

Global Social Policy Digest 14.2

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Contents

Global Social Policies: Redistribution, Regulation and Rights	2
REDISTRIBUTION	2
REGULATION	4
RIGHTS.....	5
Global Social Governance	7
International Actors and Social Policy	7
HEALTH.....	7
SOCIAL PROTECTION	8
EDUCATION.....	9
FOOD	10
HABITAT, LAND, HOUSING	11

Global Social Policies: Redistribution, Regulation and Rights

REDISTRIBUTION

Are we seeing the end of the global economic crisis? Or has it transformed into a global jobs crisis? What are the (distributional) implications for countries and people? And what does all of that mean in the context of the construction of a post-2015 development agenda? These are some of the major questions behind global social policy discussions in the first quarter of 2014.

The World Economic Outlook illustrates that global activity and world trade picked up in the second half of 2013. However, IMF managing director Christine Lagarde, at the World Economic Forum 2014, described the global economy as having “remained suspended between the poles of hope and uncertainty”. Furthermore, there is wide spread agreement amongst leading international organizations that the jobs situation has not improved. The ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM), released in mid-December 2013, show that unemployment spells for workers are becoming longer; and the ILO’s Global Employment Trends 2014 talks about ‘jobless recovery’, and claims that “a rebalancing of macroeconomic policies and increased labour incomes would significantly improve the employment outlook.” Echoing these sentiments, John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana, said at the World Economic Forum: “We need jobs, jobs, jobs. [...] Economic and social inclusion is a top priority. We can create space for the private sector and it’s one of government’s responsibilities to distribute the fruits of growth.” Yet, whether redistribution is really likely to be realised through structural reforms, as called for by Lagarde and the OECD’s ‘Going for Growth’, continues to be controversial.¹

Rising inequality has emerged as a broadly shared global concern. The World Bank initiated a discussion ‘Sharing Prosperity, Delivering Results’ related to a background note ‘Prosperity for All. Ending Extreme Poverty’, that states:

Inequality is not just a problem in itself: in countries with rising income inequality, the effect of growth on poverty has been dampened or even reversed. In contrast, research indicates that in countries where inequality was falling, the decline in poverty for a given growth rate was greater. Even if there is no change in inequality, the “poverty-reducing power” of economic growth is less in countries that are initially more unequal. [...] So the goal of ending extreme poverty and boosting share prosperity are closely linked – lasting progress in ending extreme poverty also requires continued attention to what is happening to the bottom 40 percent of the population.

Inequality was also an important issue at the World Bank/ IMF spring meeting, with the final communiqué mentioning inequality and social problems, however, the Bretton Woods Project critical view on the extent to which the IMF actually takes into account issues of inequality in its interventions is certainly well placed.

Furthermore, Lagarde’s thoughts in a speech in February fall short of catching the complexity of the issue as she argued “rising inequality and economic exclusion can have pernicious effects” and that policy can no longer “look simply at economic growth and

¹ A related report is ‘Macroeconomic and Reform Priorities’ by IMF staff.

must instead ‘ask if this growth is inclusive’”. Connected to the World Economic Forum’s discussions, also the OXFAM Briefing Paper ‘Working for the Few: Political Capture and Economic Inequality’ might have expected more from economic elites when demanding to “turn around the rapid increase in inequality”, considering progressive taxation on wealth and income, and tax revenues used to provide universal healthcare, education and social protection. In a similar vein, global trade unions express the ‘Need for IFIs to follow pro-employment and anti-inequality rhetoric with action’. In the meantime Duncan Green adds another layer to the issue discussing Angus Deaton’s latest book ‘The Great Escape’,² and reflecting on the link between income inequality and public services.

The recognition of the need to tackle rising inequality for the long term economic and social progress was also pointed to by the OECD’s ‘Society at a Glance 2014’. The report particularly notes that social consequences of the financial crisis could linger for years. It suggests that losing sight of the most vulnerable and further cutting expenditure (including in social protection) would be short-sighted. Instead, the report notes that governments need to plan for the next crisis and to “crisis-proof” social policies.

