



UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

**Research for
Social Change**

**Transformations
to Equity and
Sustainability**

**UNRISD Strategy
2016–2020**





The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the United Nations system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work, we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

UNRISD depends entirely on voluntary contributions from national governments, multilateral donors, foundations and other sources. The Institute receives no financial support from the regular budget of the United Nations. In supporting UNRISD, our donors contribute to the crucial but often neglected goal of assuring a diversity of views and voices on development issues at the highest level in the global system.

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Contents

3

Overview

6

Shaping the UNRISD Research Agenda: Contemporary Development Challenges

p. 8 • Inequalities

p. 9 • Conflict

p. 10 • Unsustainable Practices

11

Addressing the Challenges: UNRISD Research Programmes and Approach

p. 13 • Social Policy and Development

p. 15 • Gender and Development

p. 17 • Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development

21

Framing a Transformative Research Agenda

p. 23 • Inclusion

p. 24 • Institutions

p. 25 • Intersections

p. 26 • Innovation

27

Pathways to Transformation

30

Communicating Research for Social Change

32

UNRISD Strategy 2016–2020: Expected Results

p. 32 • Overall objective

p. 33 • Specific objectives

p. 33 • Activities and outputs

Boxes, Figures, Annexes

	<i>p.</i>		<i>p.</i>
Box 1: How UNRISD Defines Social Development	4	Figure 1: Addressing Global Challenges through UNRISD Research	19
Box 2: Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics	8	Figure 2: Pathways to Transformation: UNRISD's Policy-Engaged Research Process	28
Box 3: Hallmarks of UNRISD Research and Ways of Working	12	Annex 1: UNRISD Research 2016–2020	35
Box 4: Approach, Methods and Data	20	Annex 2: Budget and Financing	36
Box 5: The Four “I”s: Elements of a Shared Conceptual Framework	22	Annex 3: Consultation Process	36
Box 6: Tracking and Assessing Impact	34		



Overview

This Strategy sets out the main priorities and themes of UNRISD research for the coming five years within an overarching institutional framework that links research, communications, policy engagement, results and impact. Developed through extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, the UNRISD Strategy responds to contemporary development trends, policy concerns and scholarly debates, and aims to fill identified knowledge gaps, while also anticipating social issues that are not yet part of mainstream discourse.

A changing global context

The Strategy has been finalized at a moment of significant change in the international development landscape. The millennium consensus to end extreme poverty has been replaced by a new Agenda for Sustainable Development that will shape policy priorities and funding flows through 2030. The new global commitments contain ambitious promises of solidarity and transformation, combining a continued focus on the most disadvantaged people in low-income countries with universal strategies to ensure greater equity and sustainability—social, ecological and economic.

This global agenda has been negotiated in a complex and challenging environment: a range of new or exacerbated risks and vulnerabilities, including recurrent crises, health epidemics, environmental disasters and conflict, intensify livelihood insecurities and undermine progress already made. And its implementation will need to address difficult and intersecting problems, ensuring coherence across a diverse set of Sustainable Development Goals, and often

resolving tensions and trade-offs between them. From a social development perspective (see box 1), three overarching challenges capture many of the most pressing problems of the contemporary era reflected across the new goals: **inequalities, conflict** and **unsustainable practices**. It is to these challenges that UNRISD research most directly responds.

Addressing global challenges

Within the UNRISD Strategy—subtitled *Transformations to Equity and Sustainability*—research will analyse and explore the innovations and pathways that can lead towards more inclusive development outcomes. It will also consider critical obstacles and how they can be overcome.

An overarching goal for the Institute is to ensure that social development concerns and objectives remain prominent in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This will involve an assessment of the synergies and trade-offs among different dimensions and goals; analysing and assessing the appropriateness of the institutional architecture for ensuring

A changing global context
Addressing global challenges
Policy-engaged research
Implementation and funding

OVERVIEW

coherence among them; and identifying institutional arrangements and innovations that can support transformative processes and outcomes—defined in terms of equity and inclusion.

Work will be organized in three programme areas: **Social Policy and Development**, **Gender and Development**, and **Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development**. Building on past and ongoing research and reflecting the distinctive capacities of the Institute, each programme identifies key questions and topics that contribute to addressing the challenges identified above. A common analytical framework will unify the research across programmes.

Policy-engaged research

The UNRISD Strategy is also shaped by strong ties with the normative foundations and operational processes of the United Nations system, and by an impact approach through which policy-engaged research is informed by and responsive to potential users to ensure relevance and uptake. Taking full advantage of UNRISD's strategic institutional location and relations within the UN system, and its mandate to undertake policy-relevant research on social development issues, the Institute engages with a wide range of stakeholders—bridging academia, policy and decision makers, practitioners and advocates within and among countries around the world—to ensure that ideas, knowledge and evidence inform processes of change.

Implementation and funding

UNRISD receives no funding from the General Budget of the United Nations. The Institute must fully mobilize all the financial resources necessary to implement the strategy for research, communications, policy engagement, results and impact that is outlined in this document. Within the framework of this strategy, UNRISD will remain flexible and responsive to the changing context, emerging priorities and specific demands for research from United Nations entities and other key users and funders. The nature of activities and specific content of the research may therefore be modified, subject to discussion and approval by the UNRISD Board.

Box 1 How UNRISD Defines Social Development

Social development is a process of change that leads to improvements in *human* well-being and social relations that are equitable and compatible with principles of democratic governance and justice. It includes material achievements, such as good health and education; sustainable access to the resources, goods and services necessary for decent living in a viable environment; social and cultural attributes, such as a sense of dignity, security and the ability to be recognized as part of a community; and political achievements related to agency, participation and representation.

Transformative social development must involve changes in social structures, institutions and relations, including patterns of stratification related to class, gender, ethnicity, religion or location that may lock people (whether current or future generations) into positions of disadvantage or constrain their choices and agency. Transformative social development must also support the transition to sustainable production and consumption, and be accompanied by change in economic structures and relations—to enhance productivity in an environmentally sound manner, and ensure equitable distribution of its benefits.

The achievement of desirable development outcomes through just and participatory processes is ultimately a political project at the core of which lie power configurations at the household, local, national, regional and global levels. Social change inevitably involves contestation of ideas and interests between different groups, and requires the redistribution of resources and entitlements, and improvements in the institutions of governance that manage collective concerns at different levels.

“One of the strengths of UNRISD is its capacity to recognize the changing nature of the development landscape to which social policy must adapt: the shifting geography and profile of poverty; growing inequalities; the accelerating pace of globalization; and expanding risks associated with climate change and environmental degradation. This strength is a crucial resource that can help the UN system become more agile and responsive.”

—Mr. Wu Hongbo
Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs¹

¹ Message for the UNRISD Stakeholder Consultation, 1 September 2014, Geneva, Switzerland.

01

**Shaping the UNRISD
Research Agenda:
Contemporary
Development Challenges**

“Undue privileges, extremes of wealth and social injustice persist or have become even more pronounced during the decade. ... While various social services have continued to widen their coverage, problems of distribution, content and costs remain formidable. ... Even in the high-income industrialized countries a pervasive sense of crisis in life-styles and uncertainty concerning the future is evident. The plausibility of these societies as models for development or for welfare state policies has dwindled, along with their capacity to respond coherently to the kinds of demands made on them”.

The above description of the state of the world sounds current: it was in fact written by UNRISD in 1979 at the end of the UN's second development decade. Today, two decades after the World Summit for Social Development was convened in Copenhagen in 1995 to address such problems, the world's social situation appears more complex and contradictory. Since the turn of the millennium national governments, international organizations and non-state actors have proactively sought to improve social outcomes in the development process. Initiatives and innovations, often associated with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), provide signs of an incipient social turn in development policy and practice: evidence includes commitments to social protection floors, cash transfer and universal health programmes, enhanced social and environmental standards for business, and renewed attention to women's empowerment.

Significant gains in a number of social indicators are, however, juxtaposed against limited progress towards some

of the key concerns of Copenhagen, including full and decent employment and social inclusion. Inequality and unemployment have risen in many parts of the world, generating tensions, protest and conflict. Twenty years after Beijing, progress on gender equality is also mixed. Gains related to the presence of women in the public sphere have not always translated into substantive improvements in women's well-being, security and rights. Indeed, in many contexts they have been accompanied by increasing workloads and precarious forms of employment, rising levels of gender-based violence, and reversals of gains around reproductive and other rights. And twenty years after Rio, we have failed to make significant progress with respect to sustainable and equitable resource use, protection of the environment, and reduction of climate-damaging emissions, or in resolving the tensions between the environment and the rights of low-income countries to development.

