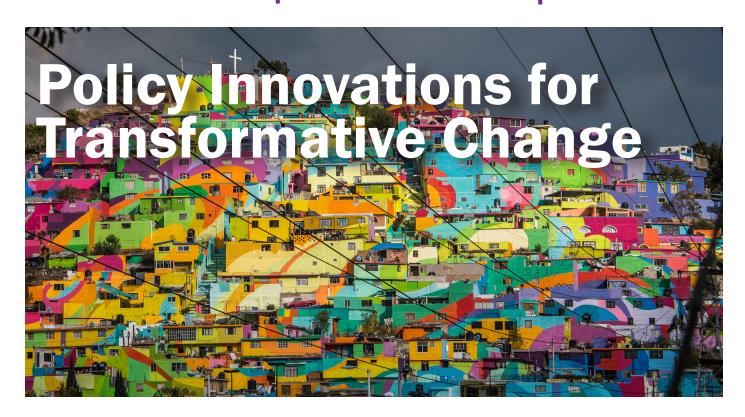HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

UNRISD Handout for the Official Side Event of the 2016 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development "Walking the Talk: Transformative Pathways for Achieving the SDGs"

Monday, 18 July 2016
13:15-14:30
Conference Room 5
UN Conference Building
New York

Policy Innovations for Transformative Change

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals are a global commitment to eradicating poverty and securing the planet by "transforming our world". But what kind of transformation is needed? And how can it be achieved?

Transformation

To achieve the 2030 Agenda, the development community needs to go beyond buzzwords. UNRISD research provides an evidence-based definition of *transformation* which can be used as a benchmark for policy making for the SDGs.

Transformative change is change in all three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental—that leads to greater equality, empowerment and sustainability. It is change in social relations, economic structures and socio-economic institutions. And it is change that attacks the root causes of inequality, poverty and environmental destruction, not just the symptoms.

Transformative policies, then, will be those that promote social mobility and break down the social stratification that locks people into disadvantage and constrains their choices; and those that enshrine social policies as rights rather than as handouts. They will impact on formal socio-economic institutions like social security and health systems, as well as informal ones like gender norms and the way public spaces are accessed. They will focus not just on avoiding pollution, but changing the carbon-based economic system and unsustainable consumption patterns. Transformative policies will not just provide palliative social transfers to prevent the worst excesses of poverty, but redistribute and create decent work and sustainable livelihoods that release people from poverty traps.

The pathway to putting transformative policies in place and implementing them needs to be transformative itself. It is not a technical fix, but a political process with negotiations between different actors to distribute costs and benefits differently from the way they are distributed now. Transformative pathways and policies are what is needed to "leave no one behind".

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Innovative Policies for Transformative Change

The UNRISD 2016 Flagship Report helps unpack the complexities of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in a unique way: by identifying key areas of innovation and reform, analysing whether these innovations are conducive to the transformative change need to successfully implement the SDGs.

Bringing together five years of UNRISD research across six areas (eco-social policy, care policy, social and solidarity economy, social policy, domestic resource mobilization, and politics and governance), the report explores what transformative change really means for societies and individuals. It provides guidance on how to turn the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into concrete actions that:
— go beyond palliative approaches to substantively and sustainably address the root causes of poverty, inequality and environmental destruction;
— are integrated, innovative and policy-driven, and demonstrate an eco-social turn in discourse and practice;
— are informed by inclusive, multi-level partnerships; and
— are grounded in evidence and normative values such as social justice and sustainability.

The eco-social turn

A key advance made by the 2030 Agenda is its focus on integrating the social, economic and environmental spheres of human activity. UNRISD research, which has always looked at the intersections between these spheres, shows that integration is not enough because the social, economic and environmental spheres do not operate on the same level. Decades of neoliberalism and market-led development mean that decision making tends to favour the economic sphere, with economic objectives such as growth and profit being prioritized. This has created a dangerous imbalance, evident in the form of the financial crisis of 2008, continuing environmental degradation, and ever increasing levels of inequality.

UNRISD research on transformation shows the need for an "eco-social turn": a normative and policy shift, making ecological and social objectives central to all development strategies with economic aims. This is what can re-balance the three spheres to reach the transformation sought in the 2030 Agenda.

Enabling national and global conditions

Much of the hard work of implementing the 2030 Agenda will be done at the national level. UNRISD research demonstrates a number of enabling conditions that will help governments to pursue transformative policies: democratic, transparent processes; a commitment to human rights and social justice in the creation of institutions and policies; and a favourable economic environment.

The international community must also play its part by reforming those sections of the global governance system which are at odds with the new Agenda to ensure:
- coherence between policy areas (horizontal) and between governance levels (vertical, from local to global);
- cooperation between all stakeholders, in partnerships with a fair distribution of risks, costs and benefits;
- meaningful participation of the vulnerable and marginalized; and
- spaces where active citizens and social activism can hold the powerful to account.

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) works to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice. Established in 1963, UNRISD is an autonomous institution within the UN system dedicated to multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues in the areas of Social Policy, Gender, and Sustainable Development. UNRISD's small Geneva-based staff carries out research, communications and policy engagement activities in close collaboration with a global network of individuals and institutions to co-create and share knowledge, and to shape and shift policy within and beyond the UN system.

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