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THE GENEVA CHALLENGE 2020

The Advancing Development Goals International Contest for Graduate Students

"The Challenges of Social Inclusion"

Last year, 346 teams composed of 1,364 graduate students from 101 different countries registered to take part in the Geneva Challenge 2019. Building on this success, the Graduate Institute continues to encourage interdisciplinary problem solving analysis among graduate students from all over the world. Thanks to the vision and support of Ambassador Jenö Staehelin, a long-standing partner and friend of the Graduate Institute, we are proud to launch

the seventh edition of The Geneva Challenge – Advancing Development Goals Contest, which in 2020 will address "The Challenges of Social Inclusion".

While significant advances have been made in reducing extreme poverty around the world, many more efforts are needed to tackle social inclusiveness. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2019, 2017: 120) reports that the new global population is "in many ways more unequal than before".

As indicated by the Inclusive Development Index (WEF, 2018), "[s]low progress in living standards and widening inequality have contributed to political polarization and erosion of social cohesion in many advanced and emerging economies". Countries at similar stages of economic development also show significant variation across different dimensions of social development (World Bank, 2017). Inequalities in human development are a serious challenge to progress, suggesting that "growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for robustly rising median living standards" (WEF, 2018). In this context, the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences was awarded to three scholars fighting poverty, social inequality and contributing "to understanding gaps in development" [1] by focusing on the spectrum of issues and challenges linked to global poverty.

As political and empirical interest in social inclusion has grown, so have a number of comparative indices and multidimensional indicators of development and progress (Barros et.al., 2010). The World Bank's Human Opportunity Index measures development of countries with an emphasis on social inclusion[2]. This index focuses on indicators such as access to primary education, electricity, basic sanitation and potable water. Among other aspects also being studied are civic activism, intergroup cohesion, trust, communication and access to basic information.

Low-income individuals, the unemployed, older persons, indigenous people, undocumented immigrants, people living in remote areas and other marginalised communities worldwide face various obstacles that "prevent them from fully participating in their nation's political, economic, and social life" (World Bank, 2013). Gender, race, caste, ethnicity, religion, and disability status are among the most common group identities that lead to social exclusion.

[1] The Economist, *A Nobel economics prize goes to pioneers in understanding poverty*, https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2019/10/17/a-nobel-economics-prize-goes-to-pioneers-in-understanding-poverty

[2] World Bank, *Infographic: Human Opportunity Index*, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2016/10/24/infografia-indice-de-oportunidades-humanas

The stigmas, stereotypes, and superstitions around these groups deprive them of dignity and a decent livelihood. As pointed out by the OECD, "[o]ver the years the complexity and multi-faceted nature of social exclusion has been well-noted: poverty, deprivation, unemployment, health, poor housing, low skills, etc., all contribute to the inability of individuals and groups to participate in the economic, social and cultural life of the society in which they live"[3].

The World Bank (2013) underlines that "[t]here are substantial costs – social, political, and economic – to not addressing the exclusion of entire groups of people". The costs of social exclusion do not only affect individuals and communities but also entire economies.

Today, instead of simply trying to avoid social exclusion the commonly understood policy direction and pathway is to promote social inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities, the disabled, those who face discrimination based on their sexual orientations, and individuals who have low incomes (Sen, 2000).

"Leave no one behind" is the central and transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals[4]. The inclusion of this principle intends to "ensure that the 2030 goals are achieved by all segments of society and that those furthest behind will be reached first"[5]. As pointed out by the World Bank (2013), "social inclusion aims to empower poor and marginalized people to take advantage of burgeoning global opportunities. It ensures that people have a voice in decisions, which affect their lives, and that they enjoy equal access to markets, services and political, social and physical spaces". In order to achieve social inclusion, and to empower poor and marginalised people, it is timely to have a call for innovative and cross-cutting proposals for mechanisms such as socially inclusive growth and development, education, creation of decent jobs, community driven resilience development, access to technology and democratisation.

Highlighted below are some pressing issues and challenges related to social inclusion.