Also addressing this discussion of inequality and its social impacts, UNDESA’s Report on the World Social Situation, entitled ‘Inequality Matters’, illustrates economic inequalities across and within countries. While in terms of global distribution (between countries) there might be some ground for optimism, this is dampened by the finding on rising inequality within countries. The report argues that “reducing inequalities is a moral imperative that yields economic, social and political benefits for all”. Related to the crisis, the report rejects “draconian fiscal austerity programmes”, and calls for “universal social policies, including social protection and universal access to essential services such as health and education, as well as strong labour market policies and institutions [...] to contain inequality.” The ILO’s ‘Wage-led Growth: An equitable strategy for economic recovery’ considers “a global Keynesian New Deal” (including proper regulation of the financial sector, the reorientation of macroeconomic policies towards stimulating and stabilizing domestic demand, and the reconstruction of international macroeconomic policy coordination and a new world financial order).

Related concerns were also raised at the occasion of the World Day of Social Justice (20 February). “Inequality is not inevitable”, stresses UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon (see also this article). ILO Director-General Guy Ryder urged policy-makers “to converge on the ambition of a real global socio-economic recovery – a recovery for all – and a Post-2015 Development Agenda that helps lift all out of poverty.” Leading officials from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) linked the struggle against human trafficking with eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and decent work, gender equality and access to justice.

Is the emerging discourse on ethical capitalism, inspired by Pope Francis and discussed at the World Economic Forum a way forward? The main ideas being that capitalism as such is neither ethical nor unethical, and envisioning a holistic model with the goal of sustainable human well-being. It would use measures of progress that clearly

² The discussion continues in a later blog.

acknowledge this goal, and include ecological sustainability, social fairness and real economic efficiency.

These and connected discussions on poverty (e.g. [Chronic Poverty Report](#)) also form part of the processes of the end of the MDGs and plans for future development goals (see Social Protection section).

REGULATION

Taxation would be one way of approaching the distributive and redistributive concerns behind global discourses on inequality. The OECD continued its efforts to improve national and international tax systems, at the [3rd Annual Meeting of the Global Forum on Transfer Pricing](#), and by proposing a [single global standard for the automatic exchange of information](#) between tax authorities worldwide (requested by G20 leaders to reinforce action against tax avoidance and evasion and inject greater trust and fairness into the international tax system). However, in a development context, the [OECD](#) also criticised international donors for failing to support fragile states in increasing their domestic revenue and improve tax collection.

At the same time, we see little progress on global taxation as a response to global inequalities. Just France and Germany [continue their efforts](#) to put into place a European financial transaction tax (a related policy brief by [TheRobinHoodTax](#) summarises the key issues).

The patterns of global inequality are, to some extent, also related to global flows of migration. The [Twelfth Coordination Meeting on International Migration](#) (20-21 February 2014, New York) was based on the idea that “[t]raditional migration patterns are complemented by new migratory flows, fuelled by changing economic, demographic, political and social conditions.” Key issue of the meeting was how to integrate migration with the post-2015 development agenda. Speaking to these concerns, the UNU has launched a [‘Migration Network’](#). The [social rights of migrants](#) have been in focus at the occasion of the World Day of Social Justice (see also Redistribution section), and the [International Migrants Day](#).³ However, the EU-OECD dialogue on [‘International Migration and Mobility’](#) was more concerned with the match between economic migration and labour market needs.

The perspective on the development contributions of migrants in terms of remittances was in the focus of the [World Bank](#) finding that ‘remittances to developing countries to stay robust’. Adding to that, at a workshop on [‘South-South Migration’](#) hosted by the IOM studies were cited that show that “the magnitude of south-south movements (82.3 million migrants worldwide) is roughly equal to south-north flows (81.9 million.) More than half of the top twenty migration corridors worldwide are along the south-south axis”, and thus “South-South remittances are as important as remittances sent North-South.”