Despite this mixed record, renewed attention to the social question in global development debates creates opportunities for UNRISD: a demand for knowledge and evidence that can facilitate more transformative, equitable and sustainable processes of social change. The global effort to design a set of goals to succeed the MDGs explicitly recognized the need for an integrated and transdisciplinary approach that connects social, economic and environmental dimensions in ways that minimize trade-offs and take advantage of potential synergies. Issues that were marginalized within the MDGs, including inequality, employment, livelihood and food security, and accountability, are

prominent in the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. So too are structural questions such as how to transform patterns of production, consumption and distribution that degrade the environment and perpetuate inequalities.

Implementation of the ambitious new agenda must engage with a number of global challenges—from new 21st century risks to the exacerbation of older problems: pandemics; demographic shifts; aging populations in some regions, and high youth unemployment in others; continued casualization of labour; intra-state and transnational conflict, escalating humanitarian crises and displaced populations; an increase in precarious and undocumented migration and human trafficking; and increased pressure on essential resources, such as water, as part of a wider climate crisis, urbanization and resource-intensive production and consumption patterns.

Within this broad context, three overarching challenges—**inequalities**, **conflict** and **unsustainable practices**—capture many of the most pressing problems of the contemporary era, and it is to these challenges that the new UNRISD agenda and strategy most directly respond. They represent a broad set of intersecting issues, which are core to the global sustainability and social justice agenda of the SDGs, and on which UNRISD is well-placed to lead research and contribute expertise. While other issues will also be addressed through the research, the overall results of the 2016–2020 Strategy should contribute knowledge to inform policy and practice on these overarching challenges.



Inequalities

Awareness of inequality as a social, political and development issue has risen dramatically in the past decade (see box 2). Concepts of inclusive growth, shared prosperity and multidimensional inequalities have gained prominence, and the SDGs explicitly aim to “leave no one behind”. Yet responses often focus on those at the bottom of the income pyramid and social hierarchy, ignoring drivers of inequality and failing to tackle the structures that reproduce it. These include the concentration of wealth and power, and the complex role of economic and political elites—now popularly referred to as “the 1%”—at one end of the spectrum, and intersecting forms of disadvantage and exclusion along lines such as gender, ethnicity or location at the other.

Addressing these issues requires a focus on the relations, institutions and structures that generate unequal outcomes, as well as interventions that ameliorate the position of the least advantaged. It requires attention to broader macroeconomic, financial, fiscal and regulatory frameworks and policies; the formation of social pacts or compromises conducive to more equitable development outcomes; and the inclusion of groups through

decent employment, expanded social provisioning and political voice. From a human rights perspective, questions range from the lack of accountability of corporations to the treatment of citizens as “beneficiaries” of social programmes rather than as bearers of rights.

Box 2 Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics

UNRISD Flagship Report 2010

Combating Poverty and Inequality was the first major United Nations report of the new millennium to draw attention to inequality as a problem for development, and as an impediment to the poverty reduction objective of the MDGs.

The report examined not only increasing disparities of income and wealth at global and national levels, but also horizontal or group inequalities (by gender, age and ethnicity, for example) and intergenerational inequalities. It highlighted the role that intersecting or multidimensional inequalities and exclusion play in perpetuating poverty. It also discussed the underlying structural causes of such inequalities, and the policies and politics required to address them—covering areas such as labour markets, trade and macroeconomic policies, fiscal and social policies, and governance arrangements.

“The most important report of the past 20 years about poverty and inequality.”

— Timo Voipio,
Ministry for Foreign Affairs,
Finland, 2010



Conflict

Rising inequalities and the absence of social cohesion fuel social tensions and, at the extreme, generate violent conflict. The early 21st century is witness to highly visible forms of violence along a spectrum from “normalized” insecurity and vulnerability to civil, interstate and transnational conflict. Poverty and rapid urbanization contribute to everyday forms of violence and insecurity, while escalating transnational conflicts are forcing people to flee their homes at numbers never seen in modern history. Other manifestations include crime, gangs and gun use; gender-based violence and high femicide rates; trafficking and exploitation of women, children and migrants; unprecedented numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons; ethnic and religious tensions; as well as the criminalization of poverty and militarization of police.

Conflicts not only cause severe hardship and harm for those directly affected; they also undermine states’ legitimacy and capacity to govern, posing obvious challenges for meeting international development goals. In fragile contexts, any “return to normal” is complex given the disruption of the social fabric and the multiplicity of groups that need to find a

common ground to live together. Even in settings nominally free from conflict, levels of violence may pose a challenge to state authority, often leading to the implementation of heavy-handed security policies. The role of social institutions and social policies in the prevention or mitigation of violence in these fragile contexts, as well as the role of social policy in humanitarian assistance, and in peace- and state-building processes, has not been explored sufficiently: such institutions and policies could play a critical role in transitions towards more stable development trajectories, reinforcing social cohesion and preventing future conflicts.

Unsustainable Practices



Ecological and climate challenges have called into question social and economic systems, and related production and consumption patterns, that depend on the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. These unsustainable practices have major economic and social repercussions, often reinforcing or exacerbating inequalities. Proposed alternatives, such as green growth or green economy approaches, have generally failed to address critical questions and responsibilities related to the distributional or equity dimensions of policies—whether among or within countries, and particularly among countries at different levels of income, as well as among social groups whose livelihoods depend directly on their relationship with nature.

While technology and resource efficiency are likely to be crucial elements of any solution to current climate and environmental challenges, alone they will be insufficient. They may even be counter-productive without profound changes in a number of areas: the organization of production; consumption and lifestyle behaviours; the distribution, use and control of resources; and systems of governance and enforceable accountability mechanisms for actions that cause lasting harm.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands a transformative and integrated approach that connects economic, social and environmental dimensions. As a universal agenda, it provides an opportunity to build consensus for action from local to global levels. This implies commitments, implementation and governance mechanisms that go beyond states and individuals to include the accountability of market actors, with incentives and regulatory frameworks for environmentally sound practices that are also socially inclusive and equitable. Realizing these ambitious goals, however, presents many risks and challenges, particularly from the perspective of countries that are still catching up in terms of the growth dynamics and structural change necessary to achieve higher levels of development.

02

Addressing the Challenges: UNRISD Research Programmes and Approach

Addressing the Challenges:
UNRISD Research Programmes and Approach

Social Policy and Development
Gender and Development
Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development

02

Research in the UNRISD Strategy 2016–2020 responds to the overarching global challenges identified above. It is organized in three programme areas—**Social Policy and Development, Gender and Development, and Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development**—reflecting the strengths and expertise of the Institute developed through past and ongoing work. Figure 1 illustrates the links between UNRISD research programmes and global challenges.

Each research programme reflects elements of continuity, building on the Institute's global track-record of high-quality, relevant, credible research in the respective fields. Presented below, the programmes identify gaps in knowledge or analysis that have come to light through past work, and propose new research on topics of significance and potential policy influence.

Work within each programme is realized as a collaborative endeavour with extensive networks of researchers, policy makers and civil society actors that UNRISD has built up over decades. The programmes undertake country-based studies in partnership with researchers located in countries of concern, particularly in the South, while also benefiting from strong engagement with leading scholars globally. They build on the distinctive hallmarks of UNRISD's approach (see box 3), aiming to contribute evidence that supports efforts at local, national and global levels to progress along sustainable and equitable development pathways.

Box 3 Hallmarks of UNRISD Research and Ways of Working

Addressing emerging and neglected issues

We focus on the often neglected social content and impacts of development processes, and the role of social institutions, relations and actors in shaping development policies and pathways.

Global networks

We engage researchers, policy makers and civil society actors from the global North and South in generating and sharing knowledge, in order to shape policy frameworks and inform policy implementation within and beyond the UN system.

Capacity building

We collaborate intensively with individual and institutional partners in the global South. Through the co-production of knowledge in the design, implementation and delivery of research projects, our ways of working help to develop the research capacities of our partners and foster processes of mutual learning.

Convening power

We provide a space for the exchange of ideas, giving prominence to marginalized viewpoints, often challenging mainstream development thinking and offering alternative policy options.

