



## REDUCING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Photo credit: TopSphere Media on Unsplash

### ... to give meaning to the commitment to leave no one behind.

UN DESA ensured that global discourse for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is anchored by fully inclusive processes that not only support the most vulnerable people and countries, but also bring them to the forefront as the key agents of transformation.

### UN DESA ...

- Promoted full and productive employment and decent work for all as a means to overcome inequalities, accelerate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and achieve the 2030 Agenda.
- Highlighted population ageing as a defining trend of our time, as well as its potential to accelerate sustainable development.
- Drew critical attention to the importance of engaging with persons with disabilities and young people in ensuring meaningful policy discourse and in the realization of the 2030 Agenda.
- Promoted leaving no one behind as the operational principle to guide the digital transformation shift from “digital by default” to “inclusion by design”.
- Provided tailored policy analysis and capacity-building support for low- and middle-income countries, as well as for the vulnerable groups within these countries.

# 02

## REDUCING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

*While the world was building back from the COVID-19 pandemic and grappling with ongoing interlinked food, fuel and financing crises, UN DESA's work in 2022-2023 sought to tackle the multidimensional challenges of poverty and inequality; shaping evidence-based policies to realize the 2030 Agenda's central promise to "leave no one behind".*

### Embracing the potential of population ageing for sustainable development

Twenty years ago, governments adopted the first global agreement recognizing older people as contributors to the development of their societies and committing governments to including ageing in all social and economic development policies. In commemoration of the 20th anniversary of this agreement, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, UN DESA worked with older persons' civil society groups to conduct an in-depth assessment of the Plan of Action in the context of the 61st session of the Commission for Social Development convened in February 2023. The assessment described overall

trends based on an analysis of the outcome of regional reviews and appraisals and the identification of emerging issues and related policy options. The Department also supported Member States as they adopted a resolution calling for the elimination of ageism, highlighting a gender perspective, and noting that intergenerational solidarity contributes to equity and sustainable development among present and future generations.

UN DESA provided an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by ageing societies, resulting in policy recommendations for creating equitable, inclusive and productive societies that benefit people of all ages. Casting population

ageing as a success story and a major global trend, UN DESA's flagship *World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World* was cited by more than 500 media articles in 52 countries in the two weeks following its launch. The report offered recommendations to balance the need for fiscal sustainability of public pension systems with the goals of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality. It argued for promoting equal opportunities from birth to give every person an equal chance to grow older in good health and with economic security. As governments consider increasing the official age at

retirement or proceed to do so, the report stressed that older persons should be able to continue working for as long as they desire and are able to but should not be compelled to do so. It also called for eliminating barriers to older people's participation in the labour force and supporting learning and skills development throughout the life course. With appropriate foresight and planning, according to the report, governments can manage the challenges from population ageing while enhancing opportunities for all people to thrive and ensuring that no one is left behind.



Participants at the opening of the 61st session of the Commission for Social Development - Photo credit: UN DESA

### Creating productive employment and decent work to overcome inequality

UN DESA continued to support Member States to accelerate their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and implement the 2030 Agenda through its work in employment and decent work. In February 2023, the report of the Secretary-General on *Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda* helped guide deliberations during the 61st session of the Commission for Social Development.

During the Commission session, UN DESA helped Member States and various stakeholders to identify

policies related to social protection especially for those in vulnerable situations, labour market regulation and social justice and equity, and development of business incubators and increase in productive opportunities for youth.

### Advancing global policy discourse towards accessible and disability-inclusive societies

UN DESA continued to address gaps in disability inclusion through close engagement and collaboration with persons with disabilities and their organizations in convening the 16th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, from 13 to 15 June 2023. To ensure a fully inclusive discourse, persons with disabilities and their representative



A view of participants during the 16th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Photo credit: UN Photo / Loey Felipe

organizations were consulted in all phases of the event planning and operations, including to identify specific accessibility and accommodation requirements. For example, with support from Member States, official Conference documents and relevant practical information on the usage of UN conference rooms and services were issued in accessible formats. This information was also made available on public portals and on social media platforms well in advance of the meetings, leading to more than 7,000 social media posts related to the Conference.

