

## ***Global Social Policy Digest 15.2***

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## Global Social Policies: Redistribution, Regulation and Rights

### REDISTRIBUTION

Looking at the global data on economic development and aid, two current trends are relevant for policies and discourses about global social redistribution. Firstly, global economic growth in 2014 was lower than expected, and is projected to only marginally pick up in 2015 and 2016, according to the World Economic Situation and Prospects 2015 Report, and the World Bank's 'Global Economic Prospects'. Secondly, development aid continues to be stable, but the poorest countries are not the beneficiaries of high levels of development aid. We explore both of these trends in turn.

In terms of the first issue, several reports note that global economic growth is highly uneven. These sentiments were echoed at the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting in February 2015 in Istanbul (video documentation related to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and G20 is available). Additionally, the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook, says on this issue:

*[t]he world economy continues to expand at rates well below the trends that preceded the onset of the global crisis in 2008 and is unable to close the significant employment and social gaps that have emerged. The challenge of bringing unemployment and underemployment back to pre-crisis levels now appears as daunting a task as ever, with considerable societal and economic risks associated with this situation.*

Uneven growth, and widening inequalities are also central in the ILO document 'Global employment and social challenges: emerging trends and the role of the ILO' presented to the ILO Governing Body meeting in March 2015. The document concludes:

*The immediate outlook in relation to reducing unemployment and underemployment, raising investment in productive enterprises, accelerating poverty reduction and addressing inequality is uneven and fragile. Differences in immediate challenges facing countries are compounding the difficulty in coordinating international action to lift aggregate demand and tackle obstacles to job creation and productive investment. There is, nevertheless, increasing recognition that closing the jobs gap opened by the financial crisis and narrowing inequalities are top priorities.*

(section 46)

The underlying processes and patterns, however, are complex. For example, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) assesses that in the mid-1990s and late 2000s, OECD countries experienced ‘inequality convergence’, meaning that “inequality in household disposable income has tended to fall in the most unequal countries and to rise in the most equal ones.” For example, there have been significant reductions in inequality in Mexico, Turkey and Chile. While inequality has increased in Sweden, Denmark and Finland, these countries remain the most egalitarian overall.

At the same time, as slow economic growth is lamented, particularly in the context of resource conservations, arguments are made claiming ‘zero growth’. A conference of Transform!Danmark provided an international forum to discuss ecological and equitable alternatives to mainstream economic thinking. In a contribution at the sharing.org website, and with reference to the ‘Piketty debate’ (see also Digest 15.1 ), it is argued “[t]here is [...] no escaping the fact that a just transition will have to be managed and coordinated globally, with rich countries radically downscaling their resource and energy demands in order to clear the ecological space for those who need it.” This topic has even been considered at the World Economic Forum.

As has been the case in previous months, the gap in inequalities between and within countries continues to be an issue (see also GSP digest 15.1). The growing inequalities and, in particular, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is emphasised in an Oxfam research brief ‘Wealth: Having it all and wanting more.’ The data uncovered in the brief regarding inequality is staggering. For example, the brief notes that, “[i]n 2014, the richest 1% of people in the world owned 48% of global wealth, leaving just 52% to be shared between the other 99% of adults on the planet.” Particularly relevant for the broader discussion and post-2015 development is the claim that “if current trends continue, the world’s richest one percent would own more than 50 per cent of the world’s wealth by 2016.”

The Oxfam research brief was published just a few days ahead of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in January 2015. As a result, it gained traction in the media and started a broader discussion of extreme inequality both at WEF and beyond. Naturally, the inequality trends were also discussed at the World Social Forum (WSF) (25-28 March 2015 in Tunis).

The 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development also stressed the importance of zero discrimination; along with the reaffirmation of the commitment of member states to eradicate poverty, reach full employment and decent work for all. A related report, entitled 'Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world', explores and discusses issues of social exclusion and global inequality, and it claims that "further attention should be put to social integration issues in the post-2015 development agenda."

Regarding gender and the role and situation of women, the Beijing+20 review, on the occasion of 20 years since the signing of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was important in the area of redistribution. Despite improvements in some areas, the political declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women expressed concern that

*progress [in achieving gender equality] has been slow and uneven, that major gaps remain and that obstacles, including [...] structural barriers, persist [...], [that] no country has fully achieved equality and empowerment for women and girls, [...] [that] significant levels of inequality between women and men and girls and boys persist globally, and [...] [that] many women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, vulnerability and marginalization through their life cycle.*

Accordingly, with a view on the post-2015 development agenda, there were calls not just to address gender equality by means of a single goal, but to ensure that 'girls' and women's needs and priorities must be reflected in all other development goals and targets'. For instance, at the Commission for Social Development it was emphasised that

*[i]nequality based on gender [was] [...] a major barrier to social development in the future as poverty and a lack of labour market protections still affect women disproportionately. Involving women in all aspects of life must be a priority, and laws securing a minimum wage for all people, increased participation of women in labour unions and cooperatives, al provide an opportunity to strengthen gains in women's empowerment and participation, including their contribution to economic growth.*

The related zero draft declaration for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development also reaffirms the importance of gender equality, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in the process to sustainable development. Importantly, it includes a statement about the plan to further the "full and equal

participation of women in the formal labour market [that] would significantly increase not just opportunities for women, but their contributions to domestic revenue and economic growth.”

