the experience of Latin American countries provides important lessons. First, taxation could contribute to reducing inequalities in developing countries. Second, there is reason to believe that taxation could conciliate the goals of equality and efficiency.'*  
(Gómez Sabáini, Martorano and Morán)

## Social protection and services

Social protection policies such as cash transfers, and free and accessible health care and education, are means of directly reducing social inequalities, and can work hand-in-hand with progressive taxation to reduce economic inequalities.

*'Social protection must be complemented by other social and economic policies to achieve maximum impact in reducing both material and non-material inequalities.'*

*(Roelen, Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux)*

## Inclusive political and governance frameworks

High-quality political and government institutions are vitally important to reducing inequality. If institutions are perceived as incompetent or corrupt, there will be diminished support for policies addressing inequalities, even among those benefiting from them.

Changing the rules in the direction of reducing inequalities is more likely to be feasible if those with an interest in change are included in the rule-setting process. This might involve policies such as quotas to bring women, indigenous people or other politically marginalized groups into formal political arenas.

## Global policies and regulation, trade and aid

In a globally connected world, reforms to international and regional governance and social policy can address drivers of inequality within and between countries, for example through tax cooperation, favourable trade agreements, strengthened social rights and carefully targeted aid packages. Effective regulation of the financial system is also essential to curb the repetition of recent financial crises.

While there are challenges to this kind of international governance, there are also spaces for pragmatic change over the short term, such as cooperation on international tax information. Recent global agreements around the SDGs and climate change hold the potential for progressive policies to address social, economic and environmental inequalities.

## Mobilizing for change: the importance of social and political action

Changes to policy and regulation are not the only responses to inequality. While the vicious circle of multiple inequalities can create a sense of powerlessness leading to inaction, it can also create its own response. There can be calls for accountability and transparency on the part of powerful elites and institutions, demands for new policies and rights, and the growth of seeds and visions for new alternatives. Such efforts from below may start small, but they may also multiply, spread and scale up to have large-scale impacts, especially when combined with rule changes and actions involving states and market actors. More significantly perhaps, they also create the foundation for future struggles for equality and social justice.

## Alliances and shifting norms

For political action from below to combine effectively with political support from above, alliances and negotiation between private, public and civil society actors and interests are crucial to shaping pathways of change.

*'Social mobilization, combined with specific alliances with political forces, can translate into more inclusive political settlements, legal principles and rights.'* (Vergara-Camus)

Research suggests that support for change depends not only on economic self-interest but also on prevailing social attitudes and moral and ethical values. Building pathways to equality may require shifts in sociocultural values, through processes that will be complex and context-specific, and which will involve challenges to entrenched habits and perceptions.

*'Social attitudes to inequality are a critical factor in the politics of change. Unless inequality itself is seen as a problem, and equality is held as a social value by politicians, activists and the public at large, there will be no agitation or support for corrective measures.'* (Fukuda-Parr)

The intersecting inequalities addressed in this Report require multidimensional responses which combine specific and cross-cutting policies and actions, involving states, markets and citizens, and which include scope for top-down leadership and bottom-up action. The ways in which transformative pathways emerge depends on how these forces come together in complex alliances, combinations and sequences.



## Part IV

# Transformative knowledge for a just world

*The social sciences have long played a leading role in analysing inequalities. But gaps remain in our understanding of inequalities and how to address them. The urgency of reducing inequality demands new kinds of research and knowledge, and a robust role for social science in identifying and building transformative pathways to greater equality.*

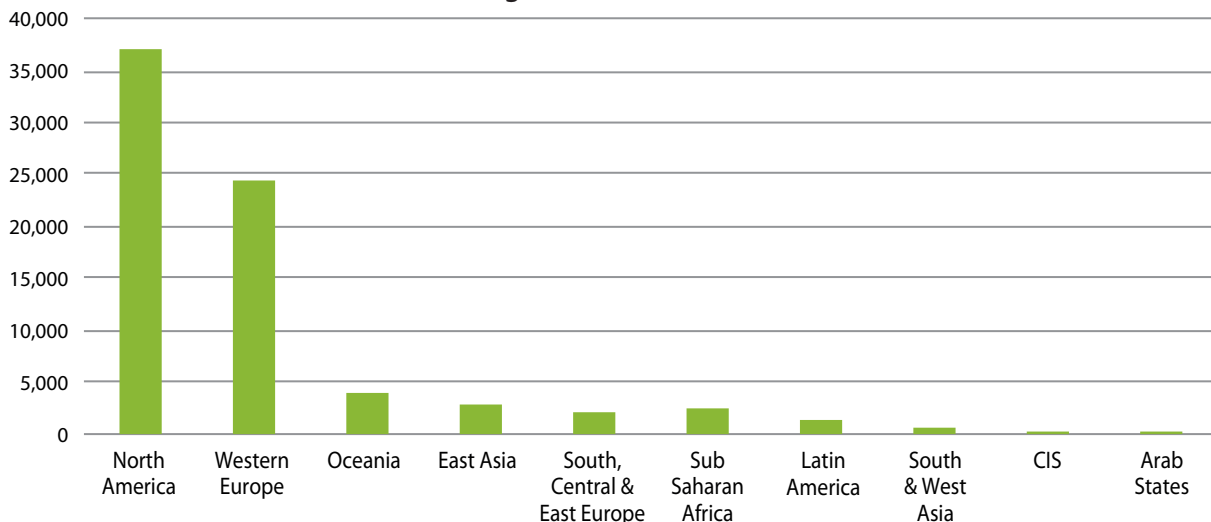
### Multiple, intersecting inequalities demand multidimensional understanding

Making progress on inequality will require the integration of a wide range of disciplinary lenses, to set agendas and define frameworks for research from across the social sciences and from the arts and humanities. It will mean going beyond the quantification of the different dimensions of inequality to emphasize qualitative and participatory methods, and to develop innovative combinations of

quantitative and qualitative research to understand why and how inequalities persist.