UN DESA's analysis revealed that at the halfway point to 2030, persons with disabilities continue to be at a disadvantage across all SDGs. The Department partnered with regional commissions, members of the UN Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and other research experts to compile

and analyse disability data, and highlighted best practices in fostering more accessible and disability-inclusive societies, which will be featured in the second UN Disability and Development Report, to be launched in December 2023.

### Reflecting on youth voices in SDG implementation

Throughout the year, UN DESA continued to support several key initiatives to ensure youth voices are heard and have a seat in navigating the path to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

For example, UN DESA welcomed over 24,000 participants from around the world to join the April 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum, which was held in a hybrid format for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. The forum leveraged the expertise of young people to generate the key solutions needed for a fairer, greener and more resilient



2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum – Photo Credit: Office of the UN Youth Envoy/Joel Sheakoski

future for all. From all corners of the world, young people called for the need to listen and work with them to tackle the complex and interconnected crises humanity is currently facing, including the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives. The forum resulted in the identification of several transformative actions needed to regain ground lost in SDG implementation, and shared other recommendations and innovative ideas in preparation for the SDG Summit in September 2023.

The Department also coordinated the United Nations Youth Delegate Programme offering a critical channel for enabling youth to participate in UN processes by formally joining their national delegations at intergovernmental meetings. This included the participation of 57 Youth Delegates

from 31 Member States in the 77th session of the General Assembly in September 2022. 33 Youth Delegates from 22 Member States also participated in the 61st session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) in February 2023, where UN DESA coordinated two briefings for Youth Delegates with the co-facilitators of the Youth Resolution, an informal dialogue with the President of the General Assembly and five information sessions with UN entities on their youth-related work. In addition, UN DESA provided guidance and support for a side event organized by several Youth Delegates from the European Union entitled, “Youth for Youth: Ensuring Quality Education and Gainful Employment within the Broader Framework of Sustainable Development.”



Hybrid side event organized by UN Youth Delegates on the margins of the CSocD61 – Photo credit: Samantha Savarese



Regional workshop on Juncao Technology and its contribution to the achievement of Sustainable Agriculture and the SDGs in Africa – Photo credit: UN DESA

### Shifting from “digital by default” to “inclusion by design”

In September 2022, UN DESA released the *UN E-Government Survey*, which revealed that countries with higher e-government capacity tend to have greater gender equality. However, the survey found that there are relatively few countries offering online services of particular benefit to women. For example, only 45 out of 193 countries surveyed allow users to apply online for maternal or new born child benefits. The report also found a persistent gender digital gap, with women being 30 to 50 per cent less likely than men to use the Internet to participate in public life while also being less likely to own a smartphone. This impacts women’s online representation, access, perspectives and knowledge creation. It may also result in the unintentional

exclusion of women and girls from public services, with women less visible in datasets, algorithms, and the machine learning that takes place in the digital transformation of the public sector. The report recommends that leaving no one behind becomes the operational principle guiding policy development and digital transformation. At the policy and regulatory level, Governments should adopt “inclusion by design” or “inclusion first” strategies in the delivery of public services, rather than “digital by default” strategies common in some countries.

The same survey has also shown that while digital development is accelerating in both developed and developing countries, the path to digital inclusion and sustainable development remains fraught, especially in Africa and among countries in special situations. Progress in bridging the digital divide

through e-government development varies by regions. In Africa, only 4 of the region's 54 countries (South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles and Tunisia) have E-Government Development Index (EGDI) values above the world average, and the very high EGDI group includes no African countries. However, there are positive signs of digital progress in the region, reflected in the movement of Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia and Rwanda from the middle to the high EGDI group and the significant improvement in EGDI values for Guinea, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Algeria and Benin between 2020 and 2022.

### Capacity-building for small-scale farmers to tackle poverty and hunger in Africa

UN DESA strengthened knowledge of new sustainable agricultural technologies for more than 100 participants from six African countries and the African Union. The workshop on "Applications of Juncao Technology and its Contribution to the Achievement of Sustainable Agriculture and the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa" focused on the adoption and implementation of Juncao grass in African countries; a technology with a proven track record of expanding livestock production, meeting demands of local and regional markets, and creating jobs and income streams. The workshop was held in February 2023, in Kigali, Rwanda, in collaboration with the National Engineering Research Centre for Juncao Technology of the Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University of China, the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, and the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board. The workshop introduced using science, innovation and technology to promote agriculture development and build the

capacity of smallholder farmers, and resulted in the establishment of a real-time online Juncao technology platform.