That much remains to be done becomes also evident when looking at the World Economic Situation and Prospects 2015 Report that estimates the participation of women in the labour market at below 40 % (compared to 75 per cent of men) in almost all Asian countries. The World Economic Forum’s website attempts to make the issue more tangible by providing a gender gap calculator. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) published a staff discussion note about the effect of legal restrictions on female labour force participation. A related comment by the Bretton Woods Project welcomes the IMF’s engagement with women’s opportunities in the workplace, however, it also stresses that “to get to the root of the problem, it must also tackle deeper, structural issues, including the macro-economic policies pushed through its structural adjustment programmes which have caused perpetuated and depended on women’s economic and social inequality.”

Such structural issues make women's rights activists to call for UN to protect women in their work and demanded “for everyone to make gender equality a reality by 2030.” Related, at the occasion of the International Women’s Day, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) organised a march for women’s social and economic autonomy, and called on unions, governments, policy makers and business to adopt an economic agenda for women:

*An agenda that includes as jobs and growth plan to increase women’s access to decent work. An economic agenda that will tackle structural barriers to women’s effective labour force participation, including through adequate investment in care provision, creating decent care jobs for women and men, family- friendly workplaces and workplaces free from violence. An economic agenda that will fit women and families out of poverty and provide a sustainable model of growth.*

In other words, ITUC highlighted that progress on women’s equality is not simply a matter of rhetorical support, but rather need to be pursued with sound economic plans.

The **second trend**, as reported by different sources, is that development aid is “at a historical high” (according to OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría) and is expected

to remain stable. And, looking into the future of development aid, the preparatory process towards the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (to take place 13-16 July 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) is continuing: from 8-9 April 2015 informal interactive hearings were held with civil society and the business sector, and in January and April 2015 drafting sessions for the outcome document preparation took place. Despite comparably high aid levels, the zero draft on the conference outcome document mourns “[c]urrent policy, financing and investment patterns are not delivering the future we want. There are enormous unmet financing needs for sustainable development” (section 4). One of the problems here is that aid to the poorest countries continues to decline, according to OECD DAC data.

Suggestions on how to move forward are manifold. The Social Watch reports, for example, that Alliance Sud is “calling for at least half the development budgets of donor countries to go towards the poorest countries.” According to OECD Secretary-General Angel Guerria, the challenge is bringing about an increase in aid to those countries most in need, and to use it as efficiently as possible. (Meanwhile for the national level to address inequalities, from Angel Guerria, we hear the standard prescription for structural reforms to boost growth).

Alternatively, a report by the Global Humanitarian Assistance programme, authored by Chloe Stirk, alerts us to another important source of humanitarian financing, namely Zakat (the mandatory Muslim practice of giving 2.5% of one’s accumulated wealth for charitable purposes every year). She argues that, 1) in order for Zakat to become more meaningful, various political and religious parties need to engage in discussion and learn from each other about the best use of Zakat for humanitarian assistance; 2) an independent global body is needed to provide guidance on the parameters of reasonable interpretations of Zakat; 3) global (and other) policy actors should improve channels between Zakat funds and the international humanitarian response system; 4) Zakat revenues should be increased and better channelled; and 5) a complementary approach between the wider development practice and Zakat.

At the same time, Jeffrey Sachs claims that “[o]nly private capital will provide the financing at a scale that is needed”, and makes the case for public-private partnerships (as has also been made at the World Economic Forum, see \_\_\_\_\_

Global Social Governance). In another context, Jeffrey Sachs also claims the “world’s richest people should also be involved in funding the development agenda [...]. More than 1600 billionaires have a combined worth estimated at around 6.4 trillion USD and if they gave a small part of this to development, it would make a huge difference” (see also Social Watch).

One concrete mechanism of global social redistribution is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Fund, created by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The fund aims to facilitate the process of getting from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the SDGs and is in the process of implementing joint programmes in almost 20 countries to address key development challenges. Jeffrey Sachs, furthermore, suggests a new global fund for health that could address the problems of underdeveloped health systems and would combine GAVI, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the World Bank. Sachs makes a similar case for the field of education: “The time has come to create a Global Fund for Education to ensure that even the world’s poorest children have the chance to receive a quality education at least through secondary school.” In contrast, Karen Mundy (Global Partnership for Education) argues “what the education sector needs is not a new global fund for education. Such an entity already exists: it is the Global Partnership for Education. It’s time to reinforce and strengthen this existing partnership.”

