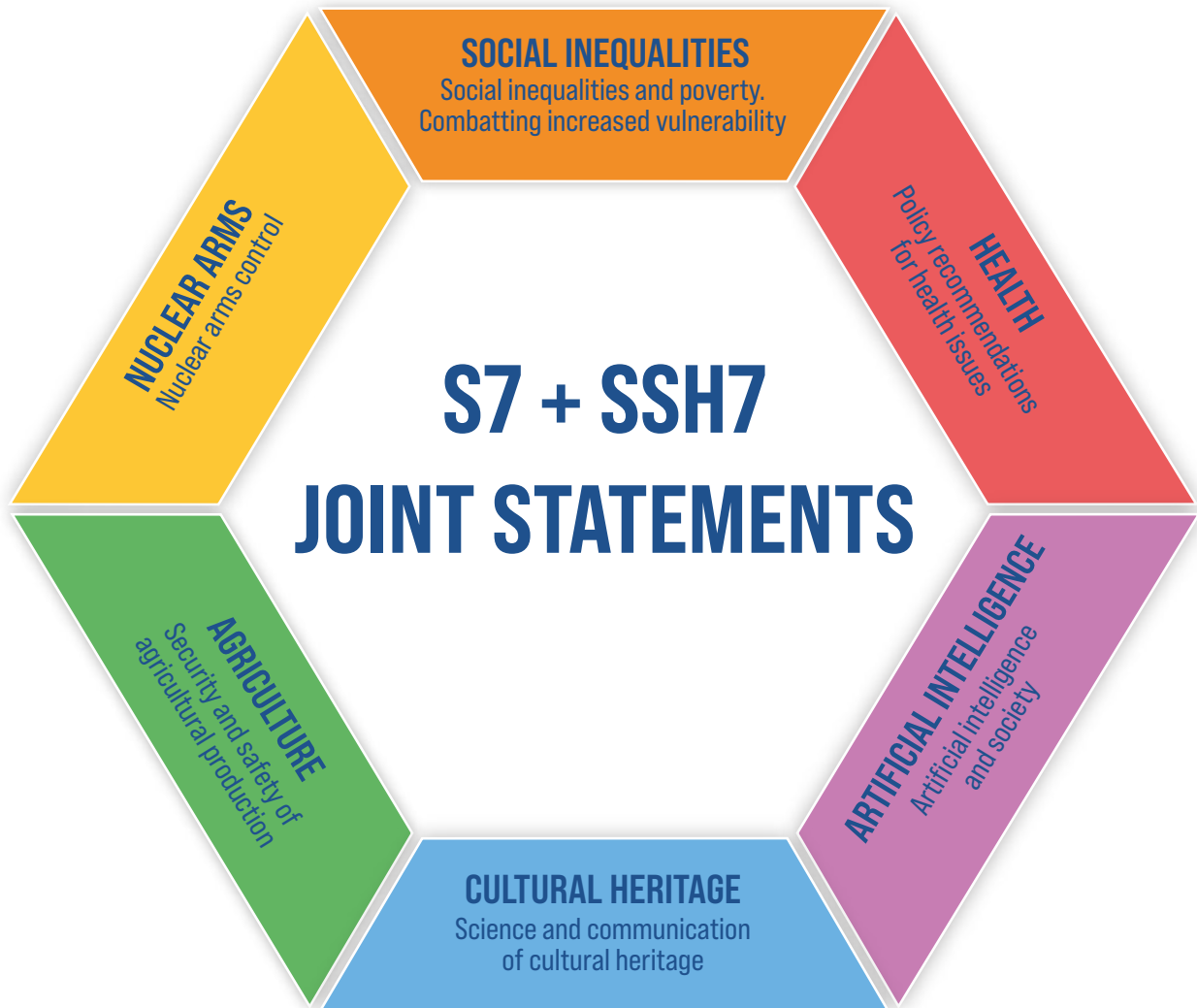




# SCIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

CHALLENGES,  
RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND OPPORTUNITIES

SCIENCE 7 +  
SOCIAL SCIENCES  
& HUMANITIES 7  
2024



**SOCIAL INEQUALITIES  
AND POVERTY.  
COMBATting  
INCREASED  
VULNERABILITY**

## SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND POVERTY. COMBATting INCREASED VULNERABILITY

---

The first of the Sustainable Development Goals approved by the UN General Assembly “to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all” is the eradication of extreme poverty, defined as surviving on less than \$2.15 per person per day at 2017 purchasing power parity, to be achieved by 2030. Since the 1980s, the number and percentage of people in extreme poverty has declined. According to World Bank estimates, in 1990 the incidence of poverty was 37.9 percent; by 2019 it had declined to 8.4 percent. Around 60 percent of the extremely poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This trend reversed abruptly in 2020, when extreme poverty increased in many regions due to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of people in extreme poverty went up by more than 70 million (crossing the 700 million in poverty threshold), and the incidence of poverty worldwide rose to 9.3 percent<sup>1</sup>. Many people who have been lifted out of poverty are at risk of falling back into poverty. Some studies report that the long-term effect (until 2030) of the pandemic shock may be an increase in vulnerability to extreme poverty of more than 100 million people<sup>2</sup>. This trend would increase social inequalities both within and between countries, especially where extreme poverty contrasts with increasing wealth of the better off.

