**Making science work in an inequitable society**

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The world is plagued with numerous challenges including climate change, diseases, poverty and malnutrition, with the negative impacts most felt in developing economies. These challenges provide a breeding ground for other huge inequality-related problems such as unemployment, civil unrest, crime, gender-based violence, environmental degradation, and corruption in all spheres. All these problems occur in societies with visible inequalities.

Looking around the world, we see huge disparities in many facets of life particularly in developing countries, resulting from inequality. We speak of inequity in terms of gender, income (wealth), assets, and accessibility to technological privileges, especially for those in rural areas. This points to several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG5, focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and SDG10, which focuses on reducing inequality within and among countries. The interlinkages of these SDGs and the rest are unquestionable. Inequality directly impacts [other development parameters](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/SDG10Profile_0.pdf) observed in unequal access to basic services and opportunities such as education, health care, finance, clean energy and water and sanitation.

On one hand, there is gender inequality which speaks to the unequal access to economic opportunities between men and women, making women more vulnerable and less resilient to challenges compared to their male-counterparts. Women and girls are already burdened with child care and other related non-remunerable jobs. In many households, they are continuously exposed to harmful unclean cooking energy, such as firewood, charcoal, and kerosene, which emit higher levels of climate-harming emissions. This energy poverty perpetuates gender inequalities by diverting women`s attention from pursuing uplifting economic opportunities.

On the other hand, [income inequality](https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/Inequality/introduction-to-inequality), measured by the Gini coefficient, shows inequality within and among countries, with disadvantaged populations highly susceptible to economic, social and environmental injustices. [Rising inequality](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/rising-inequality-a-major-issue-of-our-time/) between and within countries has led to increased political polarization and populist nationalism that are so prevalent today. These inequalities weaken the capabilities of economies, particularly the developing ones, to respond to ongoing challenges, thereby widening the inequality gap.

Perpetual inequality, be it gendered, within or between countries, can hinder progress towards achieving the SDGs and other developmental commitments. Inequality is complex and political in nature, and it can [persist](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/SDG10Profile_0.pdf) even in countries that are experiencing economic growth and poverty reduction. This is because the growth benefits are not equally distributed across the population. Therefore, it is imperative to aim for inclusive and equitable growth that translates to equal opportunities for all. This should be the common global goal that all countries, rich and poor, enthusiastically work towards achieving.

**Moving forward**

Inequality of any form is a lived reality and requires concerted cooperative efforts from a wide range of stakeholders. Science, as a catalyst for change, provides an enabling environment for equitable and inclusive development through the development of technologies and innovations that can be game-changers in critical sectors such as energy, health, agriculture, water, natural resources, to name a few.

There is a need to embrace and harness advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) while managing associated threats and risks to improve the wellbeing of all people across the globe. Additionally, private expenditure towards research and development (R&D) is paramount to promote the effectiveness of science and development of technologies and innovations. These technologies, when properly managed, can help solve some of the critical issues that perpetuate all forms of inequalities.

Incorporating science at lower levels (pre-primary and primary) of education and exposing young children to technology can cultivate an appreciation of science as a means towards achieving sustainable, inclusive and equitable development. This intellectual investment will undoubtedly improve the educational pipeline of pupils who are forward-looking and futuristic. Kids in elite schools are already exposed to high-tech as early as pre-school, while those in rural areas often lack the basics. More needs to be done to close this gap and give all these “leaders of tomorrow” a fair footing in the technology era and a brighter future.

The current discussion on sustainable and equitable development should not be a pity party, dwelling on the status-quo or on what went wrong but should focus on finding ways and means towards an equitable society by bridging the divide, thanks to science as a key enabler and accelerator of transformative change. Integrating science and associated technologies and innovations directly with societal concerns can help achieve equitable growth that is accessible and beneficial to all segments of the population. Thus, science, anchored by sound economic, social and political policies and governance structures, can be the pathway to achieving the notion of “leaving no-one behind” and promoting dignified lives for all as we draw closer to 2030.

Equality a distant dream? NO, through science, we can achieve it!

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