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ECOSOC theme 2019:  
“Empowering people and ensuring  
inclusiveness and equality”

**SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT** **GOALS**

## ECOSOC theme, 2019: “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”

The CDP is mandated to examine and make recommendations on ECOSOC’s annual theme and has also been invited to submit inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The theme for both ECOSOC and the HLPF in 2019 is “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.<sup>1</sup> At the Plenary the CDP will discuss the key messages to be conveyed to ECOSOC through the CDP report. The text for the report (approximately 1300 words) will be drafted by the leaders of the CDP subgroup on “leaving no one behind” and interested CDP Members, with the support of the Secretariat, based on the discussion. The messages will also be reflected in the statement of the CDP Chair at the High-Level Segment of ECOSOC (which includes the Ministerial Segment of the HLPF), the formal written input by the CDP to the HLPF, and possible speaking opportunities for CDP members at the HLPF.

The basis for discussions will be the work undertaken in 2017 and 2018 by the CDP sub-group on “leaving no one behind”, which is one of the overarching pledges in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Key messages deriving from this work were consolidated in the CDP’s 2018 report to ECOSOC and are equally pertinent for the 2019 theme. The CDP’s 2019 report to ECOSOC would build on that work and reflect debates and additional perspectives, information and recommendations raised at the Plenary.

To prepare for the Plenary: Please read the 4-page excerpt on “Leaving No One Behind” of the CDP’s 2018 report to ECOSOC, available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/leaving-no-one-behind.html><sup>2</sup> and the background information below. Members are asked to reflect in advance on the three main factors promoting or holding back development as conceived in the 2030 Agenda based on their respective academic perspectives and areas of expertise.

### 1. Empowerment - definitions

While emphases vary, definitions of empowerment commonly revolve around a person’s or group’s ability to make their own choices and decisions in pursuit of their wellbeing and the exercise of their rights and the institutional, economic, social, legal and political factors that determine that ability. The term is commonly used in reference to groups that are, in different ways, commonly “left behind” in this respect (“the poor”, women) (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Green, 2013; Narayan 2005).<sup>3</sup>

- The definition adopted in the Secretary-General’s Report on “Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all” (2013) in

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<sup>1</sup> Previously, the ECOSOC theme had been defined as “One world for all: empowering people to build equal and inclusive societies” and the theme of the 2019 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) under ECOSOC had been defined as “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. General Assembly Resolution 72/305 (on the strengthening of ECOSOC, adopted in July 2018) determined the adoption of a single main theme. ECOSOC defined the wording of the single theme for 2019 (“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”) in February 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Background papers by the CDP on different aspects of “leaving no one behind” are available on the same page.

<sup>3</sup> Solava Ibrahim and Sabina Alkire (2007), “Agency and Empowerment: A Proposal for Internationally Comparable Indicators”, Oxford Development Studies, Vol. 35, No. 4, December. Green (2013) refers to a different version of that paper. Duncan Green, 2013, “The Role of the State in Empowering Poor and Excluded Groups and Individuals”, Paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on “Policies and strategies to promote empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”, organized by the Division for Social Policy and Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 10-11 September 2013, New York. Deepa Narayan (2005), “Conceptual Framework and Methodological Challenges”. Deepa Narayan (ed.), Measuring Empowerment – Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives. The World Bank. Washington DC.

the context of the 2013-2014 policy cycle of the Commission for Social Development was “the process towards the effective participation of all members of society in decisions about their lives”.<sup>4</sup>

- For Eyben (2011), “Empowerment happens when individuals and organized groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realize that vision by changing the relations of power that have kept them in poverty, restricted their voice and deprived them of their autonomy”.<sup>5</sup>

- From a human rights perspective, empowerment refers to the ability to exercise all human rights, which in turn involves equipping rights holders with the means to assert and claim their rights and duty-bearers (states) with the capacities to implement human rights and addressing power inequalities. Empowerment is a central element of development from a human rights perspective and of the right to development, of which “active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom” is an important component.<sup>6</sup>

Taking these definitions as starting points, empowerment as a means to equality and inclusion – and to the pledge to leave no one behind – requires a combination of **rules and mechanisms** that formally ensure the exercise of rights, including through access to justice, and meaningful participation in economic, social and political decisions; and **enabling factors** that ensure that particularly those groups typically left behind are effectively able to use those rules and mechanisms on fair terms and level playing fields. These include, on one hand, capacities, including knowledge, skills, and access to services, the job market and productive activities; and on the other hand, social security and safety nets that ensure that the capacity to exercise one’s human and other rights and to participate in decision-making is not undermined by the imperative of meeting basic needs in crisis situations. Empowerment also requires the elimination of certain practices that restrict the ability of certain groups of people to effectively participate in decisions about their own lives and to exercise their rights. These **elements of disempowerment** can be, for example, discrimination or social practices that confine women to certain roles. They can also refer to the broader results of relations of power, and notably to the concentration of political and economic power.