Employment

- According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (2019), "economic growth is generally slower in countries with high or growing inequalities, with a growing number excluded from the labour market or trapped in low-paying and unstable jobs, with a large part of the population without social protection, and where economic gains going to the wealthier and politically powerful". Without secure employment and good jobs, individuals can be trapped in a vicious circle of low-productivity occupations and low wages that then limit their ability to improve the next generation's education and health outcomes. Workers or jobseekers in poverty find it difficult to get themselves and their families out of poverty and often find themselves excluded from society. Demographic transitions, structural change, economic globalisation, greater volatility, technological change, as well as innovations in the organisation of work, are transforming the way individuals earn a living, and shaping the world of work in different ways. Employment in the informal sector and informal employment remain important in many developing countries. In fact, "[w]hen there is a lack of decent jobs, workers often turn to informal employment, which is typically characterized by low productivity and more precarious working conditions" (ILO, 2016: 44). For many workers it represents their main source of income without leading to improvements in living standards. The International Labour Organization (ILO)

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[3] OECD, *Improving social inclusion at the local level through the social econom*y,
https://www.oecd.org/fr/cfe/leed/improvingsocialinclusionatthelocallevelthroughthesocialeconomy.htm
[4] SDG Knowledge Platform, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*,
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld
[5] UNDP, *Leaving No One Behind: From Commitment to Action*, http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/content/leaving-no-one-behind-commitment-action

estimates globally in 2017 that "760 million women and men are working but not able to lift themselves and their families above the \$3.10 a day poverty threshold[6]".

- In addition, due to the lack of sufficient jobs, educated and skilled workers are left to limited employment opportunities that suit their qualifications. Many emerging economies are facing high levels of underemployment, which "manifests itself more generally through the prevalence of low-productivity, informal jobs and working poverty" (OECD, 2014b: 6). The OECD (2014b: 7) also observed that the phenomenon of underemployment results "in the underutilization of labour resources more generally with some groups excluded from jobs altogether because of a range of barriers". New measures of inclusion targeted specifically at alleviating the social inclusion of people in low-income jobs need further attention and innovative interventions in order to achieve decent work for everyone.

- One of the biggest challenges to employment is employment creation. To keep pace with the growth of the global working age population and "to keep the ratio of employment to working-age population constant", the World Bank (2012: 5) points out that "in 2020, there should be around 600 million more jobs than in 2005". The number of young jobseekers in Africa, for instance, will double in the next 30 years, which will lead to an urgent need to create 18 million jobs every year[7]. Moreover, increased longevity and longer participation in the labour market during the life cycle will lead to a need to redefine public policies of work, as well as social security and pensions schemes (UNDP, 2015). Yet, as stressed by the ILO (2019: 1), "in these shifts lie new possibilities to afford care and inclusive, active societies".

- Technologic developments such as learning machines, robots and artificial intelligence represent another great challenge. The expansion of technology-driven manufacturing and services has led to a change in the nature of work. Technological developments have generated the emergence of new forms of work and the need for new skills.

- Globally, youth unemployment remains a critical concern. According to the ILO, we observe "[m]ore than 64 million unemployed youth worldwide and 145 million young workers living in poverty"[8]. A WEF report recognises that this global challenge "will continue to amplify numerous domestic and global risks, including social exclusion, mass migration and generational clashes over fiscal and labour-market policies"[9]. Youth unemployment is a pressing issue particularly because unemployment at earlier stages of life decreases the future employability of young people, and can lead to a significant social and economic cost for the individual and society as a whole. The 2019 World Development report (2019: 4) observes "[h]igh-skill university graduates currently make up almost 30 percent of the unemployed pool of labor in the Middle East and North Africa". Also, O'Higgins (2017: 1) raises the issue of the quality of employment; "[i]n low and middle income countries (LMICs) vulnerable and/or informal types of employment have come to dominate young people's labour market experiences, while in higher income countries (HICs) temporary and other non-standard forms of employment are increasingly becoming the norm". In addition to the unemployed youth, there is a large share of youth who are neither employed nor enrolled in an education or professional training programme, or looking for work. In 2018, the average NEET (neither employed, nor in education or training) rate among 15-29 year-old youth in OECD countries was of 14,3% and over 25% in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Italy, South Africa and Turkey (OECD, 2019b: 52). Disengagement from both education and work are negatively associated with levels of completed education and skill proficiency, and NEET are at a high risk of social exclusion.

