

16th Development Dialogue

Social Justice amidst the Convergence of Crises: Repoliticizing Inequalities

Despite continued economic growth and decades of development work, inequalities persist and continue to be a global threat, impeding the fulfillment of human rights and well-being of a great majority of people. The divide between the rich and the poor remains and has even grown in some regions. In fact, the Gini index of income inequality hardly moved. It was 65 percent in 1980 and was in the same level in 2014, with insignificant changes between these years¹. To this day, the so-called one percent still captures a substantial share of global wealth, that is, 27 percent of total income growth from 1980 to 2016 and is twice as much as the share of the bottom 50 percent². But disparities in income are but one dimension of inequality. Another important dimension is based on social groupings (by disability, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual preference, etc.), which is likewise far from being addressed. Discrimination and structural violence continue to haunt minority and vulnerable groups, pushing them towards further deprivation and marginalization. Indeed, the persistence of inequalities is both a cause and a consequence of the unfolding of different crises that the world is seeing more and more each day.

The 16th Development Dialogue (DD16) seeks to take part in the global call and action of tackling inequalities. Organized around the theme '**Social Justice amidst the Convergence of Crises: Repoliticizing Inequalities**', the conference gathers PhD students and young scholars in Development Studies and related fields to engage and bring politics back (repoliticize) in the urgent and crucial inequality debate in a bid to make headway in the struggle towards global social justice. While advances have been made in addressing various inequalities, these have been derailed partly due to the confluence of crises on the environmental, political and socio-economic fronts, both at the national and international levels. The reemergence of populist, conservative politics, for example, has not only crippled social provisioning both in advanced and developing countries, but has also bolstered nationalistic and exclusivist sentiments, inciting animosity towards migrants, 'other' races and minority groups. Meanwhile, the insatiability of global capitalism has normalized land grabs especially in developing economies, exacerbating the interconnected issues of landlessness, food insecurity, environmental degradation and migration.

The persistence of inequalities proves that often, technocratic responses are insufficient. Global goals and paradigms will not take us far unless they are anchored in the reexamination of structural and institutional factors, which are at the core of these pressing challenges. Repoliticizing inequalities entails bringing to the fore and probing into the complex power relations and tensions involved in the structures and institutions of (re)distribution.

The conference seeks to take up such questions as: What are the different dimensions and forms of inequality? What are the drivers of inequalities (forces, institutions and processes)? Whose and what competing interests are driving inequalities? How have inequalities impact societies, especially minority and vulnerable groups? How have inequalities been addressed at the international, national and community levels, with special focus on resistance from below? In addition, the conference seeks to explore the connection between inequalities and crises, taking up questions like: What are the different dimensions and forms of crisis? How have inequalities caused crises and vice-versa? How have they fed

¹ World Inequality Lab 2018. *World Inequality Report*

² Ibid.

into each other? What are the driving factors and forces of crises, and how have the latter impact peoples and communities?

In order to cover a wide range of research interests and achieve more focused discussions, DD16 has nine sub-themes (although open to other topics) around which interested participants submitted their abstracts. These sub-themes include:

1. Economic Development, Structural Change and Decent Work
2. Environment, Food and Agrarian Transformation
3. Human Rights in the World of Humanitarianism
4. Human Security and Migration
5. Innovative Approaches in Evaluating Public Policies
6. Political Economy of Social Policies
7. Politics of Gender and Identities of Freedom
8. Social Mobilization and Resistance from Below
9. Tensions and Challenges of the New Urban Agenda