In recent years there has been a growing consensus regarding the limits of income poverty measures as a standalone indicator. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon because the poor can suffer multiple disadvantages at the same time when they may have poor health or malnutrition, a lack of clean water or electricity, poor quality of work, little schooling, or other disadvantages. The World Bank estimated that in 2019, multidimensional poverty was larger than monetary poverty with a global incidence of 14.5 percent, and in Sub-Saharan Africa 52 percent, with no clear decreasing trend<sup>3</sup>. Research reveals that many women and people with disabilities tend to be multidimensionally poor compared to people without disabilities.

Food deprivation is also a serious concern, increasing from 720 million severely food insecure people to 900 million in 2022, 11.3 percent of the global population<sup>4</sup>.

There is a clear need for a change of strategy in the fight against poverty, which we urge the governments of the G7 countries to consider. In the wake of the pandemic and its severe socioeconomic consequences – as well as the poverty and hunger impact of new conflicts and tensions at the international level on international markets - it is necessary to strengthen more specific policies against poverty in addition to

fostering economic growth. Policies should aim at boosting social protection and preventing dramatic increases in extreme poverty in response to health, food and climate crises, unexpected economic downturns and conflicts (on health issues see also the document on health). These strategies require policymakers to consider other dimensions of poverty not necessarily related to income, such as adequate education and access to essential infrastructure and services (water, food, health, electricity, energy, mobility, accessibility). The lack of these crucial goods and services, regardless of income, has exacerbated disparities between high-income and low-income countries and within countries, with major consequences for social cohesion and overall stability.

Another priority for the change in strategy is the design and implementation of policies to enhance human capabilities and resilience. Much of the development assistance and policy for low-income countries has relied on financial measures (debt reduction or cancellation, financial aid and credit). The experience of the past decades shows that these measures have not been as successful as expected when not combined with the measures recommended below and have also raised concerns regarding accountability.

It is therefore important to engage in an open and critical dialogue – one of respect and reciprocity – to identify policies aimed at improving the capabilities and the resilience of populations. These policies can have specific and pre-determined objectives agreed and implemented with input from local populations. Cooperation on an equal footing and policies need to be more attentive to the specific institutional contexts and to the institutional infrastructure that con-

ditions their success.

The following recommendations are suggested to reduce poverty in countries and for population groups in greatest need:

1. Policies to improve capacity should be pursued and strengthened to increase the resilience of those people and populations who live in conditions of extreme poverty or are particularly vulnerable to future adverse shocks. It is important to ensure access to robust, accessible, sustained infrastructure and services for well-being (e.g. water, food, health, energy, mobility, and accessibility). Policies in this regard must provide for coordinated access to infrastructure and services for all;
2. It is important to ensure, through agricultural and food policies, food support programs for people in poverty that ensure conditions for adequate nutrition for all, but especially for children (see also the document on agriculture);
3. Education plays a crucial role. Generalized access to basic education must be ensured. Collaboration and partnership could be fostered between higher education and research institutions in G7 countries and local institutions, especially in those countries with high rates of extreme poverty and inadequate access to education at all levels;
4. The role of women and other often disadvantaged groups is also crucial to combat extreme poverty. Gender inequality and ableism must be strongly addressed by removing physical, legal, and cultural obstacles to the participation of women, the disabled and other groups. Policies must be developed

and implemented in ways that take account of, and are sensitive to, gender issues and women's empowerment. This should include tackling gender-based violence, which both impacts women in poverty and makes women more vulnerable to poverty;

5. Policies to mitigate climate change should not burden more heavily on low-income countries and groups than on high-income ones. Energy transitions should ensure that people in poverty, who often spend a greater proportion of their income and time on energy costs, are not negatively affected, and climate policies should consider the relative capabilities of different nations to respond, and the losses experienced by countries that cannot easily recover from climate impacts;
6. Sub-Saharan Africa overall appears to be the world's most vulnerable area based on many risk factors and dimensions of inequality: environmental, food, health, and education. Policies that support Sub-Saharan Africa are a priority, without neglecting other areas of the world where comparable conditions of inequality occur,
7. We conclude with a recommendation that calls for the urgent strengthening of an integrated action of the G7 states to combat increased poverty and vulnerability, including within the G7. This action could be carried out by using and enhancing the institutional infrastructure already offered by the UN with *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, whose primary objective is the elimination of extreme poverty; as also reiterated by the Final Declaration approved

by the *UN Annual Conference on Sustainable Development*, held in September 2023.

- 
- 1 World Bank (2022), *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course*, Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.
  - 2 Mendez-Ramos F. and Lara J. (2022), *Covid-19 and poverty vulnerability*, Brookings Institution.
  - 3 Diaz-Bonilla, Carolina; Aron, Danielle Victoria; Haddad, Cameron Nadim; Sabatino Gonzalez, Carlos Gerardo; Nguyen, Minh Cong; Wu, Haoyu (2023), *Update to the Multidimensional Poverty Measure - What's New*. Global Poverty Monitoring Technical Note, no. 34. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.
  - 4 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum*. Rome, FAO.

**CANADA**

The Royal Society of Canada



Alain G. Gagnon

**GERMANY**

German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina



**Leopoldina**  
Nationale Akademie der Wissenschaften

Gerald Haug

**ITALY**

Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei



Roberto Antonelli

**JAPAN**

Science Council of Japan



Mamoru Mitsuishi

**UNITED KINGDOM**

The British Academy



Julia Black

**UNITED KINGDOM**

The Royal Society



Adrian Smith

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

National Academy of Sciences



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Marcia McNutt