### Promoting free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education in low-income countries

UN DESA supported the Commission on Population and Development to examine the linkages between population, education, and sustainable development at its 56th session in April 2023. To inform the Commission, *The Report of the Secretary-General on population, education and sustainable development* underlined how the COVID-19 pandemic deepened the global learning crisis by exacerbating pre-existing inequalities in access to and quality of education. The global number of children aged 6-11 years, corresponding to those in primary education, is expected to reach an all-time high of 820 million in 2023, whereas the secondary school-aged population (12-17 years) will peak at 816 million in 2029. These trends will require significant investment in education and skills training particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where the school-age population will see the largest increase between now and 2050.

Member States noted that insufficient budgetary allocations, extreme poverty, early childbearing, armed conflicts, and natural disasters are key factors keeping students out of school, especially in low-income countries. Many recognized that meeting the objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, particularly around preventing early marriage and childbearing and gender-based violence, will help to keep girls in school. There

was also acknowledgement in several sessions that population data – from national censuses, population registers and other sources, with disaggregation by age, sex, and geographic unit – together with administrative data on school enrolment, attendance and completion are essential for planning educational services and monitoring progress towards the education-related targets of the SDGs.

### Supporting middle-income countries' efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda

Middle-income countries form a large and heterogeneous group that accounts for around 30 per cent of global GDP and 75 per cent of the world's population, including 60 per cent of the world's poor. Despite their many differences, they face a set of common challenges that require joint action. Multiple and overlapping crises – including the global cost-of-

living crisis, food insecurity, growing sovereign debt burdens, high geopolitical tensions, and the worsening climate crisis – have amplified challenges and constrained countries' resources to address them. At the same time, their economies are yet to fully recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

To support these challenges, UN DESA provided tailored policy analysis for middle-income countries, including through the biennial report of the Secretary-General on *Development cooperation with middle-income countries*, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session. Preparations for the report included mapping the current support available to middle-income countries. The report also analyses challenges faced by middle-income countries in achieving sustainable development, with a focus on the environmental dimension, drawing especially upon the expertise of UNEP and other UN entities. The



Wolfgang Lutz, Interim Deputy Director General for Science, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), delivers a keynote address during the opening of the 56th session of the Commission on Population and Development - Photo credit: UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Department also provided policy-oriented briefings to the High-Level Meeting on Middle-income Countries, a session at the HLPF on "Overcoming middle-income countries' challenges in advancing the 2030 Agenda" and the Like-Minded Groups for Middle-income Countries.



### Strengthening capacity of women entrepreneurs to accelerate SDG progress

UN DESA launched a series of demand-driven, capacity-building initiatives supporting women entrepreneurs together with Zimbabwe's Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and Small and Medium Enterprise Development and the UN Country Team in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, as in many developing countries, women-owned micro and small enterprises are driving forces supporting livelihoods of the working poor and groups in vulnerable situations. Nonetheless, with limited entrepreneurship and management skills, women entrepreneurs, especially those in the informal sector, have been confronting challenges underlining their resilience towards economic shocks and uncertainties.

The National Capacity Building Workshop on Strengthening Entrepreneurship for Accelerating Progress towards SDGs in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, drew together 65 women and youth entrepreneurs from four provinces. It provided business management skills and digitized solutions to seize online market opportunities. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the workshop and the Ministry has requested UN DESA to replicate the workshop to strengthen capacities of more women entrepreneurs of the country.



### Meeting the changing needs for family planning: Contraceptive use by age and method

Contraception assists individuals and couples to achieve their reproductive goals and enables them to exercise the right to have children by choice. To support policy makers in understanding the latest trends and patterns in contraceptive use and needs, UN DESA launched the *World Family Planning 2022 report* in January 2023. Examining the trends and patterns at the global, regional, and national levels between 1990 and 2021, the report revealed that there are sub-populations of women, in particular young women whose needs for family planning are not being met to the same degree as others. The Department recommended that the needs of these groups be addressed to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information, and education (SDG target 3.7), and to ensure that no one is left behind.