An understanding of how social science research can contribute to challenging inequalities requires us to acknowledge inequalities in the construction of knowledge itself. These inequalities affect which kinds of knowledge are produced, by whom and where, and whose knowledge counts. They also include inequalities of access to knowledge, and the tendency for certain disciplines and methods to be prioritized.

**Figure S.3** Number of social science publications on inequality and social justice per region, 1992–2013 (fractional counting)



Source: Science-Metrix using WOS (Thomson Reuters). See annex B4 in the main Report.



There has been a dramatic increase in the number of social science journal publications on inequality in the past twenty years, from a broad range of disciplines. The number of inequality-related articles under health sciences – notably in public health and health policy – has increased particularly rapidly since 2000.

Yet the significant regional disparities in the production of social science research on inequality remain problematic. Over 80 per cent of publications on inequality in the past twenty years have been by researchers based in North America and Western Europe. Efforts to understand the complex phenomenon of inequality demand global perspectives, and this fundamental inequality in the production of knowledge must be addressed.

### **Towards a new agenda**

Contributions to this Report, and indeed the process of compiling it, have pointed to a number of gaps in the study of inequality which will need attention in the future.

**Priority 1** – Increase support for knowledge production about inequality, and processes of social inclusion and exclusion, in those places most affected by them.

**Priority 2** – Improve our ability to assess, measure and compare the dimensions of inequality over time and across the world.

**Priority 3** – Deepen our understanding of diverse experiences of inequality.

**Priority 4** – Deepen our understanding of how multiple inequalities are created, maintained, and reproduced.

**Priority 5** – Deepen our understanding of how local and global forms of inequality connect and interact.

**Priority 6** – Promote research on how to move towards greater equality.

**Priority 7** – Support cross-cutting syntheses and theory on inequality and equality.

The creation of transformative pathways for reducing inequality demands a step change towards a truly global research agenda that is far more interdisciplinary, methodologically pluralistic, multi-scaled and globally inclusive than we see today, and which contributes towards more equal and just futures. We need not only transformative pathways for challenging inequality, but transformative forms of social science that will help take us there. Can social science rise to this challenge? The inequalities documented in this Report demand no less.

### ***Preparation, approach followed and structure of the Report***

The 2016 WSSR was prepared by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) under the guidance of a Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) composed of renowned inequality scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds and from all parts of the world. Most members of the SAC were nominated by international disciplinary associations. The SAC approved the Report's key messages and conclusions as well as the proposed research agenda.

The ISSC's 29th General Assembly, held in September 2013, decided that the 2016 World Social Science Report should focus on issues of inequality. The ISSC secretariat then launched an international consultation and review process in collaboration with its members and partners to select which issues to cover. An international expert meeting on 'Global justice, poverty, inequality and the post-2015 development agenda', co-organized with UNESCO in April 2014, provided some initial inputs and recommendations

on the kind of specific contribution that a World Social Science Report could make on the topics of inequality, poverty reduction and justice.

In May 2015 a grant agreement for research collaboration was signed between the ISSC and IDS, whereby a team of IDS researchers and research leaders became part of the team of Report directors. A first outline of the Report was developed jointly.

In commissioning authors for the Report, the editorial team sought to involve a wide range of social scientists from all over the world, across various disciplines, from within and outside academia, and to involve voices that are less frequently heard in academic debates on inequalities. Several speakers at the 2015 World Social Science Forum on 'Transforming Global Relations for a Just World', co-organized with South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), were also invited to contribute to the Report.

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## Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World

Never before has inequality been so high on the agenda of policy-makers worldwide, or such a hot topic for social science research. More journal articles are being published on the topic of inequality and social justice today than ever before.

This is the Summary of the 2016 World Social Science Report. It draws on the insights of over 100 social scientists and other thought leaders from all over the world, across various disciplines, to emphasize transformative responses to inequality at all levels, from the grass roots to global governance. It concludes that:

- unchecked inequality could jeopardize the sustainability of economies, societies and communities;
- inequalities should not just be understood and tackled in terms of income and wealth: they are economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, spatial and knowledge-based;
- the links and intersections between inequalities need to be better understood to create fairer societies;
- a step change towards a research agenda that is interdisciplinary, multiscale and globally inclusive is needed to inform pathways toward greater equality.

In short, too many countries are investing too little in researching the long-term impact of inequality on the sustainability of their economies, societies and communities. Unless we address this urgently, inequalities will make the cross-cutting ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to 'leave no one behind' by 2030 an empty slogan.

The *World Social Science Report 2016* was prepared by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), and is co-published with UNESCO.

The Report is available as an Open Access publication at:

[www.worldsocialscience.org](http://www.worldsocialscience.org)  
[en.unesco.org/wssr2016](http://en.unesco.org/wssr2016)

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