While the theme refers to “empowering people”, certain elements of empowerment could also be transported to the international sphere, reflecting on the empowerment of people. There is increasing recognition of the value of bottom-up development strategies and local expertise in developing countries, the need for development cooperation to align itself with national priorities, the need for policy space and the need for greater representation of developing countries within international institutions. There are different viewpoints on whether the concept of “leaving no one behind” in the 2030 Agenda applies to countries as well as people, which could be reflected on whether the concept of empowerment can also be applied to countries. As a reference, SDG 10 refers specifically to reducing inequality both within and among countries.

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<sup>4</sup> E/CN.5/2014/3.

<sup>5</sup> Eyben, R. (2011), *Supporting Pathways of Women’s Empowerment: A Brief Guide for International Development Organisations*. Pathways Policy Paper. Brighton: Pathways of Women’s Empowerment RPC, quoted in Green (2013), op cit.

<sup>6</sup> See United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2005), “The OHCHR Plan of Action: Protection and Empowerment”; Declaration on the Right to Development (A/RES/41/128); Piovesan, Flavia (2013), “Active, free and meaningful participation in development”, in United Nations, *Realizing the Right to Development, Essays in Commemoration of 25 Years of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development*. HR/Pub/12/4. Sales No. E.12.XIV.1

## 2. Empowerment in the 2030 Agenda

**Empowerment of whom?** In the 2030 Agenda, the term “empowerment” is most frequently used in relation to women and girls, notably in SDG 5 (*Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*) but it is also used more broadly: in reference to “people who are vulnerable” (paragraph 23) and to “all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status” by 2030 (SDG 10, target 10.2).

**What aspects of empowerment?** References to empowerment in the Agenda include legal, social and economic aspects (e.g., paragraph 8), and are associated with the realization of human rights and gender equality (e.g., preamble and paragraphs 3, 20, SDG 5 - target 5.c). There are specific references to the *economic* empowerment of women (paragraphs 20, 24). The elements identified above – rules and mechanisms, enabling factors and the elimination of elements of disempowerment – are addressed in the 2030 Agenda, including in the SDGs (see table).

### Elements of empowerment in the SDGs<sup>7</sup>

<b>Rules and mechanisms that ensure the exercise of rights and access to justice</b> 5.6: access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; 8.8: protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment 16.3 promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all; 16.6: developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; 16.9: providing legal identity for all, including birth registration; 16.10: protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements; 16.b: promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.
<b>Rules and mechanisms that ensure meaningful participation in economic, social and political decisions, in the public and private spheres</b> 5.5: participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; 5.a: reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources; 5.b: enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; 5.c: adopting and strengthening “sound policies and enforceable legislation for (...) the empowerment of women and girls at all levels”; 6.b: support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management”; 11.3: participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries; 16.7: ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
<b>Conditions that enable people to benefit from those mechanisms and rules, including information, knowledge, skills, access to services and finance and the capacity to generate income:</b> 1.4: equal rights to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, technology and financial services; 3.7-3.8: universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education (3.7) and universal health coverage (3.8); Several targets in goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all): references to education, literacy, numeracy, skills development, knowledge and skills, including education for human rights and gender equality; 5.4: recognizing and valuing unpaid and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, social protection and shared responsibility within the household and the family 9.c significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020; 12.8: information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature;

<sup>7</sup> Some of the targets in this table have been reworded for concision. The list is non-exhaustive.

13.3: refers to improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning; 13.b: promoting mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities; 16:10 ensuring public access to information (...), in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
<b>Social security and safety nets that ensure that the capacity to exercise one's human and other rights and to participate in decision-making are not undermined by the imperative of meeting basic needs in crisis situations</b>
1.3 refers to social protection systems; 3.8 refers to financial risk protection related to universal health coverage.
<b>Elimination of factors of disempowerment</b>
5.1 ending discrimination; 5.2 eliminating all forms of violence including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; 5.3 eliminating harmful practices such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; 8.7 eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and "secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms"; 10.3 elimination of discriminatory laws, policies and practices and to the promotion of legislation, policies and action to reduce inequalities and ensure equal opportunities; 16.2 ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

**Empowerment as a means.** There is a recognition that the empowerment of women and girls is a means to progress across SDGs (paragraph 20).

**Empowerment of countries?** The Agenda also refers implicitly to elements that could be interpreted as referring to the empowerment of developing countries, such as "enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions" (10.6); broadening and strengthening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance (16.8); and SDG 17 in general, which refers to strengthening domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection (17.1); promoting a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda (17.10); and respecting each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development (17.15).