³ The IOM also engaged with issues of [migrant women](#).

RIGHTS

Given the current emphasis on the jobs crisis and the growing and broadly shared concern about inequality (see Redistribution section) the fact that this opportunity is not being used to push claims for global social rights is striking. Not much new about the right to work can be found, not even the rights to health and education are currently seeing important advancements. (Though at least the [New Right to Education Project Website](#) was launched). Accordingly, [Roberto Bissio urged](#) the need for a human rights approach “as it is already elaborated in the human right charter that human beings require the fulfillment of different civic, social and economic rights”. Nonetheless, some discussion emerged on the impacts of foreign debt on full enjoyment of human rights, an increasing recognition of social protection as a central human right and a focus on rights of older persons and women. In the [report](#) by the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights particularly economic, social and cultural rights, Cephias Lumina highlighted foreign debt as crucial concern for human rights. Lumina suggests that foreign debt, by reducing the resources available to countries, continues to impact the enjoyment of human rights by populations in the developing world; and claims there is a need for a human rights organizations to focus on the human rights dimensions of the international financial assistance. Thus, the report could be interpreted as a renewed call for a human rights approach in the area of international financial assistance.

The crucial link between human rights and economic equality was also noted by Guy Ryder (ILO Director-General) marking the World Day of Social justice with a call for policy makers to take coordinated action for an economic and social recovery for all. Moreover, he highlighted the concern over social protection [stating](#) that:

Social protection is both a human right and sound economic policy. Social security enables access to health care, education and nutrition. Well-designed social protection systems support incomes and domestic consumption, build human capital, and increase productivity. Yet over 76 per cent of the world's population continues to live without adequate health and social protection coverage.

Similar thoughts were voiced by Hans-Horst Konkolewsky, International Social Security Association (ISSA) Secretary-General, who [stated](#) that “there can be no social justice without social security.” The importance of social protection for inclusive and sustainable economic growth was also a topic of [discussion](#) at a side event at the occasion of the 52nd session of the Commission for Social Development organized by the Global Coalition for the Social Protection Floors, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the ILO. The Progressive Alliance also issued a [statement](#) noting that social protection is a human right for all pointing to the emerging focus on social protection rights by a wide spectrum of actors.

During the 52nd session of the Commission for Social Development, a [resolution](#) by the Economic and Social Council, which promotes the rights of older people by reaffirming the importance of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA, 2002) was adopted. The resolution points to the need for international cooperation and better understanding of integrating ageing into the work and programmes of the UN. The

resolution also requests that the Secretary-General engage with Member States to decide on a possible theme to review MIPAA in 2017. This focus on ageing complements the work of organizations such as the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) which also held an interactive side-event during the session. The side-event was focused on the theme of “Strengthening the Rights of Older People” and the aim was to place the rights of older people on the development agenda. The 2014 Social Forum which took place from 1 to 3 April 2014 in Geneva, Switzerland was also focused on “the rights of older persons, including best practices in this regard”.

More broadly, the need for more focus on social rights was noted by UN experts. For example, UN experts have issued a renewed appeal to all countries to sign up to a landmark treaty on the rights of migrant workers that came into force some 10 years ago. Despite the fact that some forty-seven countries have ratified the treaty no major developed countries that are destinations for migrant workers, including the US, EU member states and Gulf countries, have ratified it. Enormous inequality, rapid urbanization and migration were also noted as important for the future development goals by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. In addition, Ban highlighted women’s rights and the sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human right.