The World Bank’s ‘Global Economic Prospects’, amongst other things, stresses the role of remittances in financing development which also represents an important mechanism of global redistribution. Remittances are reported to be “relatively stable, and acyclical. In a substantial proportion of the countries, remittance receipts are not significantly related to the domestic business cycle. In contrast, debt flows and foreign direct investment are procyclical” (for a related discussion see the a World Bank Blog, World Economic Forum website and the Asian Development Bank website).

The 53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD53) (4-13 February 2015, at UN Headquarters in New York) reflected more of an engagement with the principles that should guide “social development in the contemporary world.” According to the chair’s summary it was emphasised in the discussions that

*sustainable development must be people-centered and inclusive, and must integrate in a balanced manner the social, economic and environmental aspects of development [and that] social justice is critical to inclusive and sustainable development. Achieving the core objectives of poverty eradication, full employment and decent work for all and social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights are cornerstones for the sustainable future we want.*

The importance of solidarity is being stressed by others. The International Human Solidarity day this year is themed "Moving together as one: Solidarity as the foundation of the UN development agenda beyond 2015". On solidarity economy more specifically is a new International Solidarity Network report. Meanwhile Philippe Douste-Blazy, UN Special envoy on innovative financing reminds us of the solidarity levy in financial transactions (see GSP Digest 15.1).

Another and certainly most prominent way to address the inequalities (or is it 'only' about poverty?) is obviously the ever intensifying process and extensive discourses on the current draft set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (we covered this to some extent in GSP Digest 14.3). So far, a global on inequality (goal 10) is still part of the proposal (see digest 13.4 for background to the discussion on this goal), however a ICSU/ISSC report reviews the targets from a Science perspective and argues that

*The goal has neither qualitative nor quantitative endpoints. It would have been better to word this goal as: 'Minimize social, economic, political and educational inequalities within and between countries'.*

*The goal is unspecific, but the targets address all dimensions. The danger is that 'reducing inequalities' could be interpreted as reducing social inequalities, so avoiding confronting the income and wealth differences which are formative of other dimensions of inequality.*

Overall, some have characterised the SDGs as "an unprecedented commitment to inclusion, sustainability and universality"; at the same time, concerns have been raised regarding the political process and whether it will live up to the agenda's promises. For example, the Social Watch argues that the "post-2015 development agenda will only succeed if the SDGs include meaningful and time-bound targets and commitments for the rich that trigger the necessary regulatory and fiscal policy changes." And not all are still convinced the process is going into the right direction (more detail about currently proposed changes is available).



## REGULATION

In light of the structural issues generating and maintaining global inequalities, global migration, trade and taxation patterns are in need of being addressed and regulated if we aim to improve the situation.

The Migration Policy Institute presented a new report that details the increasing mismatch between the legal and normative frameworks that define the existing protection regime and the contemporary patterns of forced displacement. It analyzes contemporary drivers and emerging trends of population displacement, noting that the majority of forcibly displaced people—some 33.3 million—remain within their own countries, and that more than 50 percent of the displaced live in urban areas. It says that the international protection system is under pressure, and finally examines the key implications of these trends for policymakers and the international community, outlining some possible policy directions for reform.

Regarding trade, World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo, suggests that the Doha Development Agenda is progressing: “We are continuing to make steady progress in terms of understanding the issues and each other's aspirations and limitations.” Still, he recognized the need for more commitment in concluding the Doha Round. However, voices critical of free trade regimes continue to launch initiatives calling attention to the impacts of trade agreements on the most disadvantaged groups and the environment. For example, on 18 April, a Global Day of Action to Defeat Free Trade and Investment Treaties was held. This initiative was launched by global civil society organizations: trade unions, farmers, youth, women, indigenous movements and grassroots activists, to stop free trade and investment deals.

On taxes, in order to strengthen Base Erosion and Profit Sharing (BEPS) project, delegates from some 90 jurisdictions have gathered at the OECD Conference Centre in Paris in two meetings. In the same direction, the European Commission presented a package of transparency measures aimed at tackling corporate tax avoidance and harmful tax competition within the EU. Meanwhile, the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes claims that the international community is making major progress to end tax evasion. Similarly, Global Forum presented some reports demonstrating that. In that direction, OCDE/G20 project to combat BEPS by

multinationals made some steps toward implementation. OXFAM, however, thinks there is still much to be done and calls for a ‘World Tax Summit’ “where all countries come together to make tax fair and help close the gap between rich and poor.”

Meanwhile, the UN Global Compact (GC) was engaged in sustainable development and climate change, and strengthened local networks governance. On the first topic, Ban Ki -moon met with business leaders in Davos to engage some debates on these two issues. The idea was to turn sustainability challenges such as water scarcity and lock-in to fossil fuels into new business opportunities, particularly in the manufacturing and finance sectors in emerging economies. In addition, UN GC is trying to make stronger governance and accountability Local Networks, so they have adopted a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with some new requirements.