The success and longevity of UNRISD resides in large part in its flexibility and capacity to re-focus in response to the major development challenges of the day. We are forward looking, anticipating future concerns, while being responsive to immediate policy questions and priorities. UNRISD identifies neglected or less-visible issues as well as exploring the consequences of today's policies for the future.



SOCIAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

UNRISD research and policy analysis are at the forefront of progressive international development thinking that has reasserted the centrality of social policy in development strategies. Having been less visible for many decades, social policy is now accorded more attention in international development discourse, illustrated, for example, by the expansion of social assistance programmes (such as cash transfers and employment guarantee schemes), the global Social Protection Floor initiative, and the United Nations resolution on affordable universal health care and related national-level initiatives.

UNRISD understands social policy as public interventions that aim to guarantee adequate and secure livelihoods, income and well-being, and that enable all individuals to strive for their own life goals. This is a purposefully broad definition that goes beyond interventions designed only to protect the most vulnerable. UNRISD research has demonstrated, for example, the transformative role that state-led social policy can play in development contexts, illustrating its crucial function in enhancing productive capacities, underpinning economic growth, sharing the burden of social reproduction, reducing inequalities, and promoting social inclusion and the enjoyment of rights. It has demonstrated that social welfare is tightly bound to economic progress, as well as the role of social policy in strengthening citizenship, political participation and social cohesion.

The contemporary challenge is to build on the expansion of social policies and programmes related to the MDGs, which have largely focused on ameliorating problematic outcomes of development processes, to generate a more transformative approach to social policy that responds to the global challenges identified earlier, and identifies and addresses structural inequalities and their drivers. These include the rise of precarious employment and unemployment, particularly among youth; the gender division of labour and the unequally shared burden of care; complex forms of social disintegration, displacement, violence and conflict; and unsustainable environmental practices.

The UNRISD Social Policy and Development Programme will examine how social policies can be instrumental to economic development, and financed in a sustainable and progressive way, while maintaining their intrinsic goals of protection, equity and social inclusion. It will pay particular attention to new directions in social policy being pursued in low- and middle-income countries, examining the policies and innovations being adopted by governments and other actors to address contemporary development challenges, and the politics of social policy change. It will also explore how social policy is being, or could be, harnessed at regional and global levels to deal with issues that cross borders—such as migration, and environmental or conflict-induced displacement;

and how social policy interfaces with economic and environmental policy to address complex intersections between policy domains.

Work within the UNRISD Social Policy and Development Programme will focus on understanding, analysing and engaging with processes of policy change around the following questions:

- What innovations in social policy are being pursued in emerging economies and less developed countries to meet contemporary challenges?
- Why and how are some countries extending coverage and moving towards universalism in their social policies?
- How can social policy and human rights be linked up for more equitable, inclusive and just outcomes?
- How can social policy contribute to productive transformation and economic development?
- What are the building blocks of a new social contract, including its fiscal underpinnings?
- How can countries mobilize the financial resources required to implement sustainable development strategies?
- What is the potential role of social policy in preventing and overcoming conflict, moving beyond humanitarian assistance, and contributing to development and peace-building in violent or fragile contexts?
- How can human rights-based social policy be designed to address multiple forms of migrant precarity and strengthen the development potential of migration?



GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

UNRISD research has both led and continually challenged the field of gender and development, contributing to feminist scholarship and activism, and bringing evidence to bear on the practice of development. For more than three decades, the Institute has highlighted the diverse and often contradictory effects of liberalization and globalization on women, and the centrality of gender relations in patterns of growth, structural transformation, democratization and social change. Recent analysis of the gendered structure of social welfare regimes, and of the social and political economy of care, have shed light on how the unequal distribution of care work in the economy shapes gender and other inequalities. This work has elevated the issue of unpaid care on the global policy agenda, leading to its inclusion in the SDGs.

Gender equality is now a legitimate political claim at local, national and global levels. But despite progress and greater attention to some issues, such as violence against women, advances remain limited in others and reversals are frequent. Many claims for rights and equality fail to achieve visibility, while understandings of gender are often narrow and restrictive. Demands are often made on behalf of women as a homogeneous group, neglecting difference, for example, by age, class or ethnicity. Where women have gained voice through activism and increased political representation, this does not necessarily translate into substantive equality, or social and economic gains. Gender inequalities in resources, opportunities and power continue to be a persistent and integral feature of the modern world and its institutions—whether markets, states, political parties, social movements, communities or the family.

For these reasons the UNRISD Gender and Development Programme will continue to focus on the structures and relations that underpin gendered outcomes (and structure other inequalities), including the linkages between production and social reproduction, between economic and social policies, and between women's movements and state institutions. These linkages will be explored, for example, through research at the macro level on the relationship between patterns of growth and gender inequality, including the political economy of gender-egalitarian macroeconomic policy in different country contexts, or the implications for women's well-being and empowerment of their engagement in non-traditional agricultural exports; and at the micro level on the terms in which women engage in social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiatives, and the conditions under which feminist agendas are taken on board by them.

The UNRISD Gender and Development Programme will also maintain its focus on the intersectionality of gender with factors such as age, class and ethnicity, leveraging its pioneering contributions and expanding the analysis of care policies in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New research will aim to deepen the conceptual understanding of the gendered impacts of “civic” conflict—gang warfare, riots or violent crime—in violent urban contexts,

and to identify innovative policy interventions to address them. Feminist scholarship indicates that violence affects women differently according to class and social hierarchies, and the urban space they inhabit. However, the relationship between violent urban contexts and violence against women in the public space remains largely unexplored, as if the latter were independent of other forms of violence affecting women in cities, and the former had no relation to unequal gender relations more broadly. In extreme cases, such as conflict and post-conflict situations, gender-based violence is disproportionately high, indicating the pressing need for gender-sensitive humanitarian aid and post-conflict peace building if these are to be socially sustainable.

Work within the UNRISD Gender and Development Programme will focus on understanding, analysing and engaging with processes of policy change around the following questions:

- How can women's movements transform power relations at the local, national, and international levels and make states and other powerful actors respond to women's claims?
- What are the employment and social outcomes of non-traditional agricultural exports for different groups of women (in terms of age, class, caste and ethnicity)?
- What is needed to advance the implementation of care policies within the SDGs?
- What political processes can generate and sustain gender-egalitarian macroeconomic policies?
- How can women's participation in SSE organizations transform gender and economic power relationships?
- What policy changes are needed to overcome the gendered implications of violent urban settings, for women and girls, particularly those that live in poverty?
- How can humanitarian aid and development assistance be improved to tackle the gender dimensions of humanitarian crises more effectively?

A woman in a light green shirt and a patterned headscarf carries a young child on her back. She is standing next to a bicycle that has a bright green plastic water container mounted on the back. In the background, a large wooden water wheel is visible, with another person operating it. The scene is set in a dry, open landscape under a clear sky.

SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1970s, UNRISD has consistently emphasized the imperative of integrating the social, environmental and economic dimensions in a holistic and “unified” approach to transformative development processes and outcomes. Research has examined the wide range of factors that impact complex human/nature interactions and both social and environmental change, including the role of social norms, institutions and actors, power asymmetries and technology. It has explored the social consequences of processes of economic and environmental change; and the ways people and communities organize and mobilize collectively to enhance their well-being while managing or protecting their natural resources.

UNRISD research has demonstrated that unequal social structures and relations have repercussions for how societies employ their natural resources, and that social inequalities and ecological degradation tend to be mutually reinforcing. Recent work has documented innovative efforts to simultaneously address social and environmental issues at local and national levels through, for example, socially sensitive environmental policies that strengthen the coping capacities and resilience of vulnerable groups, social protection policies that provide incentives to protect the environment, and co-benefit approaches that direct public bodies to address environmental and social issues simultaneously in their decision making. UNRISD research has also raised concerns about the social deficit of the growth-based green economy approach, and has evaluated the potential of alternatives for more equitable and environmentally sustainable patterns of production, consumption, exchange and finance as undertaken by social and solidarity economy (SSE) organizations, which prioritize social and sometimes environmental considerations over private economic interests.

The Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development Programme will maintain its focus on the intersectionality of social and environmental issues and policies at global, national and local levels. In order to identify and overcome the structural causes and drivers of unsustainable practices, a new priority focus of the programme will be the role of international governance in the transformation towards equity and sustainability. Research will, for example, examine the coherence and transformative nature of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as its compatibility with other global agreements, such as those in the areas of trade and climate. It will also assess the social implications of the 2030 Agenda itself, exploring ways to harness synergies and manage trade-offs between sustainability goals across different policy domains. The programme will investigate how countries implement innovative eco-social policies that combine environmental and social objectives. It will also consider the transformative potential of local practices, including SSE and other innovative approaches in urban contexts, their role in supporting a socially inclusive and

environmentally sound economic system, and the possibilities for transferring lessons and scaling-up. Research on SSE will explore the ways to measure and assess the contribution of SSE to sustainable development, as well as the enabling conditions that may leverage this contribution.

Work within the UNRISD Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development Programme will focus on understanding, analysing and engaging with processes of policy change around the following questions:

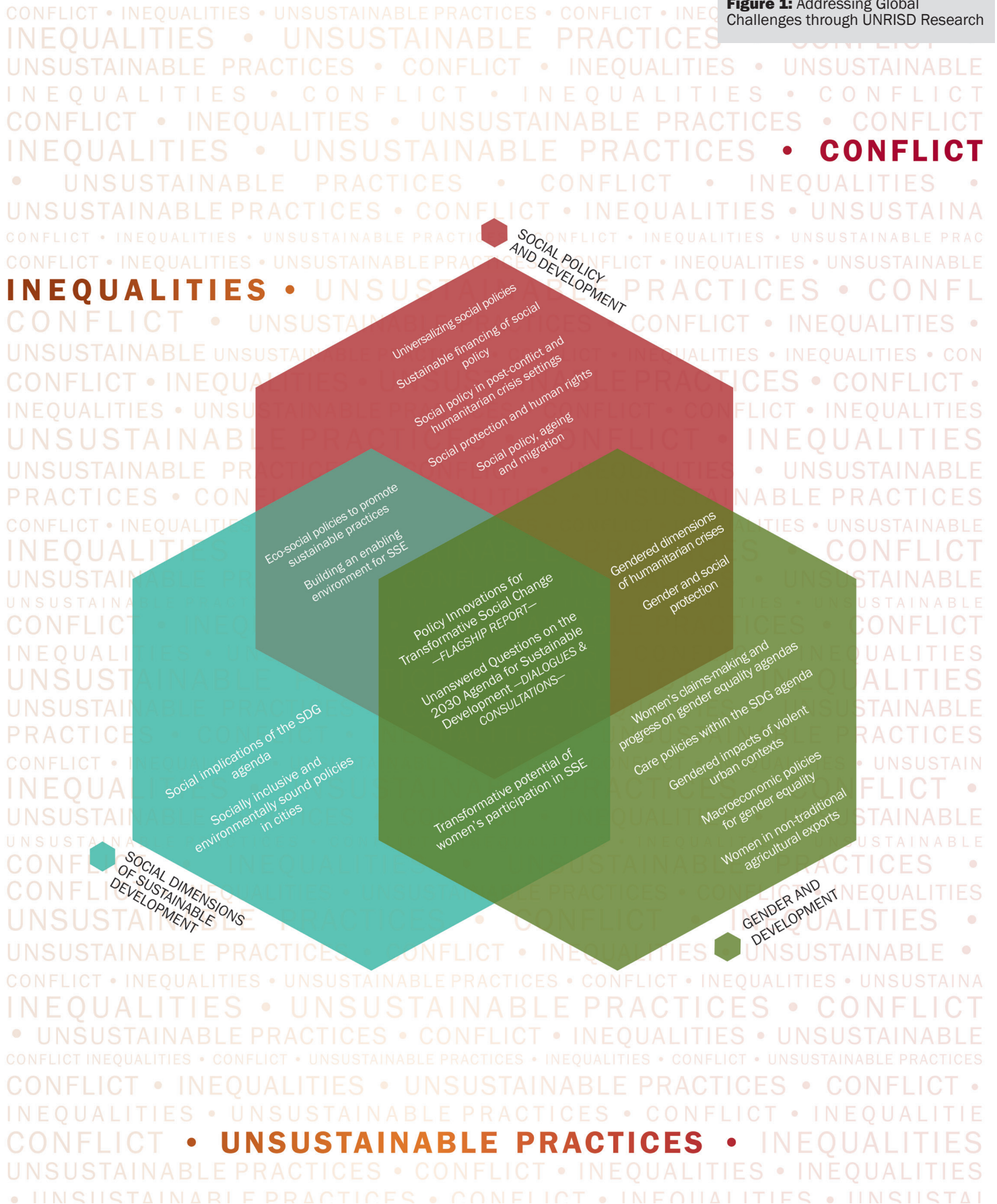
- How can the international institutional architecture of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development support the transformation toward social equity and ecological sustainability?
- What is the potential role of eco-social policies in fostering integrated approaches to sustainable development that address social and environmental issues simultaneously?
- Which areas of SSE show the most transformative potential in terms of equity (including gender equity) and sustainability, and what institutional conditions and regulatory frameworks are needed to support their wider uptake?
- What can we learn from urban governance for the integration of environmental, social and economic sustainability goals?

Addressing the Challenges:
UNRISD Research Programmes and Approach

Social Policy and Development
Gender and Development
Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development

02

Figure 1: Addressing Global Challenges through UNRISD Research



Box 4 Approach, Methods and Data

UNRISD takes an interdisciplinary and comparative approach in its research, addressing questions that cut across sectors and domains in the field of social and economic development. It uses both quantitative and qualitative methods, and draws on analytic techniques from disciplines across the social sciences, including (heterodox) economics, sociology, anthropology, geography, law, political science and political economy. This approach is fit for purpose, ensuring that collaboratively designed methodological frameworks are well suited to the questions and objectives of a particular research project. It is also well adapted to work that addresses complex social development and sustainability challenges at the science-policy interface.

Our work combines the highest standards of academic rigour and quality, recognized in independent evaluations and guaranteed through quality procedures such as peer review, with policy relevance and innovations generated through collaborations with research partners in the global South and elsewhere. The process of developing appropriate methodologies for each research project is also part of the co-construction of knowledge, contributing to the credibility and legitimacy of outputs, capacity development of Southern researchers and mutual learning opportunities.

Through this methodological pluralism, UNRISD generates data that contribute to the understanding of processes of social, environmental, economic, institutional and political change, filling gaps in the evidence base that policy makers need to design and implement more effective strategies for social and sustainable development.

The mixed methods approach employs a range of data, including:

- secondary data sets, for analysing, for example, longer term trends, well-being or social development outcomes, gender or other inequalities, or coverage of social programmes;
- primary data, collected through small-scale surveys and/or various qualitative methods, as part of multi-country studies on particular topics; and
- data on institutions, policy processes, or the political economy of reform collected through interviews with key stakeholders and reviews of secondary literature and policy documents.

UNRISD's cross-country comparative research projects generally consist of thematic or conceptual papers, country overview studies, and/or in-depth country case studies.

Countries are selected for empirical work based on assessment of their:

- relevance to the topic of the research project;
- potential to meet the needs of both research and policy-making communities by filling an identified knowledge gap; and
- diversity with respect to region, development level and political regime, as relevant to the research questions.

Through comparative analysis of the evidence generated by strategically selected case studies, UNRISD research identifies patterns and processes of social change, and different policy approaches, which can then shape policy frameworks and inform the design of development policies at both national and global levels.

03

**Framing a
Transformative Research
Agenda**



Each research programme will use a common set of concepts to frame its work. These concepts—**Inclusion, Institutions, Intersections and Innovations**—constitute the core elements of a framework for analysing issues of concern across all programmes. This framework ensures explicit attention to:

- the desired normative goals or outcomes of the research (*Inclusion*);
- the key institutions and actors in the process of political and social change (*Institutions*);
- the complex interactions between individuals, institutions and policy domains needed for coherent, inclusive and sustainable outcomes (*Intersections*);
- the practices or actions—whether of state, market or social actors—that contribute to transformative and inclusive change processes (*Innovations*).

Within this framework, UNRISD understands transformation as a process of deep-seated change in social and power relations, structures and institutions. Such transformative change must not only seek to remedy unjust outcomes or be a palliative or protective measure; it must fundamentally restructure the underlying

framework, conditions and relationships that generate inequalities and social injustice. This view of transformation is central to UNRISD’s understanding of social development (see box 1), and underpins its research approach.