### 3. Empowerment in the CDP's work on "Leaving No One Behind"

The concept of empowerment, and its relation to the pledge to leave no one behind and to the goals of equality and inclusiveness, was addressed directly and indirectly in the work done by the CDP subgroup on Leaving No One Behind over the course of 2017 and 2018.<sup>8</sup> Most references to the concept addressed elements of disempowerment or action towards enabling empowerment (or promoting the "enabling factors" identified above:

- Elements of disempowerment:
  - o Overlapping deprivations (Klasen and Fleurbaey)
  - o Lack of access to basic services (Selolwane)
  - o Elements/mechanisms that push people behind (Elson); discrimination – also mentioned in Cornia, Nurse;

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/leaving-no-one-behind.html>

- Those furthest behind may not just be further behind on a path and instead may be systematically blocked from advancing (Fleurbaey)
- Procedural inequalities (Merino)
- Action towards empowerment
  - Evaluating policies against human rights obligations (Elson)
  - Addressing concentration of wealth and power at the top (Fukuda-Parr)
  - Pre-, in-, post-market redistribution mechanisms (Fleurbaey)
  - Recognition and empowerment of those left behind by trade liberalization and technology through education, training, universal social protection and targeted support to affected workers (Harrison)

Two papers also addressed an international dimension: empowerment of recipients in development cooperation (Alonso) and international norms that do not limit policy space for national development (Alonso)

The following pages contain excerpts on this issue from the work of the CDP and its members in 2017 and 2018.

### 3.1 Excerpts from the report of the CDP to ECOSOC in 2018<sup>9</sup>:

#### **Summary**

*“(...) Extreme inequality persists within countries and cities as well as among countries. In many different contexts, people are being pushed further behind by a variety of forces, including globalization, technological developments, gender discrimination, climate change and other forms of environmental degradation that lead to loss of access to land, livelihoods and jobs. In many cases, policies, legislation and investments fail to take into account negative impacts on other sectors, groups of people and countries, and future generations. Many countries, in particular the least developed countries, still lack the productive capacity necessary to set them on a path towards sustainable development. (...)*

*(...) a generalized shift towards development that leaves no one behind requires the transformation of deeply rooted systems — economic and political systems, governance structures and business models — that are often based on unequal distributions of wealth and of decision-making power. It is not enough to address inequality by focusing on those “left behind” at the bottom. It is also necessary to address the concentration of wealth, income and decision-making power at the top and break the link between economic and social exclusion and decision-making power.*

*The pledge to leave no one behind is seldom disputed in principle, but the complexity of its practical implementation is often insufficiently acknowledged. Trade-offs in the path towards the achievement of leaving no one behind must be understood and addressed.”*

#### **Chapter 1 Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention**

##### **B. Matters brought to the attention of the Council**

*“The Committee recommends that the United Nations System entities and Member states embed the concept of leaving no one behind in their strategic frameworks and translate that concept into action, not only by targeting specific groups that are excluded from decision-making power and the benefits of*

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<sup>9</sup> The full report is available at <https://undocs.org/en/E/2018/33>. An excerpt of the content on “leaving no one behind” is contained in <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/leaving-no-one-behind.html>.

development, but also by safeguarding the interests of those groups by not pushing them further behind through measures that deprive them of their rights and livelihoods, and by the following:

(a) Ensuring that macroeconomic and fiscal instruments work towards equitable, sustainable growth, job creation and the reduction of poverty and inequalities, including extreme concentration of wealth;

(b) Implementing mechanisms that empower and actively encourage the participation of all in relevant decision-making processes, including in environmental matters, and ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights;

(c) Building productive capacity through integrated policies, including industrial policies, rural development policies and the development of human assets in support of inclusive development;

(d) Taking into account, in the implementation of technological innovation policies, that while technology has great potential to advance inclusive development it can also be at the root of national and international exclusion and inequality;

(e) Implementing transformative social policies that combine basic universal frameworks with targeted actions, as well as pre-market, in-market and post-market redistribution;

(f) Taking effective action on international cooperation on tax, cross-border financial flows, migration and remittances, debt relief and trade;

(g) Shifting development cooperation to a more comprehensive and representative framework integrating new and traditional providers, in which governance is representative of both donors and recipients;

(h) Prioritizing support to least developed countries in all the above-mentioned areas.