Finally, participation of women in the worlds of employment and business also featured in events held by the United Nations Global Compact (UN GC). Most prominent and noted above, was the 2015 Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Annual Event (10-11 March) that focused on ‘Unlimited Potential: Business Partners for Gender Equality’, and brought together business leaders, government representatives and civil society groups. The event was a part of the official CSW59/Beijing+20 programme. An interesting point of this discussion was that in the 1995 Platform for Action the role of businesses was largely overlooked. As such, the statement agreed upon by the stakeholders at the event was properly titled ‘Partnering for Women’s Empowerment--Equality Means Business’. This 10-point statement outlined the commitment to empowering women and recognizing the role business can play in partnership with governments and civil society organization. More symbolically, as part of the celebrations of International Women’s Day, and ahead of the WEPs event, several global stock exchanges joined the UN Global Compact with UN Women and Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative to ring their opening or closing bells in support of gender equality. Whether these initiatives will move past the symbolic phase and into action remains to be seen.

Still, the UN GC is in the process of incorporating the WEPs. As such, the WEPs are supposed to focus, amongst other issues, on commitments to end violence against women, unleashing government actions to end gender discrimination, and to invest in women’s health, education and entrepreneurship. These are rather ambitious goals and are not likely to be achieved in the short-term.

## **RIGHTS**

Equally, in the field of global social rights, much attention was given to the rights of women and girls. At the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, representatives of member states pledged to take further action in order to implement the Beijing Declaration and improve the overall rights of women. Also important in the political declaration is the recognition that equality and empowering of women and girls is central to the post-2015 development agenda. This was certainly the message sounded by the Human Rights Council, at the conclusion of its twenty-eight regular session (2-27 March 2015). The Council urged states “to take concrete steps towards promoting and protecting all human rights of women and girl.”

Other relevant areas of focus in terms of social rights were the rights of street children, as well as right to water and sanitation. Firstly, the UN Special Rapporteurs on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, and on adequate housing, Leilani Farha, brought to light the need to address the plight of street children. The Rapporteurs noted that the economic crisis (in conjuncture with poverty, natural disasters and conflicts) has greatly impacted the types of resources available to children living or working on the streets. In particular, they highlighted that street children do not have access to services, such as housing, health and education. Farha discussed the need in the short-term for emergency shelters, and the long-term policies on adequate housing and economic opportunities to ensure that children do not end up on the streets. Amidst growing inequalities and uncertain security situations in many parts of the world, the trends facing street children are discouraging.

In terms of water and sanitation, ahead of the World Water Day (March 22), the new United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Léo Heller, pointed to need for water, sanitation and hygiene to be dealt with in the post-2015 development agenda. Heller highlighted that is the most disadvantaged groups that need to be considered in particular, undocumented populations, migrants and indigenous communities. Heller also called attention to the need for women and girls to have access to toilets and soap within their homes. In this way, Heller pointed to very practical issues facing women and girls in many parts of the world.

## Global Social Governance

2015 marks the anniversaries of two key international institutions: the WTO turns 20, and the UN turns 70. The WTO's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary reflection process left a lot to be desired. The role of the WTO in the global economy was highlighted by for example WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo who said that: "when the global economy is more interconnected than ever, it is difficult to imagine a world without the WTO." However, there was little discussion on the broader impacts of the WTO. In contrast, the UN celebrations at its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and reflections upon its past and future roles and current challenges, link to much broader international and global processes of governance.

A key focus area, in the context of the UN reflections, was the role of women and gender issues. For example, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon drew attention to the 'Every Women Every Child' partnership, as the "fastest growing [partnership] in history." This commitment shown by a variety of stakeholders, such as governments and businesses, is a signal of the importance of women's and children's issues in shaping the development agenda.

More importantly, much of the global conversation about equality of women occurred as a result of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (New York, 9 - 20 March 2015), that brought together representatives of Member States, UN entities, and the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from all regions of the world. The event marked the 20th anniversaries of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen, and the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing. As such, the central focus was on reviewing the achievements made in regards to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The review, referred to as Beijing+20, acknowledged the achievements made in the last two decades in regards to gender equality but also noted the remaining challenges. In this regard, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) said that the "Commission on the Status of Women had a revitalized role to play in ensuring the 2030 'expiry date' for gender inequality across the world." Similarly, Commission Chair Kandra Vajrabhaya also stated that "the Commission had reaffirmed its

commitment to accelerating the pace of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the realization of the human rights of women and girls." In this way, the review process rejuvenated the discussion on gender inequality and reminded the international community of the work that remains to be done.