This framework is also part of the impact and policy engagement approach embedded within the UNRISD Strategy: it reflects a process by which research, through engagement with a range of relevant actors at all stages, itself contributes to the desired change and outcomes. We are inclusive in our interactions with all stakeholders, consciously aiming to promote marginalized voices; we seek close synergies with the institutions, actors and processes that can use knowledge for social change; our research cuts across the intersections between disciplines; and our attention to neglected issues and openness to new methodologies means that innovation is an integral part of the way UNRISD functions.

Box 5 The Four “I”s: Elements of a Shared Conceptual Framework

Inclusion

What are the obstacles to inclusion and ways to overcome exclusion?

Institutions

What institutions, policies and pathways can lead to equitable, inclusive and sustainable development?

Intersections

How are positive synergies harnessed and trade-offs minimized between different issues, policies and interventions?

Innovations

What innovations and practices have the potential to generate progressive social change?

Inclusion



The idea of inclusion is used here to capture the normative goal of research on social development: it refers both to *processes* of social change (processes that are participatory, and that reflect all voices particularly those of marginalized groups) and to *outcomes*—the reduction of inequalities, discrimination and exclusion, the promotion of social justice and cohesion.

Having gained traction in the European context from the 1990s and forming a core part of the European social agenda, notions of social inclusion (and related terms of social integration and cohesion) are being brought back into regional and global debates. The notion of social inclusion was also central to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, but was lost in the social agenda as articulated in the MDGs. Commonly used metrics or indices for assessing progress have reinforced this neglect. Measures

of inequality, poverty and human development emphasize deprivation and disadvantage at the individual level, neglecting broader societal contexts and relations (of kinship and community, gender, age, race, class or political patronage, for example) which determine well-being through the terms of people's inclusion in society. Furthermore, aggregate measures used to monitor MDG achievements focused on averages, masking inequalities within countries and ignoring processes.

Notions of social inclusion point to these more complex social relations within which individuals are located. It refers to social capabilities, and values of solidarity between different income and social groups. Achieving “inclusion” is rarely a simple process of increasing incomes or enhancing access to economic opportunity or services; nor can it be addressed only through specific interventions in a single sector

(health, education). It requires more complex change in social structures, institutions, relations and norms (**institutions**); and attention to intersecting forms of disadvantage across economic, social, political and environmental spheres (**intersections**). Conceptually, therefore, **inclusion** provides an important entry point for understanding individuals and groups in their broader social context, as well as pointing to better ways of measuring the success of relevant initiatives.

Institutions



Institutions, whether formal or informal, are a critical element of any transformative social change agenda. Institutions evolve in ways that reflect structures of constraint or power (by gender, race or class, for example). They can perpetuate and entrench structures of inequality—for example, through unequal inheritance rights, access to education, employment or voting rights. But they are also key building blocks for challenging inequalities—for example, through constitutions that encompass equal rights, anti-discrimination legislation, universal suffrage, redistributive tax and welfare systems, or collective bargaining mechanisms.

In much of the developing world, the contemporary social agenda has been constrained by the legacy of weakened state and institutional capacities as a consequence of structural adjustment programmes, conflict and crisis, as documented in prior UNRISD research.² A renewed focus on institutions for development, for example through the “good governance agenda”, remains problematic for various reasons, particularly in its current

orientation towards fiscal stabilization through austerity; and in prioritizing secure private property rights, free trade or investment over social, cultural, civil and political rights. The task of strengthening the regulatory and administrative capacity of government institutions is often undermined by macro-policy regimes and conditionalities.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of institutions in development, their study is also constrained by methodologies currently in vogue. The methodological shift that has prioritized evidence derived from experimental and evaluative methods (such as systematic reviews and randomized control trials) has overshadowed other approaches that are better suited to examining processes of institution building and institutional change.

New institutional capacities or arrangements are needed to rebuild social and fiscal contracts, to regulate powerful financial and corporate actors for the public good, and to ensure voice and participation for

all in political and policy processes. Methodological innovations are needed to help understand how institutions adapt, and the political economy of policy and institutional reform. UNRISD research programmes will contribute to filling knowledge and methodological gaps in these areas, examining the role of institutions and actors whether at local, national or global levels, and in relation to different contexts and issues (such as conflict, gender, social policy and the environment), and identifying the reconfiguration of institutional relationships (for example, between state, market and household) needed for delivering progressive social outcomes.

² See, for example, UNRISD’s Flagship Reports: *States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization* (1995); *Visible Hands: Taking Responsibility for Social Development* (2000); *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (2005); and *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics* (2010).



Intersections

The mandate of UNRISD includes an explicit focus on the **intersections** of economic and social development, including both the role social policies play in promoting economic transformation, and conversely the importance of prioritizing inclusive social outcomes to maintain economic dynamism. Since the 1970s UNRISD has also included attention to environmental and natural resource implications in its work, recognizing the imperative of addressing multiple dimensions of development in an integrated way. This focus on interactions between sectors or issues that are often treated separately elsewhere provides the Institute with a unique niche in the research of the United Nations system that is of particular relevance in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

First, at the level of individual well-being, intersections are critical to understanding and overcoming multidimensional forms of poverty and inequality—people or groups who benefited least in the MDG social agenda, for example, tend to be those affected by intersecting categories

of disadvantage—by gender, age, ethnicity, location or (dis)ability. Moving beyond averages to ensure benefits are shared by the most disadvantaged requires analysis of how these factors interact and reinforce each other, creating poverty traps.

Second, UNRISD research demonstrates the importance of institutional complementarities and synergies in the development process: interventions in one area (health, for example) are dependent on or made more effective by interventions in others (such as education, employment). Ongoing research on social policy, for example, shows that the pursuit of one goal to the neglect of others in the design and implementation of social policy may undermine the full realization of the benefits, or even the achievement, of the goal. While currently dominant methods tend to focus on evaluations of particular interventions, the question of how these are affected (positively or negatively) by other policy interventions or change processes is generally less well explored.

Third, the idea that social development will necessarily follow in the wake of economic growth, or that coherent development strategies can be crafted when bureaucracies are organized in policy silos, have been fundamentally challenged in debates around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Implementation and monitoring of the new global goals will need to take into account synergies and address trade-offs at the intersections of social, environmental and economic policies. Policy coherence is not simply about better coordination in the design and implementation of interventions across different policy fields; more fundamentally, it is about ensuring that progress in one domain is not undermined by impacts emanating from another. Macroeconomic policies and technological or efficiency gains, for example, must not fundamentally contradict welfare and sustainability objectives. Similarly, environmental protection goals must be balanced with human welfare considerations.

UNRISD research programmes will pay particular attention to the intersections of these different dimensions, and the scope for effectively addressing tensions and trade-offs. The Institute will continue to analyse the interconnections between social and economic policy through research on “productive social policy” and links between education policy and industrial strategies; it will identify policy interventions that have dual social and environmental objectives and can generate “win-win” outcomes; and will explore the potential and limits of alternative ways of organizing economic activity that are more equitable and sustainable in terms of both processes and outcomes.



Innovations

The past decade has seen significant policy innovations in the social domain, for example in Social Protection Floors, different types of cash transfer programmes and employment guarantee schemes, new universal health coverage initiatives, new social and environmental standards that aim to improve business performance, and the growth of social enterprise and solidarity economy. Innovations may be seen when states, social movements, civil society and economic actors respond to new risks and challenges, for example those associated with environmental change, economic crisis or new technologies. A focus on innovation in the context of the Institute's research aims to identify, analyse and understand what works in promoting inclusion, and why, in different contexts. This may involve innovation in the policy, institutional, technological or discursive domains.

The following key, overlapping, categories of innovation will be explored through the UNRISD research programme.

Policy and institutional innovation

Policy innovations in the social domain can be found in several regions of the world over the past decade. While many countries, not least those of the global North, have had to endure the social consequences of austerity measures, some low- and middle-income countries have adopted policies aimed at expanding social services such as health and education; social assistance programmes for vulnerable groups; and social security for the unemployed, elderly and infirm; as well

as policies generating employment and reducing inequalities. Institutional innovations are seen in new normative, regulatory and judicial instruments; changes in governance arrangements associated, for example, with participatory democracy, public-private partnerships and multistakeholder standard-setting where new combinations of actors engage in service delivery and decision-making processes; multi-scalar and multi-level governance, where such processes and institutions are articulated at local, sub-national, national, regional and international levels; and institutional complementarities that reconfigure institutional arrangements (for example, state and market) and policies (such as economic and social) at the macro level.