Equality and women’s rights were encapsulated in the 2014 theme for International Women’s Day: “Equality for women is progress for all”. Following on from this discussion, challenges and achievements in the implementation of MDGs were reviewed at fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10 to 21 March 2014. Some civil society organization, such as Global Social Justice, call for a more fundamental rethinking of the global order and women’s place in it in the development of the post 2015 goals. Property rights of women were highlighted in two publications. The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights released a publication on the issue of property rights of women. The purpose of Using CEDAW to Secure Women’s Land and Property Rights: A Practical Guide is to provide advocacy information, advice and tools to those wishing to use the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol to secure the land and property rights of women. The Open Society Foundation released a new Briefing Paper entitled Securing Women’s Land and Property Rights: A Critical Step To Address HIV, Violence and Food Security. The Briefing Paper, developed in partnership with the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, addresses the fact that in many parts of the world, women’s rights to land and property are systematically denied. The paper argues that improving these rights would also positively impact the issue of HIV and violence against women.

Global Social Governance

If the attention to inequality at the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Bank – IMF spring meetings make a difference will have to be seen. The WEF's 'Global Risks 2014 Report' drew attention to, amongst other things, structurally high unemployment and underemployment, water crises, severe income disparity, climate change, global governance failure, food crises, and political and social instability. However, the Bretton Woods Project presented the summary of a joint seminar on 'The Future of Global Economic Governance and the IMF' (with DIE, FES, G-24) expressing doubts about the appropriateness of the current global economic governance and international financial architecture.

Previously perhaps promising developments regarding social problems and policies at the levels of G7/8 and even more G20 meetings have now been brought to a halt. Due to the crisis around the Ukraine, the G8 is at a standstill. The countries of the G8 have decided to exclude Russia due to its role in the Ukraine. The now G7 countries issued a declaration on this matter. Depressing is also the announcement of Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott (to host the next G20 meeting) that the focus of the next G20 meeting will be on free trade – despite the jobs crisis and concerns about inequality.

If the BRICS can make a difference also remains unclear. In terms of public utterance, at a BRICS Ministers Meeting in the Hague, 24 March 2014, it was agreed that:

BRICS countries would continue to act as positive catalysts for inclusive change in the transformation process towards a new and more equitable global order. The BRICS agenda is not centered around any specific country or related issue and shares a global vision which drives it to also increasingly identify common areas for cooperation to assist with finding global solutions to global challenges.

International Actors and Social Policy

HEALTH

A number of significant reports were published in this period dealing with both economic and political dimensions of global health. These included: 1) the release of Global Health 2035: A World Converging within a Generation in the Lancet on December 3, 2013 – the results of an independent commission who have revisited the case for investing in health; and 2) the launch of The Lancet—University of Oslo Commission on Global Governance for Health which considers the political origins of health inequity and prospects for change. The publication of both reports sparked a range of associated discussions and debates. The release of the first report on health investments was timed to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Davos at which health (alongside the environment) were argued to be 'prominent pillars' of the Forum's debates. In terms of real examples of investments in global health, the US government was lauded for demonstrating real commitment to global

health in March, with a request for US\$1.35 billion for the Global Fund in the budget proposal for 2015.

There was considerable discussion surrounding the 'heavy agenda' of the 134th Executive Board meeting of the WHO in Geneva and, in particular, civil society criticisms of the 'conspiracy' by pharmaceutical companies to undermine South African patent reforms. IP Watch argued that this 'overshadowed' the Board's debates on access to essential medicines, as part of wider efforts to secure universal health coverage (UHC). Debates surrounding UHC continued apace. World Bank President Jim Yong Kim emphasised the importance of focusing on the 'science of delivery' developing a rigorous understanding of why approaches succeed in one country context and might fail in another. Emerging lessons from Indonesia provide interesting insights in this respect, highlighting differential impacts across society and the inherent messiness of UHC in practice. There were also timely reminders of health challenges that will still remain including, for example: the critical need for safer, cleaner transport, the need to address the issue of urban health (particularly inequities for the urban poor), the need for leadership to secure access to effective antimicrobials and to deal with multi-drug resistance tuberculosis.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

There have been efforts, primarily by civil society organizations, to promote a goal dedicated to social protection and more specifically to social protection floors in the UN's post-2015 development agenda. In its latest deliberations, however, the Open Work Group (OWG) who is devising a highly-anticipated set of Sustainable Development Goals (to be presented to the UN General Assembly in September 2014), appears to be more inclined to consider targets on social protection under the overarching goals of reducing poverty and inequality.