- The ILO (2018: 1) estimates that "the number of people in vulnerable employment projected to increase by 17 million per year in 2018 and 2019". Social protection is

[6] ILO, *ILO calls for boosting global labour markets, social protection and social dialogue*, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/statements-and-speeches/WCMS_582787/lang--en/index.htm
[7] European Commission, *Employment and Decent work*, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/661_mt
[8] ILO, *Youth employment*, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/lang--en/index.htm
[9] WEF, *Youth Unemployment*, http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2018/youth-unemployment/#view/fn-24

still missing for some of the global workforce and access to quality and adequate social services remains an important challenge that need to be addressed to ensure social inclusion of all branches and income levels of society (Eichhorst et.al., 2016). In order to prevent generationally transmitted poverty, recurring absence from the job market and skills degeneration, new forms of social investment need to be found that foster social inclusion. For instance, the ILO recommends establishing "a strong and responsive social protection system based on the principles of solidarity and risk sharing, which supports people's needs over the life cycle" (2019: 3). Active inclusion policies, activation investments, investments directly or indirectly in human capital particularly among high risk groups, and innovative protection measures could be devised at all three levels – international, country, community – to improve social inclusion by a diversity of actors.

Education and Training

- Today, 750 million adults in the world remain illiterate, with two-thirds being women[10]. In 2019, 262 million children and adolescents worldwide are still out of school[11]. Poverty remains the main obstacle for the access to quality education. UNESCO (2017: 12) stresses "[w]hile the situation is most acute in the developing world, growing inequalities are also present in many wealthier countries, compounded mainly by increasing globalization and international migration". Human Rights Watch (HRW) also recognises among the main causes to this learning crisis, "[d]iscrimination of marginalized groups by teachers and other students, long distances to school, formal and informal school fees, and the absence of inclusive education"[12]. Conflicts are also an important factor hindering the access to education; schools and universities are notably converted into military bases[13]. For example, in countries affected by conflict and ongoing violence, such as Mali , UNICEF reports that "[t]he rising insecurity and a growing displacement crisis have in turn created a crisis in education, with hundreds of schools having been forced to close"[14]. Ensuring an inclusive and quality education to everyone is part of the Sustainable Development Goals' fourth goal. UNESCO (2017: 18) declares that the principles of inclusion and equity should guide all educational policies, as "education is a human right and is the foundation for more equitable, inclusive and cohesive communities".

- An ever-changing world of work is leading to more and different transformations, not least because of technological development and digitalisation. As underlined by the ILO, "[t]echnological advances – artificial intelligence, automation and robotics – will create new jobs, but those who lose their jobs in this transition may be the least equipped to seize the new opportunities". The OECD skills strategy (2019: 19) stresses that the profound transformation in the nature of jobs due to digitalisation will lead to upskilling and training requirements. Indeed, "many current jobs are being retooled into new forms, resulting in new and sometimes unexpected skill combinations" (World Bank, 2019: 70). The result is that skills underutilization and mismatch lead to higher unemployment and inequalities (Braňka, 206: 7). The investment in the capabilities of people is essential. Acquisition and renewal of skills and knowledge is of prior importance and "is a matter of lifelong learning". The World Bank (2019: 72) underlines that "[t]his kind of learning is especially germane to skills readjustment amid demographic change—be it the aging populations of East Asia and Eastern Europe or the large youth populations of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia". The ILO recommends adopting a holistic approach by encompassing "access to good basic education; development of cognitive and core skills, including

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[10] UN, *4. Quality Education*, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/E_Infographic_04.pdf
[11] UN, Sustainable Development Goal 4, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4
[12] HRW, *Education*, https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/education
[13] HRW, *Protecting Schools from Military Use*, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/27/protecting-schools-military-use/law-policy-and-military-doctrine
[14] UNICEF, *Education – and dreams – displaced in Mali*, https://www.unicef.org/stories/education-and-dreams-displaced-mali

literacy, numeracy, communication, problem-solving and learning ability; and, availability of continuous training opportunities targeting adult and older workers"[15].