Technological, economic and social innovation

This is seen, for example, in the case of networking that is facilitated by ICTs, and when farmer cooperatives move up the value chain through processing and quality control. Such combinations address some of the limitations of development strategies that centre on technological fixes but that often disregard the social contexts where diffusion occurs. Non-state actors, in particular NGOs but also the private sector, are increasingly associated with social innovation, when organizations and networks adopt new ideas, strategies and practices that aim to better meet social needs and build relationships conducive to social and environmental improvements. Social innovation frequently occurs at the local level, where community organizations and social enterprises, often enabled by civil society networks and decentralization, organize to greater effect in order to mobilize resources and to defend their rights. It is also apparent in social movement activism, or “glocal” networking, that connects local actors with change agents across scales, as well as across North and South.

Conceptual and discursive innovation

Changes in institutions, policy and the way organizations behave are often informed by shifts in discourse or in how problems are framed.

Particularly important in recent years have been conceptual innovations associated with governance and organizational theory, which recognize that heightened complexity and risk, and effective regulation, require multistakeholder interventions and collaborations. This may include new forms of public-private partnership that go beyond a conventional “state versus market” dichotomy. New analytical perspectives have refocused attention on inequalities as a major impediment to not only social inclusion and cohesion, but also growth. Diverse analytical and philosophical currents are coming together to highlight the potential and viability of alternative development pathways, such as those of the social and solidarity economy. Moreover, there appears to be greater recognition that heightened complexity and risk require new analytical and methodological approaches involving inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinarity.

Finally, innovation will also continue to be part of how UNRISD works in practice. We will pursue our approach to research capacity development, particularly of our Southern research partners, identifying new ways to engage with them in research and in the co-generation of knowledge. We will be innovative in the types of data we use, ensuring that analysis is grounded in participatory and qualitative data generated collaboratively with our partners as well as that enabled by new technologies (see box 4). We will adopt innovative approaches to the communication of research results, evidence and analysis in ways that amplify the voice of our Southern research collaborators in national, regional and international policy processes. And we will continue to innovate in our approach to knowledge transfer, further enhancing our networked approach which is adapted to working in a complex, evolving, interactive system of many actors whose knowledge needs inform one another's relationships and activities.

04

Pathways to Transformation

In the context of an agenda for transformation to equity and sustainability, key questions concern whether and how the innovations described above translate—through institutional arrangements, synergies and intersections—into the desired inclusive outcomes. The challenge surrounding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to ensure that the transformative potential of new approaches, policies and practices is realized. While the terminology of “transformation” is now part of the discourse surrounding the SDGs, the necessary processes of change at the levels of individuals, societies and economies are often not specified. Change in policy rhetoric or intentions may not be applied in practice or may translate into cosmetic reform; policy “incoherence” often means that policy initiatives in one field are contradicted by those in another; progressive ideas and institutional reforms may be captured by special interests or superficially attached to business-as-usual approaches; innovations that require changing social norms may encounter strong resistance; and promising social or governance innovations may not be sustained or may even be reversed.

Figure 2: Pathways to Transformation: UNRISD’s Policy-Engaged Research Process



UNRISD’s policy-relevant research and evidence-based analysis can help identify barriers to sustainable development, and provide ideas on how to attain in reality what is set out on paper. This kind of innovative and forward thinking drives the collective efforts of the development community to identify and implement transformative solutions to increasingly complex, interconnected global sustainable development challenges. Specifically, UNRISD seeks to contribute to processes of transformative social change via several distinct, but related, mechanisms.



Policy-relevant research questions that address knowledge gaps

Transformation is the subject of our research. We generate knowledge on transformation which can assist development actors in bringing about transformative social change. Our emphasis on processes of transformation (rather than a short-sighted and ultimately less helpful exclusive focus on programme outcomes) means we can contribute to the understanding of the politics of change. In the field of social development, social problems are embedded in complex systems; UNRISD

research helps stakeholders understand the dynamics of systems, non-linear processes and the nature of institutions, and in this way strengthens decision makers’ capacity to shape them to the desired outcomes.

UNRISD research performs the classic functions of independent inquiry in a policy context. By posing policy-relevant questions and addressing them through evidence-based analysis, we generate new ideas and insights which frame the way issues are taken up, helping to shape policy agendas. We also have a “horizon scanning” role: through expert knowledge of development challenges and debates at all levels, we are able to identify emerging or neglected topics and prioritize research in these areas, helping to shift policy agendas.



Co-design and co-production of evidence with global research networks

Our research process is itself an instrument of transformation. The ways we collaborate with researchers and institutions from the global South contribute to their capacity development. We build interdisciplinary networks and engage in two-way dialogue with partners to design, implement and deliver research projects, ensuring genuine co-production of knowledge and mutual learning. Our integrated approach encourages thinking outside of disciplinary silos and operates at the intersections where the most innovative solutions to complex global development challenges are often imagined.



Policy and praxis engagement throughout the research process

Transformative processes also occur through the transdisciplinary engagement with other policy actors, practitioners and advocates that is part of the UNRISD approach. We build synergies with the relevant stakeholders, institutions and processes in order to ensure that research questions are relevant, evidence is robust, and findings are communicated in ways that ensure they can be taken up and used by the development community to effect change.



Share results and engage in UN and national policy processes

While UNRISD research remains independent and guided by standards of academic rigour, we design and undertake our research explicitly to enable sustained interactions with potential users, as depicted in figure 2, taking advantage of multiple opportunities for policy engagement afforded by our unique position as an autonomous research institute within the UN system.



Changes in policy and practice

The results of our research provide practice- and policy-informed evidence that can be taken up and used by development actors in assessing the relative benefits and shortcomings of different approaches, setting priorities, making policy choices, and supporting the implementation of choices made.

³ See, for example, the three volumes of UNRISD Classics—*Social Policy and Inclusive Development*, *Gendered Dimensions of Development* and *Revisiting Sustainable Development*—that bring together 50 selected essays from 50 years of UNRISD research. These volumes highlight some of the Institute's most influential and ground-breaking research and, through new introductions, demonstrate its relevance to today's development debates.

⁴ For example, the creation of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy following the UNRISD conference on the same topic.

UNRISD has evolved this model of **engaged** research and analysis on the social dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development over more than five decades. Through this ongoing process, the Institute has:

- built up a substantial body of evidence and original analysis on the relationship between social, economic, environmental and political dimensions of development;³
- leveraged its unique position within the United Nations system as an interface on social development issues with research and academic communities in North and South;
- through transdisciplinary collaboration, raised the visibility and interest of the United Nations in neglected issues;⁴
- developed global networks of policy makers, academics, advocates and practitioners, giving it recognized and respected convening power;
- built a reputation for contributing to the capacity development of Southern researchers;
- via an innovative outreach and communications strategy, effectively communicated and disseminated its work to those who can use the knowledge generated for social change; and
- used the combination of the credibility of its research and its extensive networks to ensure significant long-term transformative impacts (see box 6).

05

**Communicating
Research for Social
Change**

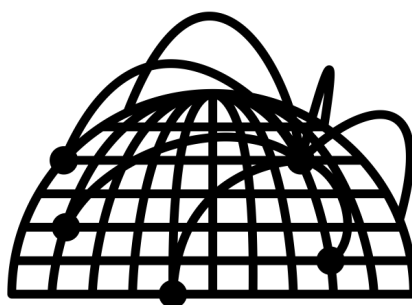
Our capacity to communicate is central to the ultimate purpose and impact of all UNRISD activities. It determines how we translate the evidence and key findings from our research into effective messages that are understood by a range of audiences; and it influences who has access to the knowledge that is generated, and how that knowledge can in turn be used to change debates, policies and practice. UNRISD's Communications Strategy forms an integral part of our policy-engaged research process (see figure 2). In terms of our overall outreach and engagement around research for social change, it is complemented by network-based activities and advisory work by UNRISD research staff.

The Communications Strategy achieves these aims by strategically combining audiences, products and channels. We aim to reach a diverse range of audiences across policy, research, advocacy and practice constituencies, which generates a variety of demands and expectations about formats and channels of information. We communicate research in a range of printed and digital products, via the most appropriate delivery channels and across multiple platforms to maximize the impact of our work.