## **Chapter 2 Leaving no one behind (parts not reflected in Summary)**

*“Segments of the population that are typically excluded from meaningful participation in decision-making — those already left behind in material well-being, education, health and other factors, those that are geographically isolated and future generations — are unlikely to see their interests safeguarded in policy and investment decisions, as is the case for countries that are marginalized in international decision-making structures. (...)”*

*Where changes represent a threat or perceived threat to the established interests of the most influential groups, there is likely to be resistance. Thus, it is not enough to address inequality by focusing on those “left behind” at the bottom. It is also necessary to address the concentration of wealth, income and decision-making power at the top. (...)”*

*Institutions need to be reoriented so that policy is driven from the bottom up by the needs of those who are deprived and disadvantaged. Governments need not only to remove barriers to political and civic participation but also to actively ensure that they are accountable to all citizens both through formal processes — such as free and fair elections that are not captured by economic interests — and through other accountability mechanisms such as a free press, access to information, meaningful multi-stakeholder participation instances at all levels of policymaking and access to justice. (...)”*

*To leave no country behind and ensure sustainability and resilience, international action must be coherent. It should support rather than hinder countries’ capacity to enact and finance their development strategies, and enable rather than block channels through which global wealth can be redistributed.”*

**3.2 Excerpts from the background papers (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/leaving-no-one-behind.html>)**

**No. 44: Leaving no one behind: Some conceptual and empirical issues, Stephan Klasen and Marc Fleurbaey**  
(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/leaving-no-one-behind-some-conceptual-and-empirical-issues/>)

“(H)ealth and education are two dimensions of achievement that strongly determine the possibilities for self-realization of any individual and for valuable social interactions with others. Health is both influenced by social standing and the economic situation, and a factor in getting access to all sorts of personal achievements. Access to health care is one of the most important vital needs. Education is often seen primarily as providing human capital that can be transformed into earnings in the labor market, but it is much more than that. It is one of the most important “social bases of self-respect” (Rawls 1971) and opens minds to understanding the world and interacting with others in a fruitful way.

Second, social relations are very important for people’s well-being, and they can be both a source of disadvantage and the locus where disadvantage originating elsewhere becomes tangible and painful. (...)

Two broad dimensions of disadvantage in social relations can be distinguished and described as follows. First, there is disadvantage in the form of constraint and lack of freedom, which can be found in subordination (being subject to authority without adequate checks and balances), in dependence (being subject to arbitrary influence or unreliable support), or in obligations and duties (being in charge of others or bearing excessive responsibilities). Second, disadvantage in social relations can also take the form of exclusion, and this can occur in different ways: discrimination (being assigned inferior roles), stigmatization and humiliation (being shamed and blamed), ostracism (being submitted to refusal of contact, including unemployment).”

**No. 43: Push no one behind, Diane Elson**

(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/push-no-one-behind/>)

“It is people who already lack economic, social and political power who are most at risk of being pushed behind by processes driven by those with more economic, social and political power, who seek to sustain and increase that power. The policy frameworks that are currently dominant fail to provide adequate safeguards. Underpinning them is a utilitarian social ethic which judges policy in terms of the maximization of the greatest wellbeing of the greatest number, and takes for granted the prevailing distribution of private property rights. This is operationalized in terms of the pursuit of economic growth. Policies which increase output are judged to be efficient if the increase is sufficient for the winners to compensate the losers, in financial terms. The fact that compensation often never takes place, or that for some losses, money can never compensate, is disregarded. The utilitarian policy framework is a technocratic framework in which policies are designed by experts trained in mainstream economics. These mainstream economists identify market failures which they agree policy should correct; but also identify government failures, and advocate greater reliance on the market to correct these. Since the late 1970s, the dominant view has been that government failure outweighs market failure in relation to the objective of maximising the greatest well-being of the greatest number, given the distribution of private property rights.

An alternative approach, in terms of social ethics, understanding of policy process, and identification of rights that should be treated as foundational is provided by human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a founding document of the United Nations, provides an alternative social ethic which judges policy in terms of its impact on the wellbeing of each person. As well as setting out specific political and civil and economic, social and cultural rights, the Declaration states that ‘Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized’ (Article 28). The great moral vision of the Declaration has been elaborated in a system of human rights



treaties, treaty bodies, further Declarations on specific topics, reports of Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts, and clarifications by international groups of jurists (Steiner and Alston 1996). (...)

Human rights standards are not just concerned with setting a floor below which people should not fall. Non-discrimination and equality in the enjoyment of rights is a central principle: and this does not just mean equality in formal, legal rights. Rights are to be exercised without discrimination not only on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, but also national or social origin, property, birth or other status (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 2). Equality in the human rights framework means substantive equality in outcomes (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2005; UN Women 2015 chapter 1). (...) There is plenty of evidence of the ways in which current levels of inequality in wealth and income hinder the realization of human rights. For instance, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) show that countries with higher inequality have worse health outcomes, controlling for differences in GDP per capita. (...)

What is needed to prevent anyone being pushed behind is a different kind of development that is not driven by financial calculus and the interests of those who possess economic, social and political power, and takes private property rights as foundational; but one that puts first the dignity and worth of each human being, takes human rights as foundational and seeks to realise everyone's human rights on a basis of substantive equality. The sustainable development goals go some way to address the creation of better forms of development but fall short in many ways. Evaluating policies against human rights obligations can point us in the right direction, and can help to build coalitions between different groups across the world who are struggling for social justice. All policies should be subject to the question: is this policy likely to push some one behind, and if so, will this loss be mitigated or must it be prevented from happening in the first place?"