Financial Inclusion

- According to the Global Findex database (2017), 1.7 billion adults in the world do not have access to a financial account[16]. Women, poor households in rural areas or people out of the workforce count among half of the unbanked population[17]. The World Bank notes that "two-thirds of adults without an account cite a lack of money as a key reason, which implies that financial services aren't yet affordable or designed to fit low-income users. Other barriers to account-opening include distance from a financial service provider, lack of necessary documentation papers and lack of trust in financial service providers"[18]. Through digital financial technology, the acquisition of a basic transaction account is a first step for a more decent livelihood. Financial services can help alleviate poverty and uplift people socially and economically as it facilitates investments in education, health and business (Demirguc-Kunt et al, 2017). According to the Global Findex database (2018: 1), "[t]he power of financial technology to expand access to and use of accounts is demonstrated most persuasively in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 21 percent of adults now have a mobile money account – nearly twice the share in 2014 and easily the highest of any region in the world".
- Access to microcredit for low-income individuals has also been regarded as a tool for financial inclusion and development. However, evidence over its impact is mixed. According to Banerjee *et al* (2015) the impacts of these loans on household finances and economic development have "modestly positive, but not transformative, effects". The expansion of financial services for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises is currently at the core of the economic diversification and growth challenges many countries are facing (IMF 2019).
- Financial risks can also be managed through formal insurance products. For instance, in the context of agriculture, Dercon *et al* (2011: 169) mention that insurance schemes "prove important in fostering the use of yield increasing inputs and overcoming risk induced poverty traps". According to Demirguc-Kunt *et al* (2017: 19), "realizing the benefits of financial inclusion depends on an adequate financial infrastructure and a regulatory environment that is conducive to innovation, making small financial transactions economically viable and ensuring a safe, stable, and reliable financial system".

Social and Political Inclusion

- As pointed out by International IDEA, "[d]emocracy cannot truly deliver for all of its citizens if half the population remains excluded from the political arena."[19] However, considerable barriers, "[f]rom inaccessible polling stations to information unavailable in minority languages to discriminatory laws to a lack of access to information"[20], undermine the access of marginalised populations to the political process. Institutional barriers to registering and voting are also hindering participation, along

[15] Skills for Employment, *Portability of skills and life-long learning*, https://www.skillsforemployment.org/KSP/en/Issues/Portabilityofskillsandlife-longlearning/index.htm
[16] World Bank, *The Global Findex Database 2017: 7: Measuring Financial Inclusion and the Fintech Revolution*, https://globalfindex.worldbank.org/sites/globalfindex/files/2018-04/2017%20Findex%20full%20report_0.pdf
[17] World Bank, *Financial Inclusion*, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/financialinclusion/overview
[18] World Bank, *UFA2020 Overview: Universal Financial Access by 2020*, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/financialinclusion/brief/achieving-universal-financial-access-by-2020
[19] International IDEA, *Political inclusion is vital to sustainable democracy*, https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/political-inclusion-vital-sustainable-democracy
[20] National Democratic Institute, *Political Inclusion of Marginalized Groups*, https://www.ndi.org/political-inclusion-of-marginalized-groups

with "social networks, trust in the political system, attitudinal factors, such as partisanship, political interest and political efficacy, and mobilization by political actors" (UN, 2016: 85). Thus, the ability of minorities to have an influential say on policies affecting their lives is very restrained[21].

- According Hedström and Smith (2013), "[c]onstitutional and legislative reforms, together with reforms targeting political parties and other political institutions, must also be accompanied by community education initiatives promoting attitudinal change to overcome deep-seated, systemic and institutional obstacles to the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making". Thus, working towards a stronger political inclusion requires reforming political institutions but also rebuilding trust in the political process and interest among these populations. Hedström and Smith (2013) also underline that "[t]he implication for democracy reform is that interventions must be multidimensional and coordinated, involving legally binding and monitored measures such as inclusive constitutional, legislative and legal reforms. These should be complemented by income generation, literacy, community education and, quite often, physical infrastructure improvement initiatives and well-integrated basic services such as, for example, childcare, a critical provision promoting broader women's participation".