We target our communications to those potential users of our research who are most likely to be able to bring about progressive, transformative change. This reflects our understanding of the processes whereby the generation of knowledge through research can translate into visible and measurable outcomes. But knowledge is used and transformed into results or impacts through complex, non-linear processes: tracking, documenting and attributing impacts to research remains a challenge for all research institutes. We do track those impacts that can be traced using quantitative methods, and we also recognize that the most significant impacts of UNRISD research are often those that are the most difficult (or impossible) to measure. Agenda shaping and agenda shifting take place over time and cannot be quantified. Our efforts to capture and demonstrate the results and impacts of our research—whether at the level of challenging and reframing ideas, providing

evidence for policy reform or catalysing change in practice—make use of both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

To meet the information needs of our audiences, UNRISD has developed a range of products which translate academic findings into short, sharp policy messages. The challenge for UNRISD—and one that we embrace and defend in the face of pressures for commissioned research to list best practices and “what works”—is to translate evidence and arguments that are rich, nuanced and complex into clear, accurate and useful policy messages, and to ensure that these are communicated to key policy, practitioner and advocacy audiences in ways that facilitate their uptake and use. Our products include research and policy briefs, research notes, think pieces, videos and podcasts, and events small and large, from our popular seminar series to large international multistakeholder conferences.



We deploy our products flexibly to ensure that we communicate about our work throughout the research cycle, identifying strategic points in time to engage with ongoing policy processes. In response to evaluations and expectations that we demonstrate value for money, UNRISD also communicates explicitly about the results and impacts of our research. Examples include our brochure, *Ideas to Impacts*, and a series of infographics that visualize the Institute's networks, supporters and collaborative work.

We use a range of channels to deliver our products to our audiences. In this Internet age, online channels are at the forefront, primarily the UNRISD website which provides open access to all of UNRISD's research products as well as acting as a repository for the outreach products mentioned above and general information about the Institute

and how it works. In addition, YouTube and iTunes are used to disseminate our growing collection of multimedia products. As well as making products available via the above channels, UNRISD also actively reaches out to its constituencies to draw attention to our work by using social media (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) and producing a bimonthly eBulletin and email alerts for specific products and events which are sent to over 40,000 subscribers.

While online channels are important, UNRISD's unique location as a research institute in the UN allows us to exploit other channels for knowledge sharing and influence in the form of participation in the meetings and expert groups of the UN system. We also recognize the continued importance of printed products, as well as offline digital products (such as DVDs and flash drives), which we use to complement face-to-face interaction with stakeholders at the UN and in the wider international development community, and to reach audiences where online dissemination simply is not an option. Finally, we endeavour to spread research findings via knowledge intermediaries and information multipliers, including our extensive global networks across the policy, research, advocacy and practice communities that provide a direct channel for engagement at national and local levels.

The Communications Strategy, the accompanying brand and visual identity guidelines and the use of templates ensure that all UNRISD materials have consistent branding and are easily identifiable as UNRISD products, enhancing our recognition and potential for impact.

Finally, a series of mechanisms are in place to track and monitor our communications activities, so we can learn from our experience and work in a cycle of continuous learning and improvement. A Results Based Management Logframe comprises a set of indicators, based mostly on outputs and uptake, which are regularly monitored; we will introduce an innovative set of feedback-based indicators as part of the UNRISD Strategy 2016–2020.

06

UNRISD Strategy 2016– 2020: Expected Results

Through the implementation of the UNRISD Strategy 2016–2020, the Institute will contribute to a better understanding of and greater pluralism in transformative policies, practices and approaches to social development, inclusive of human well-being, equity, sustainability, democratic governance and social justice, by relevant UN, national government, civil society and academic stakeholders. UNRISD will contribute evidence, analysis, ideas and strategies that can shape debates, frame policies and approaches, and guide policy makers and practitioners in their efforts to combat the contemporary challenges of inequalities, conflict and unsustainable practices, and to achieve more equitable, inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

Specific Objectives

Producing the evidence, analysis and ideas needed for socially sustainable development: UNRISD will produce and convene high-quality, relevant research on contemporary social development issues, including the often neglected social consequences of development policies and pathways, and on processes of social change (**Specific objective 1**).

Building research capacity: UNRISD will help develop the capacity of Southern researchers to carry out and communicate interdisciplinary research on social development issues through knowledge engagement and mutual learning within the framework of UNRISD research projects (**Specific objective 2**).

Informing and influencing the norms, policies and practices of sustainable development: UNRISD will make knowledge available (**Specific objective 3**) and accessible (**Specific objective 4**), by communicating research in ways that facilitate its uptake and use by key change actors in the policy, advocacy and practitioner communities at national, regional and international levels.

Convening and catalysing engagement and constructive debate: UNRISD will pursue its collaborative approach to engagement with its extensive network of researchers, policy makers and civil society actors from the global North and South (**Specific objective 5**), which is recognized as one of its greatest assets. From our position as an autonomous space within the UN system, UNRISD will exercise its global convening power (**Specific objective 6**) to promote under-represented viewpoints, often challenging mainstream development thinking and offering alternative policy options.

Delivering value for money: UNRISD will monitor the effectiveness of its activities by setting objectives, measuring performance and reviewing processes, in order to remain highly productive and continue generating a large volume of outputs and impacts with a relatively small level of expenditure.⁵ We will assess our results and feed lessons back into future work, further strengthening a creative and learning institutional culture (**Specific Objective 7**).

⁵ Shaw, B., A. Boaz, H. Ward, T. Jones, M. Bicket, B. Elliott, and A. O'Shea. 2014. Evaluation of United Nations Research Institute for Social Development UNRISD (2008–2013), Final Report (Draft 14 May 2014). London: Policy Studies Institute. p. 79.

Activities and outputs

Through the UNRISD Strategy 2016–2020, we will continue to strengthen the mechanisms and modalities for delivering on UNRISD's objectives through engaged research.

Several opportunities to engage with the global development community in a timely fashion are afforded by global processes, including the overarching 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, related finance and climate discussions, and the World Humanitarian Summit and Habitat III Conference in 2016.

Within the United Nations system, UNRISD will continue to work closely with UNDESA, providing technical and expert inputs for their reports, and informing the work of ECOSOC and its various Commissions. The priority topics on the agenda of the Commission for Social Development—focused on rethinking social development, and on social inclusion—provide particularly good channels for UNRISD research. Focus areas of the Commission on the Status of Women—linking women's empowerment and sustainable development, and the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls—also offer entry points for the Institute. The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will also be a key focus for UNRISD engagement, as the main United Nations platform on sustainable development. As a member of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, and an observer in the United Nations Development Group, UNRISD ensures that its work is informed by, and informs, the highest-level coordination forums in the UN development system.

Ongoing collaborations with other UN agencies, including but not limited to ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, FAO, ILO, OHCHR, UN Women,

UNAIDS, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNECE, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, provide additional opportunities for sharing findings and influencing debates.

A number of activities, outputs and tools designed to support Member States and the global community in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are already foreseen, including:

- A flagship report on *Policy Innovations for Transformative Social Change*, to be published in 2016.
- Multistakeholder dialogues and consultations on *Unanswered Questions on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* in 2016.
- A series of evidence-based contributions on the humanitarian-development nexus in the run-up and follow-up to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.
- Continued development of the web-based platform *Linking Social Protection and Human Rights*, and implementation of related interdisciplinary research and knowledge exchange.

Project and institutional activities and outputs through which UNRISD consults, shares information, partners and engages with diverse audiences will also continue, including:

- Consultations and briefings with Member State representatives and donors.
- Capacity building and research methodology workshops with research partners.
- Public seminars, conferences and other events to share knowledge and expertise in International Geneva and beyond.

- Production of high-quality (peer-reviewed) publications, including journal articles and books.
- Open access publication of policy-relevant research papers (peer-reviewed) on the UNRISD website.
- Policy, issue and event briefs published digitally and in print.
- Online discussions and think pieces on timely topics.
- Regular e-bulletins, project briefs, newsletters, research notes and other mechanisms for providing research updates.
- Social media engagement and digital products including videos and podcasts.
- Participation in events and advisory work for academic, civil society and United Nations organizations, and national governments.
- Student essay competitions that help promising young researchers broaden the audience for their research.