Once again, the key feature of this most recent discussion prompted by the 20 year anniversary of the Beijing conference, is the diversity of stakeholders. As part of the Commission's meeting, the 2015 Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Annual Event gathered leaders from business, Government, the UN and civil society to reflect on the implications of the Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and project an action agenda driven by WEPs champions. Therefore, while much work remains to be done the renewed discussion is an opportunity to further women's equality agenda, and at the very least to ensure its prominence in the post-2015 development process.

Evidently, while in a stage of expectations looking to the summits on the SDGs, development finance, and climate change still to happen this year, there are struggles around and between actors regarding roles and functions in future global social governance. Ban Ki-moon called for a new model of governance "that is ready for the future, accountable, transparent, inclusive and participatory" and stressed the role of the UN and the SDGs for this process. However, reflecting back to the Copenhagen Summit, 20 years ago, the Commission for Social Development came together in February 2015 for its 53<sup>rd</sup> session. Participants "called for transformative public policies that support a rights-based vision of a world which uplifted living standards for society's most neglected while recognizing the vast differences among countries' abilities to bring about that worthy goal," and "decried that the goals of the 1995 World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen – eradicate poverty, create full employment and foster social integration – remained unfulfilled. Instead, unequal wealth distribution had grown more acute" (more here).

Despite the emerging debates on inequality, and need for an alternative development approach there have been no 'big picture' ideas from the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting in Davos. Instead, a renewed emphasis on the value of public-private partnerships at the WEF prompted critical replies. For example, the public-private partnerships approach was challenged by David Hall, director of Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU) at the University of Greenwich Business

School, who wrote a report '[Why Public-Private Partnerships don't work](#)'. He concludes that "PPPs are an expensive and inefficient way of financing infrastructure and services", and suggests a 'public alternative'.

On two other important actors in global social policies, the IMF and the IFC respectively were in the focus of criticism. At the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting in Istanbul in February 2015, the [final communiqué](#) includes:

*We remain deeply disappointed with the continued delay in progressing the IMF quota and governance reforms agreed in 2010 and the 15<sup>th</sup> General Review of Quotas, including a new quota formula. Recognizing the importance of these reforms for the credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness of the IMF, we reaffirm that their earliest implementation remains our highest priority for the Fund. [...]*

(section 9)

The [Bretton Woods Project](#) also commented on the issue of IMF governance reform, arguing that it was "at risk due to a failure of US leadership and contradictions of the Fund itself."

Meanwhile, the problem with the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation (IFC) is, according to an [Oxfam Issue Briefing](#),

*the IFC's flawed system of measuring development impacts of financial intermediaries (FI) lending means that it has little proof of positive development outcomes,*

and it recommends that

*the IFC should include binding measures in contracts with FI clients to enable sanction for wrong-doing. All new IFC contracts should include language requiring the suspension of IFC support and immediate refunding of investment, without prejudice or fee, and the imposition of sanctions (including financial), in the event of breach of environmental and social requirements.*

## **International Actors and Social Policy**

### **HEALTH**

In terms of health, key discussions occurred during the meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board (Geneva, 26 January-3 February, 2015). The meeting focused on setting the agenda for the May 2015 World Health Assembly and addressed the issue of strengthening health care, particularly emergency and essential surgical care in developing countries. In this context, the report by the Director-General to the Executive Board points to the “growing evidence that well-functioning and inclusive health systems contribute to social cohesion, equity and stability” in times of growing economic inequalities and emerging dangerous diseases. The report emphasizes that resilient health systems “hold societies together and help reduce social tensions.” Amongst other things, the Executive Board also considered a report on ‘Women and Health: 20 years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action’. This report identifies an ‘unfinished agenda’ regarding gender equality in health, and call for appropriate responses of health systems to tackle remaining problems.

The debate on the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and on the lessons from the crisis stands out in the period under review. Looking back on the reasons for the fast-paced spread of the virus, the WHO published a report, consisting of a series of 14 papers and entitled 'Ebola in West Africa: 12 months on', in the beginning of January. The report not only sets out the key events chronologically, but it also analyses the causes as well as the WHO's response over the past 12 months and the worldwide health emergency preparedness. Margrete Chan, Director-General of the WHO, also tried to get to the bottom of the deadly outbreak in her lecture 'From crisis to sustainable development: lessons from the Ebola outbreak' at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She drew conclusions and lessons from the crisis, as she indicated the importance of well-functioning health systems and emergency alerts in order to stop the spread of a virus before becoming an international threat. In this regard, Chan pointed out that “from the health perspective, the greatest need is to have health systems in place that can withstand future shocks, whether these come from climate change or a runaway virus. Doing so is not a luxury. It is the best insurance policy for the future [...]” The WHO Executive Board, which convened from 26 January – 3 February 2015, also focused on the Ebola crisis in a special session and urged the need 'to get to zero' cases.

Moreover, the WHO Executive Board broached the issue of strengthening health care, particularly emergency and essential surgical care in developing countries. In this context, the report by the Director-General to the Executive Board points to the “growing evidence that well-functioning and inclusive health systems contribute to social cohesion, equity and stability” in times of growing economic inequalities and emerging dangerous diseases. The report emphasizes that resilient health systems “hold societies together and help reduce social tensions.”