The initial summary of the stocktaking process, which has been the bulk of the OWG's activities thus far, contained two references to social protection under the focus areas of poverty eradication and the promotion of equality. A revised version of the report, which added specific references to social protection floors under those same headings, was released several weeks later and names under focus area 1 Poverty eradication: "providing social protection and social protection floors as relevant to reduce vulnerabilities of the poor, including children, youth, the unemployed, migrants, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and older persons"; and under focus area 12 Promote equality "strengthening social protection systems, and social protection floors as relevant".

While at the time of writing, the OWG was hosting only "indicative debates" on the agenda, members continue to make concrete proposals for goals and targets in interventions recorded by the co-chairs. Many of the targets proposed so far use terminology that spans the ideological spectrum of social protection, including floors, systems, and safety nets. Targets typically focus on either extending coverage to certain disadvantaged groups or universalizing coverage under the moniker of "to all."

Attempts to define benefit adequacy or to identify those in need from non-disadvantaged categories, such as the working poor, are largely absent from the discussion by member states. However, it is important to note that the OWG is unlikely to include

quantitative indicators in its eventual proposal and that this work, instead, could fall to the UN Statistical Commission.

In March, there was a meeting in New York organized by UN member states and the ILO on post-2015 targets and indicators, in which participants put forward targets on expenditure levels for social protection and national strategy formulations. Both concepts have been incorporated into a new policy brief by the ILO on potential social protection floor targets and indicators, which also make allusion to benefit adequacy.

Beyond post-2015 conversations, another UN-wide process has also been garnering recent attention. The UN Development Group (UNDG) along with the ILO appear to have resuscitated the Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPF-I) after a period of relevant dormancy. In a letter signed by Helen Clark and Guy Ryder, UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators are asked to push forward on establishing One-UN SPF teams, which would put national policymakers and practitioners into cooperative structures in the field, much like that of the SPIAC-B, which coordinates agency activities at the global level. What structure, if any, there will be to facilitate interaction between the newly formed country SPF teams and the SPIAC-B remains unclear.

On 20 March 2014, during a High-Level Meeting on Decent Work in Fragile States, the ILO and the G7+ signed a Memorandum of Understanding on a partnership for cooperation in job creation, skills development, social protection, SSTC, migration, and labour market monitoring.

EDUCATION

Financing and the access to education were prominent themes in the period under review. On the basis of the 'Education Attainment and Enrolment Around the World' data-base, the World Bank shows that educational inequalities based on wealth are often bigger within countries than between countries (for the more general trends see Redistribution section), and reflects on a range of policy options to address this problem. An ILO report analysing survey results in eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa shows that while youth unemployment rates increase with the level of education, it is the young people with less education who are disadvantaged in terms of wages and access to stable employment. Appropriate taxation appears as an important means to address these problems. The new EFA-GMR policy paper, 'Increasing tax revenues to bridge the education financing gap' shows that, if governments in low and middle income countries modestly increased their tax-raising efforts and devoted a fifth of their budget to education, they could fill over half of the annual funding gap for basic and lower secondary education.

Whether the private sector needs to become more engaged in education remains debated. The report 'Corporate influence in the Post-2015 process', by Lou Pingot, examines what corporations are pushing what interests in the debate for a post-2015 sustainable development agenda. In March 2014, the Global Education Skills Forum was held in Dubai. The forum invited heads of government to meet with business leaders with a view to strengthening ties and further engaging the private sector in the field of education. A new campaign, Business Backs Education, challenging business to commit 20 per cent of its global Corporate Social Responsibility spending to education by 2020 was launched in the context of this Forum. The IFC's International Private Education Conference was held in Washington DC on 1-2 April 2014.