- The recent mobilisations for climate "have demonstrated the capacity of young people to organize, communicate, exercise influence, and act as a positive force for transformational change" (UNDP, 2017: 6). Yet, the youth is underrepresented in formal political processes, and voter turnout among young people is generally low. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in 2018 only 2.2% of the world's parliamentary members are young people under age 30[22]. There is an urgent need to develop policies and legislations that adopt "youth sensitive strategies" in order to foster youth participation in political and electoral processes (UNDP, 2017: 32). Introducing quotas for youth in Parliament, lowering the voting age or the age of eligibility to run for office, and earmarking state subsidies for youth are some examples of inclusive practices (UNDP, 2017). According to the IPU, "[n]ew technologies and online tools are helping citizens, including young people, to understand and monitor the work of parliaments, and are also boosting accessibility and transparency". However, as underlined by the WEF (2017), "inclusive policies mean embracing the fact that technologies exist and develop within social contexts, and that the general public – rather than "experts", business leaders, politicians or technocrats – has both the ability and responsibility to shape and guide policy in regard to the diffusion and use of emerging technologies".

Gender Equality

- According to the UNDP's Human Development Index (2018), "while global gender disparities are narrowing slowly, longstanding patterns of exclusion and lack of empowerment for women and girls remain pressing challenges". More generally, the UNDP (2013: 163) underlines that "[g]ender norms and stereotypes reinforce gendered identities and constrain the behaviour of women and men in ways that lead to inequality". Addressing gender inequalities would not only drive achievements in employment but also in health and education, while improving livelihoods.

- In the context of employment, Wodon and de la Brière (2018: 2) stress that "women account for only 38 percent of human capital wealth versus 62 percent for men". According to the UNDP's Human Development Index (2018), "[g]iven current rates of progress it could take over 200 years to close the economic gender gap across the planet". There are also some industry and occupational segregation patterns that have been identified in countries at different stages of development. The ILO explains that "[w]omen make up a greater percentage of workers in 'informal' and other

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[21] UNDP, *World's most marginalized still left behind by global development priorities: UNDP report*, https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/03/21/world-s-most-marginalized-still-left-behind.html

[22] IPU, *Data on youth participation*, https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/youth-empowerment/data-youth-participation

precarious forms of employment, which tend to lie outside the purview of labour regulations and inspection, and are therefore more prone to exploitation"[23]. According to the ILO (2019: 15), a more decent and better future of work for women can only be achieved "by redressing discrimination and disadvantage and overcoming entrenched stereotypes relating to women in society, the value of their work and their position in the labour market". In this sense, the ILO recognises four different strategies: establishing laws for equal rights; improving the access to infrastructure, social protection and public care services; supporting and engaging women through work transitions related to technology, demographics and climate change; and amplifying their voices by increasing their political participation and representation. In order to increase women's earnings and human capital wealth, Wodon and de la Brière (2018: 2) also state that "investments throughout the life cycle are needed, from early childhood development and learning in schools to building job-relevant skills that employers demand, encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation, and ensuring that both women and men have equal access to opportunities and resources".

- Gender inequalities exist both within and outside the health system and are linked to poverty, ethnicity and sociocultural practices that hinder women's access to health. 51% of people diagnosed with HIV worldwide are women[24]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2017, ix), "HIV is not only driven by gender inequality, but it also entrenches gender inequality, leaving women more vulnerable to its impact". In addition, maternal mortality is still unacceptably high[25]. Preventing unintended pregnancies, reducing adolescent childbearing and maternal mortality through an inclusive access to maternal, sexual and reproductive health care is also crucial to the health and well-being of women, children and adolescents. Therefore, public health policies must address gender inequalities and ensure that the specific needs of women are taken into account. As pointed out by the WHO (2017b: 17), "[w]omen's rights to decision-making about their own bodies must be upheld, in accordance with human rights law, along with the development and implementation of evidence-based policy and programming".