The importance of health systems in addressing women’s health needs was taken up in the context of violence against women. A Lancet series took up this issue as “violence against women was identified as a health priority in 2013 guidelines published WHO and the 67<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly resolution on strengthening the role of health systems in addressing violence, particularly against women and girls.” In a comment by Michelle Bachelet, a gender lens was applied to perspectives on how to achieve universal health coverage.

Meanwhile, the High-Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development issued some ‘food for thought’ on financing sexual and reproductive health and rights in the post-2015 era. It defines sexual and reproductive rights as “fundamental human rights, central to eradicating poverty and achieving development across its social, economic and environmental dimensions. [...] [They are] fundamental to the ability for all people, especially women, adolescent girls and young people, to lead full, satisfying, healthy and productive lives.” The policy recommendation on how these rights can be achieved include domestic and international financing plans, coordination, access to services, taxation, and regulation. However, Angeline Mutunga and Preethi Sundaram at the Bretton Woods Project Website wonder how the Global Financing Facility will deliver for sexual and reproductive health and rights?

The WHO also put the subject of international diseases on the global health agenda by publishing several reports. ‘Investing to overcome the impact of neglected tropical diseases’, published in February 2015, highlights the progress made in recent years and sets specific investment targets for 17 tropical diseases in the affected countries. Furthermore, the WHO launched the ‘Global status report on non-communicable diseases 2014’, which underlines the importance of investments in the fight against non-communicable diseases, as they are said to having caused premature death of about 16 million people in 2014.



Furthermore, World Health Day (7 April) focused on food safety. In this context the WHO stressed that over 200 diseases are caused due to unsafe food containing harmful bacteria, parasites and chemical substances. As a result, it is estimated that some 2 million people die annually from unsafe food.

## **SOCIAL PROTECTION**

As discussed in the earlier sections, in March, the Commission on the Status of Women held its 59th session, twenty years after the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Social protection featured prominently in the outcome documents of that Conference, which recognized that many social security schemes linked to employment status and earnings qualifications mirror, or even amplify, many of the inequities women face in the labour market. No agreed conclusions were adopted at the Commission this year, although not because of reproductive health or LGBT-related controversies as in years past. Instead, a brief political declaration was adopted, reaffirming the commitment of Commission members to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which, *inter alia*, calls upon governments to:

*Create social security systems wherever they do not exist, or review them with a view to placing individual women and men on an equal footing, at every stage of their lives*

Progress towards those goals, even twenty years on, has been slow and uneven, as recognized on the occasion of this year's International Women's Day by ILO Director-General Guy Ryder, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and others. Recent research shows that women's well-being is often still tied to that of a partner or family member, and social protection from the state can be somewhat effective in providing women additional income security to overcome that dependency. Still, not all transfer programs may achieve that aim, particularly conditional cash transfers that they rely disproportionately on women's efforts to ensure compliance and reinforce unequal distributions of unpaid care work.

In its 54th session, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) adopted the Statement on social protection floors: an essential element of the right to social security and of the sustainable development goals, which dedicates an entire section of the short four-page document to social protection for women. It recognizes the disproportionate numbers of women engaged in unpaid care work and

the informal economy, as well as social protection schemes that, in their design, reinforce traditional gender roles:

*An additional obstacle is that women are often considered primarily as being dependent on a male partner and not as individual rights holders. In this context, the Committee highlights that several of the basic guarantees included in the national social protection floors, such as maternal health, child care and maternity benefits and pensions, contribute towards establishing universal benefits. These benefits decrease gender inequalities also by alleviating the burden imposed on women who continue to shoulder a disproportionate part of household responsibilities.*

The statement identifies the establishment of social protection floors, in particular, as useful for creating the sort of entitlements and enforceable rights necessary to bring about more gender-equal access to social protection, as well as access for other groups typically excluded from or disadvantaged in traditional systems.

The role of a rights-based approach to social protection continues to supplement arguments for the economic benefits of social protection investments made by states. At an event organized in Geneva by UNRISD, links between human rights and social protection were discussed by a rather distinguished panel of participants, building upon the work done for many guest blog entries and other contributions to UNRISD's Web platform on the topic. References to social security and protection in human rights instruments are plenty, and the challenge moving forward will be greater recognition in the policymaking and policy implementation processes, if these rights are to eventually be realized.

## **EDUCATION**

Discussions on gender inequality also often indirectly touched upon women and girls access to education. However, the challenge also seems to be in ensuring that girls and women's educational attainment is followed through with equal employment rates and pay. The OECD's 'ABC of Gender Equality in Education - Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence' presents a wealth of recent data on gender differences in education and analyses it from a multitude of angles. In particular it looks at underperformance among boys, lack of self confidence among girls and family, school and societal influences before addressing policies to help boys and girls reach their full potential. The report shows that, despite their higher educational attainment, young women still have lower employment rates than men. The gender gap is much narrower for tertiary educated

young women than for those with lower educational attainment, but even then, women with tertiary education earn about three-quarters of their male peers' earnings.