#### **No. 42: Priority to the furthest behind, Marc Fleurbaey**

(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/priority-to-the-furthest-behind/>)

"In the perspective of empowering the worst off, it is worth revisiting some important distinctions in the field of social policy. One such distinction is about redistribution and predistribution, or, even more precise, about the difference between redistribution post market, pre market, and in market. Post-market redistribution is the classical tax and transfer system which takes market incomes as given and seeks to redistribute them. Pre-market redistribution is aimed at preparing individuals for market competition, by endowing them with skills, human capital and related resources such as access to health care. But there is also in-market redistribution, when regulation of market activities contributes to protecting the weakest parties in trades, such as consumers confronting monopolies, workers negotiating with employers, tenants facing landlords, or small farmers interacting with the agroindustry.

What type of policy is the most suited to empowering the worst off? Post-market redistribution may be considered less effective than pre-market action, because it makes the poor dependent on the continuity of the social policy and is more likely to generate the perverse stigmatization and discouragement effects mentioned earlier. However, one should not ignore that post-market redistribution can also make the poor stronger in their market interactions. For instance, it is an important argument of the advocates of a universal basic income that such a program makes the most vulnerable populations stronger in front of employers seeking to enroll them in bad jobs. The Scandinavian welfare state is considered to keep a balance in the relative power of workers and employers for the same reason. Similarly, in-market policies can also substantially shift the balance of power, and in some cases more effectively than any other policy. For instance, no pre-market or post-market redistribution can produce the outcome that private firms are governed in the interest of stakeholders and not just shareholders as well as a regulation that imposes governance bodies representing the relevant parties. The reason why no other policy can achieve this is that the creators of firms have no incentives to adopt democratic governance forms, and that it is extremely

hard for the stakeholders to impose such forms when they are in a weak position in the organizational structure.

The association of taxes and transfers with post-market redistribution should not hide the fact that certain taxes and transfers can also contribute to in-market transformation. Regulation of governance structures in private firms can take the form of taxes for bad structures and/or subsidies or tax breaks for good structures. It is also increasingly recognized that taxes that seek to enhance the efficiency of the economy, such as penalties for polluting activities (including a carbon tax, for instance) or taxes on rent-seeking practices (such as speculation or anti-competitive practices), can contribute to improving the situation of the worst off in several ways. They can provide new revenue to the welfare state for investment in human capital (pre-market redistribution) or for post-market redistribution. They can make it possible to decrease taxes on labor incomes, reducing distortions on the labor market and encouraging job creation and preservation (as well as slowing down automation). They can protect the poor from harm, such as pollution which tends to disproportionately affect them, as well as some predatory practices. (...)

It is not certain, however, that the most disadvantaged populations are simply the “furthest behind,” in the sense that they simply have to wait a little longer than the others. Many of the poorest populations suffer from exclusion mechanisms that seem to unjustly and systematically block the waves of progress before they can reach them. It is therefore not enough to think of reaching out to them in the standard redistributive ways, one must also fight the exclusion mechanisms that “push them behind.””

**No. 40: Eradicating poverty by 2030: Implications for Income Inequality, Population Policies, Food Prices (and Faster Growth?), Giovanni Andrea Cornia**

(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/eradicating-poverty-by-2030-implications-for-income-inequality-population-policies-food-prices-and-faster-growth/>)

“Pre-market changes in path-dependent ‘social norms’. Even before discussing economic discrimination, inequality depends on path-dependent social and religious norms that define the culture of a nation. For instance, minority discrimination affects the access of women, and other marginal groups to land, education, certain professions, credit, public employment, social transfers and so on. Such discrimination applies in particular to women who suffer a longstanding ‘gender discrimination’, including lower pay for the same job. Note that discrimination persists after controlling for education, location, sector of employment, etc. Note also that the effects of gender and minority discrimination reinforce each other, as in the case of Indian women belonging to low castes.”

**No. 47: ‘Leaving no one behind’ as a site of contestation and reinterpretation, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Thea Smaavik Hegstad**

(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/leaving-no-one-behind-as-a-site-of-contestation-and-reinterpretation/>)

“LNOB was promoted to frame the SDG inequality agenda as inclusive development, focusing on the exclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups from social opportunities, deflecting attention from the core issues of distribution of income and wealth, and the challenge of ‘extreme inequality’. As implementation proceeds, countries are taking up the LNOB principle in different ways. (...)

Thus the goal of inequality is reinterpreted by the targets and indicators as an agenda to reduce poverty and exclusion, keeping out issues of distribution of income and wealth, particularly the concentration of both at the top. Similarly, LNOB as an over-arching principle is often thought to be an important commitment to inequality, but its real social agenda focuses on the deprived and marginalized, not on elite power. (...)