In addition to these programmed activities, which can be expanded and supplemented depending on resources, UNRISD has the flexibility to identify and respond rapidly and creatively to new opportunities. This occurs, for example, through calls for papers and conferences, activities that draw on and further build a large network of partners and close engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Important recent examples include conferences on emerging issues such as Social Dimensions of Green Economy (2011), and Potential and Limits of Social and Solidarity Economy (2013).

As part of the Institute's drive to increase its relevance to stakeholders and ensure that its work is responsive to the research and data needs of the development community, UNRISD is also considering the development of other high-impact activities and outputs, such as social policy reviews, social development indicators, or

surveys of diverse voices on key social development issues. UNRISD will continue to explore such possibilities in consultation with its policy, practitioner and donor stakeholders.

UNRISD receives no funding from the General Budget of the United Nations, and must fully mobilize all the financial resources necessary to cover institutional and staff costs required to implement the UNRISD Strategy 2016–2020 outlined in this document. The underlying assumption in terms of delivering results, therefore, is that UNRISD will design and successfully implement a fundraising strategy that will diversify the Institute's funding sources, and generate predictable, stable and increased revenues.

“At a moment where a ‘new’ global consensus is in the making, UNRISD research provides important insights for those who believe that it is necessary to push the boundaries of political discourse beyond its current focus on economic growth and poverty reduction towards a broader understanding of development that includes human wellbeing, equity, sustainability, democratic governance and social justice.”

—DFID Evaluation of UNRISD (2008–2013)

Box 6 Tracking and Assessing Impact





UNRISD has in place a number of mechanisms for tracking and assessing the impact of its work. A *Results-Based Management Framework* sets out key indicators for monitoring and reporting achievements towards the objectives of the 2016–2020 Strategy. In our response to recommendations of the 2013 evaluation of UNRISD (commissioned by DFID and available on request), we described additional steps we are taking to further enhance the impact of our work.

While the Results-Based Management Framework captures some quantifiable impacts of UNRISD's work, our research has a number of qualitative impacts. It translates into changes in discourse—whether academic or policy; it contributes to reframing debates; sheds light on concerns that were previously unrecognized; and generates evidence that can be used by policy makers and practitioners for their own purposes. The influence of research findings or ideas is mediated by the broader environment, and such knowledge becomes influential through its interaction with institutional forces and political actors. It may help political actors make sense of their goals and interests, and may help empower disadvantaged groups and lend legitimacy to their claims. (See, for example, *Ideas to Impacts: Research for Social Change*. UNRISD, 2014.)

In order to gauge UNRISD's impact at the qualitative level, regular feedback is sought from a wide range of stakeholders on the quality of specific outputs and activities, their use of findings or materials, and influence or impact attributable to UNRISD work. Annual Reports to the UNRISD Board provide a comprehensive account of activities, engagement and influence during each year. Regular reporting to donors, and evaluations, also present a rich body of evidence for assessing the overall achievements of the Institute.

Annex 1: UNRISD Research 2016–2020

UNRISD Research 2016–2020

PROGRAMME	PROJECT
 Social Policy and Development	<i>Ongoing*</i>
	New Directions in Social Policy: Alternatives from and for the Global South
	Towards Universal Social Security in Emerging Economies
	Linking Social Protection and Human Rights
	Politics of Domestic Resources Mobilization for Social Development
	Addressing Migrant Precarity – Beyond “Management” of Migration to an Integrated Rights-Based Approach
	<i>Planned</i>
	When Security Meets Social Security: Social Policies in Post-Conflict Settings
	Social Policy and Productive Transformation: Linking Education and Industrial Policy
	Social Policy in the Context of Humanitarian Crisis: Linking Humanitarian and Developmental Assistance
 Gender and Development	<i>Ongoing*</i>
	When and Why Do States Respond to Women’s Claims? Understanding Gender-Egalitarian Policy Change
	Feminization of Rural Employment in Transitions to Non-Traditional Agricultural Exports
	Feminist Analysis of Social and Solidarity Economy Practices: Views from Latin America and India
	Care Policies: Putting Care at the Centre of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda
	<i>Planned</i>
	Surviving the City: Understanding the Gendered Dimensions of Violent Urban Contexts
Gendered Institutions, Inequalities and Economic Growth	
 Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development	<i>Ongoing*</i>
	Feminist Analysis of Social and Solidarity Economy Practices: Views from Latin America and India
	Social and Solidarity Economy: Means of Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals
	<i>Planned</i>
	Scaling Up Social and Solidarity Economy: Institutional and Policy Requirements
	Eco-Social Policy: Towards an Integrated Approach to Public Policy for Sustainable Development
Coherence of the Sustainable Development Agenda: Managing Trade-Offs, Harnessing Synergies	
 Institutional Activities	Policy Innovations for Transformative Social Change (FLAGSHIP REPORT)
	Unanswered Questions on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (DIALOGUES & CONSULTATIONS)

* Ongoing as of January 2016

Annex 2: Budget and Financing

UNRISD maintains its autonomy to undertake independent research and provide a neutral ground for policy discussion by remaining financially independent of the United Nations system. The Institute relies entirely on voluntary contributions from governments and other donors. Through the provision of non-earmarked institutional funding, donors contribute to the assurance of a diversity of views and voices on development issues at the highest level in the global system.

UNRISD's non-earmarked institutional funding, essential to underpin the capacity and stability of the organization, has fallen in the last five years. In order to deliver on the 2016–2020 strategy of research, communication, policy engagement, results and impact, and have a healthy staffing configuration, total annual funding (institutional and project) of at least \$4.1 million is needed. In 2014 funding received was \$2.6 million, and in 2015 it is expected to be \$2.3 million.

The following donors provided institutional funding to support the overall programme of work in 2011–2015.

- Government of Denmark
- Government of Finland
- Government of Germany
- Government of Mexico
- Government of South Africa
- Government of Sweden
- Government of Switzerland
- Government of the United Kingdom

The following donors contributed to specific UNRISD activities in 2011–2015.

- Asian Development Bank
- CCICED: China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development
- China Medical Board
- DFID: Department for International Development
- FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- Ford Foundation
- Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung
- Fundación Carolina
- Hivos International
- Hospital do Coração
- IDRC: International Development Research Centre
- ILO: International Labour Organization
- KOICA: Korea International Cooperation Agency
- Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland
- Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Norway
- Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
- Sida: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
- UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
- UNESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
- UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific
- University of Bern, Switzerland

Annex 3: Consultation Process

The UNRISD Strategy 2016–2020 has been developed through extensive consultations with and feedback from actual and potential users of UNRISD research in the United Nations, national government, civil society, NGO, academic and donor communities.

UNRISD received valuable inputs on priority themes and development concerns through meetings with government representatives in national capitals, permanent missions in Geneva, and at the Commission for Social Development in New York in 2014 and 2015.

The Strategy has been informed by the priorities of the United Nations Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, and engagement with other UN departments and agencies, including the Regional Commissions, DESA, FAO, ILO, OHCHR, UN Women, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO.

The critical support and insights of UNRISD Board members were also instrumental in shaping the Strategy:

- Maureen O'Neil (Chair; Canada; President, Canadian Health Services Research Foundation)
- Jimí O. Adésínà (Nigeria; Professor and DST/NRF SARChI Chair of Social Policy, University of South Africa)
- Bina Agarwal (India; Professor of Development Economics and Environment, University of Manchester)
- Asef Bayat (US; Catherine C. and Bruce A. Bastian Prof. of Global and Transnational Studies and Professor of Sociology, University of Illinois)
- Evelina Dagnino (Brazil; Professor of Political Science, University of Campinas)
- Ping Huang (China; Director General, Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)
- David Hulme (United Kingdom; Executive Director of the Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester)
- Joakim Palme (Sweden; Professor of Political Science, Uppsala University)
- Patricia Schulz (Switzerland; Expert, UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women)
- Onalenna Selolwane (Botswana; Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Botswana)
- Julia Szalai (Hungary; Professor, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Policy Studies, Central European University)

A draft discussion document was presented to 25 key stakeholders in September 2014. Participants' frank and constructive discussions at that meeting helped sharpen the framing and presentation of the strategy. A final round of consultations took place in April 2015 with current and potential donors, and with the UNRISD Board.

UNRISD is grateful to Sarah Cook, former Director, for her leadership in developing this UNRISD Strategy.

Research for Social Change
Transformations to Equity and Sustainability
UNRISD Strategy 2016-2020



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