More broadly, the 2015 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) – Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges was provided as a comprehensive assessment of progress towards the six Education for All (EFA) goals set in Dakar at the World Education Forum. It takes stock of which countries did or did not make progress and whether stakeholders upheld their commitments. It discusses which factors influenced the pace of progress and identifies key lessons for shaping the post-2015 global education agenda.

The GMR identifies that there are still millions of children and young adolescents who are denied their right to education, especially in developing countries. The report 'Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All', produced by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF, tries to provide with answers to the persistence of the out-of-school children phenomenon. Among other things, this report explores why some children never make it into the classroom at all, why some children start going to school far later than others, and why some children are more likely than their peers to drop out before they complete their schooling.

A recent ILO study also highlights the importance of education for development, but this time from the perspective of 'decent jobs' generation. The report, 'Is education the solution to decent work for youth in developing economies?' shows that the lack of post-secondary education in lower and middle-income economies leaves the majority of young men and women stuck in vulnerable and informal employment.

Furthermore, Jeffrey Sachs estimates the annual education "financing gap" to achieve EFA in around \$40 billion. According to Sachs:

*That \$40 billion might seem like a lot of money [but if] the world's richest 80 people (...) would devote just 1% of their net worth each year, they would cover half the global financial need. Facebook, Google, Ericsson, Huawei, Samsung, Microsoft, Cisco, and other ICT giants could cover at least another \$10 billion per year, in cash and in kind. A few forward-looking governments could then close the remaining \$10 billion gap (...) this is the kind of partnership that is needed to take the SDGs from rhetoric to reality.*

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report 'Investment Case for Education and Equity' also relies on the mobilization of non-traditional donors including private

companies to finance quality education for all, but emphasizes the importance of generating domestic resources by increasing the tax base in countries. UNICEF consider these reforms as urgent due to the fact that, in average, poorest students receive up to 18 times less public education resources than the wealthiest.

Some of these issues were taken up at the Global Campaign for Education's 5th World Assembly held in Johannesburg, South Africa between the 23 and 26 of February 2015. The Assembly brought together 190 delegates representing civil society campaigns fighting for the right to education across 91 countries. Delegates discussed campaign priorities for the education movement now and for the proceeding four years of the GCE collective strategic plan. The core strategic focuses for the movement between 2015 and 2019 will be quality, equity, financing, public systems and the role of the State, transparency and citizen participation, and education in conflicts and disasters.

Meanwhile, the International Conference Making Reforms Happen organised by the OECD in partnership with the Department for Education (England) was held in London (22-23 January 2015). The working sessions confirmed the relevance and potential policy impact of the many on-going reform initiatives gathered in the report OECD's Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen that aim at enhancing frameworks, processes, methods and tools for better education systems. One of the main issues discussed, and highlighted in this report, is that once new policies are adopted, there is little follow-up in most countries. Specifically, only around one in 10 of the 450 different reforms put in place between 2008 and 2014 were evaluated for their impact by governments.

One of the most controversial themes from the point of view of evidence-based policy is that of the role and impact of private schools in developing contexts. A passionate debate on this theme has been recently triggered by the publication of a rigorous review funded by Department for International Development (DFID) which notes that evidence on the potential contribution of the private sector to achieve quality education for all is still inconclusive. In particular, the review is sceptical in regards to the idea that private schools can become, generally speaking, an affordable option for the poor. James Tooley, one of the main advocates of low-fee private schools (and the owner of a chain of this type of schools himself) wrote a report (together with David Longfield and published by Pearson Education) emphasizing the potential benefits of private schools for the poor, and challenging the methodology of the mentioned

rigorous review. The authors of the DFID review reacted and responded to Tooley's methodological critiques in this document. The debate was outlined in the *The Guardian article*.

## **FOOD**

The eradication of hunger remains one of the main topics in the UN process of defining a post-2015 development agenda, since UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon emphasized the aim to end poverty and hunger in his report 'The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet', which was released at the beginning of January. At the second informal consultation of the UN General Assembly, held in February 2015, the CEO of 'The Hunger Project', Asa Skogström Feldt, illuminated the importance of empowering women in tackling poverty and hunger. She suggested that, women could so to speak act as change agents because both they invest in the development of their families and they are the majority of those living in poverty. The latter statement goes along with a number of other recent declarations concerning the impact of women in fighting hunger, particularly released in the regard of the International Women's Day (8 March).