In summary, while countries show diverse responses to the LNOB challenge, they consistently identify the concept with stronger social protection and investment. This is a very limited conception of LNOB in contrast to the ambition of the 2030 Agenda and the definition provided by the UN Chief Executives Board. Those commitments call for a transformative change that would require addressing deep rooted systems – economic, social, political – that not only perpetuate inequalities but ‘push people behind’ (Elson 2018)(Committee on Development Policy (CDP), UN 2018). A combination of policies is needed, starting with social policy, but also including fiscal and other macroeconomic policies conducive to equitable and sustainable growth, voice and accountability, and the fulfilment of human rights. The VNRs reviewed tend to neglect economic policies and extreme economic inequalities, institutionalized discrimination against groups, new approaches to putting the last first, and reforms for greater participatory governance. (...)

In these ways, the LNOB as a call frames the inequality agenda in the SDGs flexibly, without obliging countries to address difficult issues of discrimination against excluded subaltern groups. At the same time, it also keeps out concern with ‘extreme inequality’ off the table. It is not difficult to see why there would be no objection to LNOB as a core theme of the 2030 Agenda. It is also not surprising that the inequality agenda in the 2030 Agenda contains a set of contradictory elements: a strong commitment to reducing inequality within and between countries as a goal and in the grounding in human rights principles, but weak measures for operationalization in the way that the targets and indicators are set up, with the ambiguous theme of LNOB that is open to broad interpretation.”

**Inequality and Sustainability, Leticia Merino** (not published; summary available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-2018-LNOB.pdf>)

“An important dimension of inequality is procedural inequality or procedural unfairness<sup>2</sup>, resulting from unequal access to power and decision-making capacities, an important condition present in the relations between countries and within countries. As the richest groups generally have a disproportionate access to power, they tend to impose their interests, visions and values in international and national arenas<sup>3</sup> favoring the reproduction of economic and social inequities. Procedural inequalities permit global and local elites to maximize short term benefits by over-exploiting natural resources and ecosystem, transferring environmental and social externalities to local societies, particularly when elites can isolate or distance themselves from environmental deterioration<sup>4</sup>. Many toxic waste dumps and other sites of high environmental risks in many countries are located close to poor neighborhoods inhabited by migrants or rural territories inhabited by ethnic minorities. Procedural inequality may also promote values and projects contrary to environmental protection.”

**Who Might be Left Behind? A Perspective on Agenda 2030’s Vision of Inclusive Development, Onalenna Selolwane** (not published; summary available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-2018-LNOB.pdf>)

“The inequalities embedded in the provision of the two social services of education and housing are illustrative of the structural inequalities and corresponding poverty that characterise socio-economic development: particularly in Africa where the exclusion involves the vast majority of citizens. Providing access to such a limited number of people creates and perpetuates systemic poverty across a wide range of social life. Those who benefit educationally, also benefit in terms of access to employment, quality housing, banking and credit, quality health services, water, electricity, sanitation, social security as well as life and health insurance. Education also gives people political voice and the capacity to make demands on their governments and hold them accountable.

The exclusion of such a sizeable proportion of African citizens from access to quality education invariably translates into a society dominated by people who lack the capability to demand accountability from their

governments except through riots and eruptions in mass demonstrations that are very often also violent. Such rates of social exclusion are breeding ground for coups d'état, authoritarian regimes, ethnic conflicts and generic lack of accountability on the part of both the citizen majorities and their governments.”

**The Quest for Agenda 2030 – Leaving No One Behind – Inclusive Rural Transformation, Lindiwe Sibanda (not published; summary available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-2018-LNOB.pdf>)**

“Under inclusive rural transformation, everyone, without exception, can exercise their economic, social and political rights, develop their abilities, and take advantage of the opportunities available in their environment. This leads to a marked improvement in the economic position and quality of life for small farmers, land poor and landless workers, women and youth, marginalized ethnic and racial groups, and victims of disaster and conflict. Inclusive rural economic growth in agriculture-based economies requires a smallholder farmers-centred and market-led productivity revolution, which typically represents the bulk of the agricultural sector in these countries. (...)

Agricultural transformation requires making political commitments at the highest level of government and making investments by devoting substantial amount of financial and human resources. Governments play irreplaceable role in the transformation of agriculture by creating an enabling policy environment, creating the incentives for people to use their resources and talents and benefit from the fruits of their labor, providing critical public goods which the private sector is not able or willing to provide.

Yet, the ability of governments to provide these vital services and enabling environment depends on the political economy and the capability and effectiveness of the civil service system (...)