Education International has launched the campaign Unite for Quality Education to demand that quality education for all remains at the top of the agenda for a sustainable, peaceful and prosperous future. In the view of the campaign, the three pillars of quality education are quality teachers, quality teaching-learning materials and quality environments. The Right to Education Project new website has been launched, explaining how diverse partners can work together to ensure access to education for all.

FOOD

The FAO reported that 2013 was the third highest annual value on record for the Food Price Index. While large supplies pushed down international prices of most cereals, oils and sugar, dairy and meat prices peaked in 2013. In terms of projections, record global harvests are expected for 2013/14 for the main cereals (maize, wheat, rice), as farmers respond to recent high prices. Recent months have demonstrated how economic and political crisis shape food prices and thus impact on food security. The escalating situation in Ukraine is, for example, contributing to sharp global price rises for both wheat and corn. Furthermore, several countries continue to 'grapple with food insecurity under emergency conditions'. The issue of food security remains high on the global policy agenda given the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II, which illustrates that climate change will impact food prices between 3-84% by 2050 and trigger 'hotspots of hunger'. Debating a number of the key findings of the IPCC report, Oxfam emphasised that climate change will impact food production 'harder and sooner than previously thought'. Also controversial has been the World Bank's new Benchmarking the Business of Agriculture (BBA) programme, which experts are warning will threaten food security in low income countries.

In other news, this period coincided with a Global March for Nutrition, which sought to engage individuals and partners within the global health community and beyond on the critical importance of good nutrition during the 1,000 days from the start of a woman's pregnancy. Such a focus on maternal, infant and young child nutrition was reflected in discussions of the 134th Executive Board of WHO. Progress with the international code of marketing of breast-milk substitutes was considered and a series of recommendations made for the 67th World Health Assembly to endorse, including indicators to form part of the global monitoring framework on maternal, infant and young child nutrition as part of the comprehensive implementation plan. The People's Health Movement were critical of the general 'slow progress and even stagnation on this issue'.

Some of these concerns were noted in a critical piece, by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), that was a contribution to the post-2015 development agenda discussions. The three agencies identified a list of five targets: access to adequate food all year round for all people; end malnutrition in all its forms with special attention to stunting; make all food production systems more productive, sustainable, resilient and efficient; secure access for all small food producers, especially women, to adequate inputs, knowledge, productive resources and services; more efficient post-production food systems that reduce the global rate of food loss and waste by 50 percent.

HABITAT, LAND, HOUSING

Global protests against a World Bank funded forestry project in East Kenya that evicted over a thousand Sengwer families gained momentum in mid-February. The World Bank is also accused of inadequate resettlement for project affected communities in Lagos. Both these protests are spearheaded by Amnesty International. Despite of these setbacks, World Bank has clarified that it is keen to advice countries about good global practices in resettlement. World Bank's annual event of Land and Poverty conference (held in April 2014) is a landmark occasion to discuss such thorny issues.

Shifting the focus to urbanization, a report by the World Bank and the Development Research Center of China's State Council has unveiled the plan for denser urbanization and land reform in the coming years, in the light of urbanization practices are able to lift millions of people out of poverty. In Africa too how cities may be more liveable and sustainable was the point of deliberation in a report by UN Habitat. Similar strategies with a focus to introduce 'Urban Equity in Development' are being discussed during the Urban World Forum (April 2014, Medellin, Colombia).

In a recent report, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, Raquel Rolnik called for a paradigm shift from the financialization of housing to a human rights-based approach (see also Rights section). The report points to the need for wider array of forms of tenure and more effective policies such as subsidies for the private rental sector.

As the 2014 United Nations World Water Development Report (WWDR) was released, a looming threat to world's fresh water resources were highlighted. Particularly the threat is due to growing global demand for energy. In another intervention by UN, a response to this threat was contemplated. In the first global conference, held at Dubai in March 2014, on the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), an initiative led by the United Nations, more than 450 participants from 66 countries – including 27 ministers - presented their national perspectives on making the transition to an inclusive, low-carbon and resource-efficient economy.