Role of women in fighting hunger also emerged at the second International Congress 'Hidden Hunger' took place in March 2015. Highlighting the prominence of an adequate nutrition in the first 1000-Day-Window of life, it was revealed that the number of people suffering from hidden hunger has increased by 2015 in comparison to 2000. Moreover it was stated that hidden hunger is not only due to poverty but also due to the lack of knowledge about adequate food intake during pregnancy and adequate infant feeding. Thus, it might also affect high-income countries.

More broadly, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Food Price Index has continued to decline to a 55-month low in February 2015. It has dropped remarkably by 14 percent below its level a year earlier, as the FAO reported at the beginning of March 2015. While the prices for wheat, meat and sugar kept decreasing, the prices for dairy products increased in February 2015 for the first time in a year, ascending by 4.6 percent from the previous month. In terms of projections, the FAO's market expert Michael Griffin stressed that the ongoing decline of the Food Price Index appears to continue, since it rests upon robust supply

conditions, weak crude oil prices and a lasting weakness in many currencies versus the U.S. Dollar.

Nevertheless, millions of people, particularly in conflict-affected areas as well as in the territories stricken by the Ebola virus, suffer from deteriorating food insecurity and famine. The FAO and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cautioned insistently in February 2015 about the escalation of food insecurity and famine in the conflict-affected areas of South Sudan and Syria as well as in the Ebola-ravaged territories, especially in Guinea. According to the latest FAO/World Food Programme Crop and Food Security forecast 470.000 people in Guinea might be seriously food insecure by March 2015 owing to the effects of Ebola. Besides, the food crisis in South Sudan has worsened since December 2014, as the conflict is proceeding. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report, released at the beginning of February, reaffirms that the number of people in South Sudan suffering from a food crisis or from food insecurity on an emergency level, has more than doubled since 2013 and consists of approximately 2.5 million in 2015. Furthermore, Kyung Wha Kang, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, stressed the seriously concerning picture in Syria, as thousands of needy individuals cannot be reached by the United Nations food aid packages. Consequently she admonished of the danger of a severe hunger crisis in Syria. Once again, most vulnerable groups, such as women and children, are particularly affected in these cases.

Pointing to the interrelation of food insecurity and political conflicts, the FAO published in collaboration with the Peace Building Fund (PBF), a report, entitled 'FAO and Peacebuilding: Supporting peace through food security and resilience'. In this regard the FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva underscored during a special meeting of the UN Peacebuilding Commission that “food security is an important foundation for peace, political stability and sustainable development.” He also remarked that “in the history of humanity, time and time again we have seen vicious circles linking violence and hunger [...]” Therefore he concluded that on the one hand policies on food can prevent conflicts and on the other hand conflicts and political instability can cause hunger and food insecurity.

## **HABITAT, LAND, HOUSING**

Women's rights were also relevant in the discussions on habitat, land and housing. On 5 March 2015, FAO introduced a new and improved Gender and Land Rights Database (GLRD). Consisting of three main sections – country profiles, gender and land-related statistics, and the all-new Legislation Assessment Tool - the indicators also draw on FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security and the Technical Guide on Governing land for women and men. The database aims to serve as a hub of information on factors influencing women's land rights throughout the world.

Similar tools for gender sensitive water monitoring have also been developed. On 11-13 December 2014, the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) hosted the second workshop of the UN WWAP-UNESCO Project for Gender Sensitive Water Monitoring Assessment and Reporting. Phase I - Production of the Toolkit for gender sensitive water monitoring (January 2014 – January 2015) produced a Toolkit on Gender Sensitive Water Monitoring Assessment and Reporting. It included 4 - 5 high-priority water indicators identified by the international expert group for which gender-disaggregated data is especially needed. The workshop discussed specific methodologies for collecting and assessing such data; a guideline manual for “in-the – field” data gathering with specific insights for different world regions; and a questionnaire for practitioners on gender-disaggregated interviews and data collection.

Women are most affected, when a sense of insecurity hinders their access to services. Deputy Executive Director of UN-Habitat Ms. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira highlighted the importance of public space in the realization of Women's rights and empowerment during the 59th session on the Commission for the Status of Women (New York, 24 March 2014). As she notes unsafe and unfriendly public space is “one of the major elements restricting women's and girls' access to public space because of gender-based street harassment [...] this as a global problem.”

The UN Global Compact – RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) Responsible Business Best Practice Toolkit for the Land, Construction & Real Estate Sector Toolkit has asked the industry to consider opportunities in advancement of human rights and support marginalised groups such as women. Women's empowerment should be supported with greater employment opportunities which will broaden the pool of the potential workforce, including key specialists needed for the industry.

As part of the World Water Day (22 March) celebrations, the UN launched the report 'Water for a Sustainable World', in New Delhi India on 20 March 2015. The report acknowledged women's contributions to local water management and role in decision-making related to water. Women and youth are disproportionately affected both by water scarcity and the lack of safe drinking water, increasing falling into poverty trap. It also notes past two decades have seen a significantly increased role women playing to promote improved access to and management of water.