A critical remaining and crosscutting barrier to transformation relates to access to finance for smallholders. The need and demand for finance at this level is huge. (...) Relatively little is known about the financial services needs of smallholder families, however, and the first step in reaching these clients successfully is to better understand their needs, preferences, aspirations and behaviors. With that knowledge, financial services providers and other stakeholders can develop and pilot more effective financial services and products designed to enhance the value proposition for smallholder families, focusing on improving their risk management ability and lowering provider delivery costs with technology.

Promoting “inclusive finance” means intensifying the depth of outreach and providing services to marginalized groups, especially women, reaching beyond conventional microcredit to the people at the bottom of the economic pyramid. Smallholder farmers need ongoing access to financial services specific to their agricultural activities and to reach markets. But small producers are often perceived as too risky by commercial financial institutions and can fall into the category of “the missing middle,” as they are served neither by microfinance institutions nor by commercial banks. In many places, formal financial services are not aligned with the business and investment purposes of small producers, as well as being simply too far away or too expensive.”

#### *International dimensions:*

**No. 39: Development cooperation to ensure that none be left behind, José Antonio Alonso**  
(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/development-cooperation-to-ensure-that-none-be-left-behind/>)

[South-South cooperation players] “defend more balanced and horizontal relationships among partners, rejecting the application of policy conditionalities, demanding respect for the national sovereignty of partners, and insisting that action be based on the principle of “mutual benefits” (as opposed to charity).” “...new providers have also raised some criticism, basically for their lack of transparency, their limited concern about recipients’ ownership and their tendency to use different kinds of “tied aid”. This last

problem particularly affects some Chinese investment projects, in which inputs, managers and sometimes workers come from China, limiting the spillover effects of the development cooperation initiatives on the recipient country; but the problem could also affect some training and technical assistance programmes promoted by other providers (Brazil, for example). As a consequence, some recipient countries have begun to demand greater space for decision-making and more balanced outcomes in South-South cooperation interventions as well.”

“...as the diversity of the actors engaged increases, so does the heterogeneity of interests and visions at play, thus opening the space for new conflicts. To avoid such pitfalls, it has become necessary to design an inclusive and legitimate structure for development cooperation governance. Given its exclusive membership, the DAC may not adequately fill this function.”

**No. 41: International tax cooperation and sovereign debt crisis resolution: reforming global governance to ensure no one is left behind, José Antonio Alonso**

[\(https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/international-tax-cooperation-and-sovereign-debt-crisis-resolution-reforming-global-governance-to-ensure-no-one-is-left-behind/\)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/international-tax-cooperation-and-sovereign-debt-crisis-resolution-reforming-global-governance-to-ensure-no-one-is-left-behind/)

“Most [global] rules have been developed in ways that are hardly compatible with a fair distribution of development opportunities among countries and people. Among the most important shortcomings, three deserve to be underlined (Alonso *et al.*, 2014): (...)

If the principle of “leaving no one behind” is to be made effective, it is not enough that national policies take into account the needs of more impoverished, marginalised, and vulnerable social sectors: it is also necessary that global rules promote a fair distribution of development opportunities at the international level, in order to ensure that countries have the capacities and resources to implement such policies. This latter purpose would require, at least:

1. Firstly, that countries have the ability to build sound, efficient, and fair tax systems, in order to collect the resources required for managing the economy and to properly fund their public policies;
2. Secondly, that countries have the capacity to define and implement their own policies in accordance with the social preferences and priorities of their citizens and without external impositions;
3. Thirdly, that an international mechanism of income redistribution be instituted, in order to correct asymmetries between countries, to ensure universal minimum standards of social protection, as well as provision of global public goods.

The two first conditions seek to guarantee the principles of economic allegiance<sup>5</sup> and fiscal self-determination of nations, which are basic components in any approach to global justice. But in a world of deep distributive inequalities, this is not enough, because fiscal capacities are highly correlated with countries’ income levels (van Apeldoorn, 2016). Therefore, mechanisms of redistribution at the international level are needed (the third requirement). Development cooperation should be part of those mechanisms, even if more binding and centralized procedures of international redistribution would be more efficient and effective.

The lack of sufficient tax cooperation at the international level frustrates the two first requirements, insofar as it reduces national capacities for raising tax resources and funding public policies. This opens the gates to a ‘race to the bottom’ in tax rates among countries, to tax avoidance through profit-shifting activities by companies, which reduces the tax basis, and to tax evasion by individuals and companies, based on the accepted existence of opaque and non-cooperative jurisdictions. In the last five years, the international community has improved some of these areas significantly, but the situation is far from satisfactory: as

many studies show, the resources that developing countries lose through these practices are at least double what they receive as international aid.

The absence of a mechanism for an orderly, timely, and fair procedure for sovereign debt-crisis resolution also works counter to the two first criteria. This obliges debtor countries to follow procedures clearly controlled by creditors that are limited in efficiency and highly asymmetric in the distribution of costs among the parties involved. In spite of attempts, the international community has been unable to build an appropriate alternative to this problem.”