- In the context of education, according to UNESCO's data, two-thirds of the 750 million adults without basic education are women. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), gender parity in primary school exists in only 66 per cent of countries[26]. The main barriers that stand in front of women and girls are, among others, "[p]overty, geographical isolation, minority status, disability, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence, and traditional attitudes about the status and role of women"[27].

Community Driven Resilience Development

- One of the most immediate and efficient social inclusion instruments is at the community and the local level. The proximity, past knowledge and the dexterity that stem from community enhance the capacity to include vulnerable groups. These vulnerabilities in the community can span from economic difficulty to high risks towards natural disasters and the effects of climate change. A similar trend can also be found in other natural disasters and economic shocks as well. A community driven development approach "gives control over planning decisions and investment resources to community groups and local governments" (Arnold et.al., 2014: 2). The approach can be applied to a multitude of immediate local resilience building and protection against social exclusion through community driven buffers. International organisations, most notably the World Bank and UNDP, have argued for the merits of this approach in issues such as climate change, disaster prevention, food crisis and

[23] ILO, *Women Work More, But are Still Paid Less*, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_008091/lang--en/index.htm
[24] UNAIDS, *When women lead, change happens*, http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/when-women-lead-change-happens_en.pdf
[25] WHO, *Maternal mortality*, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality
[26] UNICEF, *Education*, https://www.unicef.org/education
[27] UNESCO, *Education and gender equality*, https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-and-gender-equality

infrastructure building (Wong, 2012; WEF, 2014). Engaging marginalised populations in health services planning, for instance, is also a tool of inclusion. However as underlined by Montesanti *et al.* (2017), "[t]he challenge for community development is to both enable marginalized populations to have a voice and influence, and help provide whatever support is needed—capacity-building, self-esteem and building relationships—while also acknowledging the different underlying values that marginalized populations hold toward participation in health service planning and decision making".

Inclusive Health Systems and the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

- Access to medical care and products is a complex global challenge at the interface between health, economics, politics and development. Health inequalities vary between countries, regions and social groups and put people in a vicious cycle of deprivation and social exclusion as "poverty breeds ill-health, ill-health maintains poverty" (Wagstaff, 2002: 97). According to the WHO, "[a]t least 400 million people worldwide lack access to the most essential health services"[28]. Marginalised groups such as migrants, homeless people, LGBTIQ+ or drug users face many barriers for having access to medical care (O'Donnell et. al., 2016). For instance, Kontunen *et al.* mention that "migrants and migration are not often adequately considered in health policies, disease control programmes and social protection in health measures, and there is a lack of mechanisms facilitating dialogue between policy-makers from different sectors such as health, labour, foreign affairs and immigration". The European Commission (2018: 5) recognises "poor literacy, language or culture, social inhibition, isolation, lack of trust between the provider and the patient […], geographical mobility", as well as 'costs and waiting time' as important obstacles to accessing healthcare". Strategies to address these barriers are urgently needed from the policy level through to practice. The WHO introduced guidelines for self-care interventions linked to sexual and reproductive health aimed at increasing access vulnerable populations' health service access [29]. In order to reach a broader population and to improve the prevention and detection of diseases, there is a need to reimagine the approach to traditional healthcare systems. In Vietnam, for instance, the Communities for Healthy Hearts initiative "brings hypertension detection closer to communities by working with partners from outside the healthcare system to make free screening available in non-traditional but convenient locations"[30]. The initiative uses a digital tracker in order to enable health workers to get easily in touch with people diagnosed with hypertension living in rural and remote areas and therefore, to accelerate the progress[31].
- In 2006, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to "promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity" (WHO, 2007). It is imperative to take action in order to protect people with disabilities and health conditions from the risk of social exclusion. In addition to physical disabilities, health issues such as mental disabilities, social integration problems and psychological traumas require further attention within the scope of social inclusion. It is important to ensure that individuals are protected from a vicious cycle of social exclusion as it also has serious mental consequences (Baumgartner and Burns, 2014). A report from the WHO and the World Bank (2011: 206) found that children with disabilities are "routinely" excluded from school. A comprehensive plan of instruments that target individuals who are at a high risk of

