

For Immediate Release



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World Social Science Report launched at AUB: Unchecked inequalities could threaten UN's Sustainable Development Goals

The World Social Science Report, “Challenging Inequalities – Pathways to a Just World” warns that unchecked inequalities could jeopardize the sustainability of economies, societies and communities, undermining efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Now published in Arabic, thanks to the contribution made by the Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud Charitable Foundation, the report was launched on September 13 and 14, 2018 at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in collaboration between AUB's Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies (SOAM), the Arab Alternatives Forum (AFA), and UNESCO.

The report highlights significant gaps in social science data about inequalities in different parts of the world and, to support progress towards more inclusive societies, calls for more robust research into the links between economic inequalities and disparities in areas such as gender, education and health.

“The World Social Science Report 2016 is an honest message of how bleak the future of humanity is given the increasing trends in the different types of social inequalities. What is striking is the environmental inequalities in terms of access to natural resources, benefits from their exploitation and exposure to pollution and risks. In spite of that, there is some relatively good news from BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) that have managed to drive economic growth in the poorer regions of the world,” said professor of sociology at AUB, Dr. Sari Hanafi.

The report features contributions from more than 100 experts. It was overseen by a scientific advisory committee of leading academics from all regions that included economics Nobel Prize

laureate Joseph Stiglitz. The report has been prepared by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) in cooperation with the Institute of Development Studies (UK). It is co-published by UNESCO.

“The issue of rising inequality and what to do about it looms large in the minds of governments, businesses, civil society leaders and citizens around the world. Reducing inequality is, first and foremost, a question of fairness and social justice. It is also key to eradicating extreme poverty, fostering transformations to sustainability, promoting civil progress, reducing conflict and violence, and developing inclusive governance,” the report says.

While there was a fivefold increase in studies of inequalities and social justice in academic publications from 1992-2013, many studies pay too little attention to inequalities that go beyond income and wealth, such as health, education and gender, according to the report. It identifies seven intersecting dimensions of inequality: economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, spatial and knowledge-based. Closely linked, they create vicious circles of inequality that are handed down from one generation to the next.

“This report is a wake-up call. Closing the gap in social science research into inequalities, and then acting on the research to design and implement practical policies, is vital to achieving the cross-cutting ambition of Agenda 2030 for transformations that ‘leave no one behind’,” said the Chief of Section for Research, Policy and Foresight in the UNESCO Sector for Social and Human Sciences John Crowley.

The report also calls for more cooperation across disciplines, geographical borders and fields of research to help governments develop more effective policies for more inclusive societies. International networks, open data sources, open access to publishing and software are vital to achieve this.

The publication of the World Social Science Report in Arabic offers an important opportunity for regional reflection on the challenges of inequalities. “In the Arab region, we need more long-term and robust social science research into inequalities that continue to undermine our capacity to address other global priorities. We need to see a step change towards a research agenda that is interdisciplinary, multiscale and globally inclusive,” said Director of the Arab Forum for Alternatives Mohamed El Agati.

The report highlights that the focus of social science research into inequalities tends to be in developed countries for which reliable data exists, whereas developing countries do not have similarly reliable data. North America and Western Europe accounted for more than 80% of social and human science publications on inequalities and social justice from 1992 to 2013

(including research by economists, psychologists and sociologists). Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America only contributed 3% and 2% respectively, according to the report.

Research into rising inequalities has shown that almost half the world's household wealth was owned by 1% of the population and that the 62 richest individuals owned as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity.

The United Nations' 193 Member States adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, an ambitious global undertaking to end poverty, address inequalities and tackle climate change over the next 15 years. The SDGs, which replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aim to improve lives, committing both rich and poor countries to achieve a series of interconnected goals, including the reduction of inequality.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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