**No. 45: International trade or technology? Who is left behind and what to do about it, Ann Harrison**

(<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/international-trade-who-is-left-behind-and-what-to-do-about-it/>)

“Recent thinking on how to ensure that no one is left behind emphasizes the importance of universal mechanisms of redistribution, such as universal access to social services or the strengthening of universal social protection. These are the first best solutions advocated by international organizations such as the United Nations and the ILO. The United Nations (2016) report “Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development” makes the following points (pages 121-122):

*“Policy approaches to address exclusion and leave no one behind have often been centered on the promotion of the rights and capabilities of disadvantaged social groups. There is nonetheless growing recognition that action to promote social inclusion must go beyond group-specific approaches...that would address the underlying social, economic and political causes of inequality and social injustice....The universal provision of social protection as well as good-quality health and education services can address a range of exclusionary barriers. Access to good-quality education in particular empowers individuals economically by enhancing their human capital, but it also entitles them socially and politically....”*

“The United Nations and ILO call for universal provision of services in health care and education, as well as social protection for all of society. The UN has advocated for a Social Protection Floor which is nationally defined, reflecting country-level differences in administrative capabilities, fiscal space, needs and priorities. Examples of such programs include the European Union’s “Europe 2020” strategy and Rwanda’s vision 2020. Effective solutions to support individuals left behind by globalization are likely to include universal access to higher quality and lower cost public education at all levels as well as training programs like those in Germany. While the question of affordability has been posed, estimates by the ILO and others suggest that a universal social protection floor (excluding health care but including old-age, disability and family allowances) is feasible even for least development countries. Of course, such programs would be enhanced by measures that strengthen fiscal space and improve domestic resource mobilization through tax and transfer reforms.

Even when universal social programs are effective, such approaches are likely to require special measures. Combatting rising insecurity with more effective safety nets should also be explored, such as a Trade Adjustment Assistance program that covers all affected workers. In the US, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) was designed to provide a safety net for individuals hurt by trade, but many who qualify do not apply. Increasing take-up so that the majority of workers who qualify actually use it should be a top priority. While a greatly expanded safety net may seem ex ante to be a costly policy solution, I suspect that the costs are small relative to the lost opportunities from a more protectionist world.”

**No. 48: Migration, Diasporas And The Sustainable Development Goals In Least Developed Countries, Keith Nurse**

[\(https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/migration-diasporas-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-in-least-developed-countries/\)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/migration-diasporas-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-in-least-developed-countries/)

“Migrants are often subject to official and unofficial discrimination practices, xenophobia, stigmatization, violence, exploitative work conditions and social marginalization and so are amongst the most vulnerable social groups globally and thus key to achieving the SDGs and “leaving no one behind”. A key factor is the social position of the migrants in the new host societies. Addressing workers rights (especially women migrants, seasonal workers) and eliminating discrimination of migrants’ access to housing, healthcare and education are considered as key issues to redress the problems faced by immigrants. (...)”

The growth of international migration and the proliferation of global diasporas relates to a new transnationalism and geo-economics in which non-state actors play an increasingly critical role in international relations and development outcomes.<sup>21</sup> The economic flows associated with migration and the growth of diasporas have improved access to non-traditional finance, investment and savings that have surpassed traditional sources of external capital (e.g. FDI, ODA, debt, and portfolio investments) for many developing countries and LDCs in the last two decades or so.<sup>22</sup> The growth of what can be described as a diasporic economy has also facilitated the expansion of bilateral trade in goods, services and intellectual property along with new forms of entrepreneurship and social innovation between sending and receiving countries and regions. These economic flows and the attendant social formations have impacted poverty reduction and inequality through expanded life capabilities for migrants and their households, families, communities in both home and host nations.<sup>23</sup> In short, migration is not a zero-sum game.”

A key concern that has emerged in the debate on remittances and the financial impact of the diasporic economy has been the issue of “banking the unbanked”. This is considered to be a critical issue for the LNOB discourse as access to financial services is viewed as important for social and economic mobility. It is estimated that close to half of the world’s population is unbanked and the regions with the highest unbanked adult populations are in LDCs regions. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest unbanked adult population with 80 percent without access to financial services. The other regions with large unbanked populations are the Middle East (67%), Latin America (65%), East Asia/Southeast Asia (59%), South Asia (58%). For comparison it is important to note that the high-income economies in the OECD have an unbanked population of only 8 percent.<sup>48</sup> Access to banking (e.g. savings and credit), insurance and other financial services are a key resource to improve the livelihood of poor households.

Large shares of remittance recipients operate outside of the traditional banking system and so are key targets for “banking the unbanked”. Banks and microfinance institutions have been using money transfer services to attract new clients. This provides migrant remitters as well as recipient families with an additional option for transferring money not only for consumption but also for investment purposes.”