

SOCIAL JUSTICE: PROMOTING INCLUSION, ENDING POVERTY, AND REDUCING INEQUALITIES

Task Force 5 - S20 Brasil 2024

This is a Chair's summary of S20 Brasil 2024 discussions; the positions are not necessarily shared by all S20 members.

Preamble

In September 2015, at the United Nations Headquarters, representatives of 193 countries approved a global agenda to be achieved by 2030. The signatory countries recognized that to make our planet suitable for sustainable living, we urgently need to take action on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among the most important identified was eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, which is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Bold and transformative measures were outlined, with our governments committing to embrace them to steer the world towards a sustainable and resilient path. These actions are integrated and indivisible and must balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental. Science and international scientific collaboration serve as key mechanisms to reach these goals. With this standpoint, under the motto "Science for Global Transformation", the S20 Academies of Sciences met in Rio de Janeiro in 2024, and focused the discussions on five themes related to the UN 2030 Agenda: (1) Artificial Intelligence; (2) Bioeconomy; (3) Energy Transition Process; (4) Health Challenges; and (5) Social Justice.

We present to the G20 governments and society, the S20 Brasil 2024 recommendations with the expectation that these will be considered by our governments and help guide the final document of the G20. We also draw attention to the fact that G20 countries should consider their demographic trends, proactively anticipating and adapting to changes in their workforce size and age distribution, as these factors will significantly impact social security, pension systems, health and welfare programs, thereby affecting economic growth and competitiveness. It is essential for the educational system to address the diverse needs of both aging and youthful populations. Grasping social and demographic trends is essential for anticipating technological requirements and driving innovation.

Introduction

Despite the extraordinary technological progress attained through the contributions of science, the world continues to be afflicted by glaring inequalities and social disparities. Poverty remains a scourge that afflicts vast segments of the global population. Large human contingents are facing food deprivation, lacking shelter, being devoid of medical care, and deprived of access to clean water and basic sanitation. There is the dismantling of jobs and the creation of new ones at an unprecedented fast pace caused by digitalization, artificial intelligence and robotization. Additionally, the changing job market presents challenges for retraining the workforce, particularly in poorer countries. While poverty and inequality can exist independently, they are frequently intertwined, creating a complex social landscape.

Among the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations, eliminating poverty in all its forms is the first listed. Eradicating hunger, promoting health and well-being, and ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, besides quality education and gender equality, are some of the crucial conditions for achieving this goal. However, the core issue is not resource scarcity but rather its unequal distribution. Moreover, poverty looks different all over the world. While some in need starve, others struggle with obesity through the unavailability of healthy nutrients, rich foods, and poor education.

Even if, due to globalization and sustained international economic exchange, in the last decades the economic gaps between countries have decreased, income inequalities between and within countries remain a matter of concern. The pivotal path to be pursued requires reducing internal and external socioeconomic disparities.

To promote social inclusion and cultural diversity, the people should be at the center of all development policies, and nobody should be left behind. It is therefore essential to develop a perspective of rights and guarantees that

considers the value of developing institutions and to allocate the resources necessary to ensure full economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights.

Perspectives on the Role of Sciences

One of the primary purposes of science is to generate knowledge and make discoveries that enhance social, environmental and human well-being. Therefore, pursuing scientific advances with ethical considerations and a consciousness of their consequences is crucial.

Harnessing the power of science is not only a pathway but a responsibility in the quest to end poverty, reduce inequality, and promote inclusion. Societies can create a more equitable and sustainable future through technological innovation, data-driven policymaking, and advancements in various scientific fields. Through the integration of scientific knowledge into development strategies, we can address the root causes of poverty and exclusion, paving the way for a world where everyone can thrive and contribute to the betterment of humanity.

Science, by its very nature, is a social practice. Social, natural, and life sciences can inform strategies to decrease discriminatory practices and promote social justice. Understanding human behavior allows for the development of interventions that challenge stereotypes, biases, and unfair structural barriers, fostering a more just society. By applying scientific insights into human behavior, communities can work towards breaking down social norms perpetuating inequality. To resolve these issues, given their complexities, it is critical to promote interdisciplinarity alongside the collaborative work of the local communities.

Reducing inequality, in addition to being an ethical imperative, is a decisive condition for effectively enriching the human resources available for the advancement of society. Social justice constitutes a powerful antidote in the fight against violence, intolerance, and the development of significant social divides that weaken trust levels and degrees of solidarity that constitute the social fabric of life.

Digital Economy and Social Justice

The digitalization of economies and societies is an ongoing global phenomenon with significant implications that will benefit from insights of all branches of science. These issues include the impact of digital transformation on employment and the necessary skills and information that should be provided through education, and the development of effective strategies and policies. It is necessary to explore how access to technology, digital skills, and resources may either exacerbate or alleviate existing inequalities. Bridging the digital divide is crucial, as it involves expanding infrastructure for universal internet access and enhancing digital literacy to ensure all segments of society benefit from digital advancements. Addressing these issues can help formulate inclusive and equitable approaches to digital development. By actively engaging with these topics and leveraging insights from the social sciences and humanities, countries can effectively navigate the complexities of digital transformation and contribute to a just and sustainable digital development globally.

Science-related Disinformation

It is crucial to address the problem of science-related disinformation, understand its varied impacts, and identify effective measures to counter it. The detrimental effects of disinformation on digital media have profoundly impacted society and its governance. Building national, regional and global strategies to combat disinformation needs the involvement of the scientific and academic communities, and active participation from civil society. The dissemination of false information concerning scientific matters can lead to adverse consequences, as was the case for the alleged efficacy of hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin for treating COVID-19. The G20 countries are well-positioned to foster collaborations in global initiatives focused on combating disinformation in health and science.

Scientific Literacy

Scientific literacy plays a crucial role in enabling all individuals to comprehend and engage with future scientific advancements. To tackle the complexities of sustainable development, it is essential for governments and citizens alike to cultivate scientific literacy and awareness of how science works as a self-correcting process and not static facts. Enhancing scientific literacy is particularly important to better equip societies to meet future technological tasks. Today's challenges surpass the confines of traditional disciplines and encompass a wide range of scientific domains, spanning research, knowledge advancement, and their practical implementation. By fostering scientific literacy, we can promote an environment where everyone is equipped to understand and actively participate in addressing the multifaceted challenges of our time.

Scientific Cooperation

Cooperation among all sciences as well as between science and society can lead to: (1) promoting education, social equality, and fair treatment for all by abolishing all forms of unjust discrimination and asserting the fundamental moral equality of all citizens; (2) focusing on health, to assure well-being for all demographic strata; (3) transitioning to sustainable energy and industry practices to reduce carbon emissions; (4) ensuring sustainability in food production, land use, water management, and ocean health; (5) developing sustainable cities and communities that are just and resilient; and (6) harnessing the digital revolution for sustainable development. By working together, these transformations can pave the way for achieving the SDGs outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

Final Remarks

The members of the G20, representing the world's largest economies, play a central role in the fight against poverty and tackling inequalities. Governments need to consider the array of mechanisms to reduce inequalities and promote social justice, such as the revision of tax structures, the establishment of cash transfers, and fair governance of firms. Policies for combating all forms of unjust discrimination are also crucial for building a more equitable society.