[28] WHO, Expanding access to health services with self-care interventions, https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-interventions/access-health-services/en/
[29] WHO, Expanding access to health services with self-care interventions, https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-interventions/access-health-services/en/
[30] The Novartis Foundation, *Bringing hypertension care closer to the community on World Hypertension Day*, https://www.novartisfoundation.org/news/bringing-hypertension-care-closer-community-world-hypertension-day
[31] PATH, *Blood pressure check with your manicure?*, https://path.org/media-center/blood-pressure-check-your-manicure/

exclusion due to physical and mental health require planning from the bottom to top levels and that also involve the community and a personal network of individuals.

Infrastructures, New Technologies and Digital Inclusion

- Infrastructures play an important role in development. As stated by the UN report on the World Social Situation (2016: 67), "[b]asic infrastructure − roads, water and sanitation, energy, broadband and other telecommunication infrastructure[s] − facilitates access to health and education services, as well as to jobs, and is therefore essential for reducing poverty, inequality and exclusion". According to Agarwal and Steele (2016: iv), "[w]hen infrastructure is inaccessible to any social group, that group is at risk of social exclusion, unable to participate in and contribute to society". In this same vein, PwC notes, "[w]e must embrace new methods and new technologies if we are to build and operate transport systems that deliver these goals while functioning inclusively, to the benefit of all".
- In many developing countries, the access to quality education is often hindered by the absence or shortage of basic infrastructure. As underlined by the UN, "Sub-Saharan Africa faces the biggest challenges: at the primary and lower secondary levels, less than half of schools have access to electricity, the Internet, computers and basic drinking water."[32]
- Concerning the decent work agenda of the ILO, the World Bank (2019: 4) stresses the important need to invest in infrastructures; "[m]ost obvious are investments in affordable access to the Internet for people in developing countries who remain unconnected". The need for lifelong learning to cope with the demand for changing job skills will, according to the World Bank (2019: 71), "be driven by the competing forces of automation and globalization". The differences between regions are still considerable; "[i]n Europe and Central Asia, 26 percent of the population had fixed broadband subscriptions in 2016, compared with just 2 percent in South Asia" (World Bank, 2019: 72).
- According to the UN, "55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050"[33]. In this context, providing employment for the rapidly growing population in metropolitan and rural areas, as well as reducing unemployment and underemployment will be a significant challenge. In this context, "[i]ntegrated policies to improve the lives of both urban and rural dwellers are needed, while strengthening the linkages between urban and rural areas, building on their existing economic, social and environmental ties"[34]. The UN also recommends that "[t]o ensure that the benefits of urbanization are fully shared and inclusive, policies to manage urban growth need to ensure access to infrastructure and social services for all, focusing on the needs of the urban poor and other vulnerable groups for housing, education, health care, decent work and a safe environment".
- A large share of individuals in developing countries still has limited access to information and communication technology (ICT). According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU, 2019) only 47% of people in developing countries have access to the Internet. Within countries, variations in access remain important: the digital divide is often explained by barriers such as limited connectivity, affordability, as well as digital literacy.

Overall, social inclusion matters concern a multitude of groups and have strategic impact on the social cohesion, human development, productivity, economic growth and long-run development of countries and regions around the world. Therefore, a call for innovative and

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[32] UN, *Sustainable Development Goal 4*, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4
[33] UN, *2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects*,
https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html
[34] Ibid.

crosscutting proposals accounting for the context and the multitude of potential actors involved is critical.

There is a pivotal need for an interdisciplinary approach in confronting this global issue. Solutions to this pressing challenge should come from a broad scope of participation in various areas including (but not limited to) – anthropology, business administration, development studies, economics, engineering, geography, history, international affairs, international development, international relations, law, management, political science, public policy, psychology and behavioural science, social policy, sociology, medical and health studies.

Hence we welcome students from diverse academic backgrounds to present their ideas and proposals to tackle the issue of social inclusion.

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