

**People-centred Development and Globalization:
*Strengthening the Global Partnership for Development***

**Opening Remarks
Sarah Cook, Director, UNRISD**

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this panel.

By way of introduction, I would like to start with a quotation: the source is a report by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) – but I will leave it to you all to think about when it might have been written. It starts, I quote...

‘If ever there were a time for rethinking social development, it is now.’

And it continues to discuss the quickening pace of change ... and to note that ‘the world is now paying a heavy price for putting social issues in abeyance.’¹

With minor shifts in emphasis, these words could I think refer to recent events – since the 2008 financial crisis. They are in fact from a report published in 1995 - by UNRISD in preparation for the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen. And it goes on to make points that also seem as relevant today – a time where the complexities and uncertainties seem to have intensified. What was the analysis and to what pathways did we point in that early report; and continue to work on and argue for up to the present?

These can be discussed within the framework of some notion of people-centered development. But we need to give that notion specific content. UNRISD approaches this through a particular lens – which I hope to elaborate further here.

First, let me not that we are a **research** institute: a point to come back to is the importance of research, of intellectual debate and contestation around ideas that can push the frontiers of how we engage with the difficult challenges the world confronts. We may need to ask ourselves whether the UN system is sufficiently well-equipped in this respect.

More importantly in this forum, we work on **social development**: and this is where I will focus my remaining remarks – on the approach and the research that UNRISD undertakes.

People-centred and social development

I start from the definition and approach to ‘social development’ used by UNRISD:

Social development can be broadly understood as *processes of change that lead to improvements in human well-being (both individual and collective) that are equitable, sustainable, and compatible with principles of democratic governance and social justice.*

¹ Full quotation from ‘States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization’ An UNRISD Report for the World Summit for Social Development UNRISD 1995.

In its research, UNRISD emphasises ***social relations, institutional arrangements and political processes*** as central to efforts to achieve development.

In doing so, it questions and attempts to reorient the focus from economic growth and material well-being (measured in economic terms), and from a dominant focus on the agency of the individual, to an approach which reintegrates social and collective dimensions into the fundamental conceptualization, measurement and practice of 'development'; and which rejects the widely accepted dualism of the 'economic' and 'social'. It also recognizes that the achievement of development is always a political process, involving contestation, struggles for the **representation** and **recognition** of different groups with competing interests, and ultimately requiring the **redistribution** of power and resources (all key elements of any rights-based approach). The emphasis is thus on the **social relations and institutions** that generate outcomes.

People Centred Development, Human Development and Rights-Based approaches have a primary focus on the individual – which of course is important. This can reinforce a dominant economic paradigm that also is focused on the individual – agency, rights, as economic actors (though also giving many of those rights to corporations and capital). What is often lost in these analyses is the relational perspective - and in turn a focus on the structures and institutions that are needed to make the rights of individual real.

Social development, then, is not just a question of social protection for some groups; the poor; marginalised; to support the poorest, alleviate their poverty: nor is it just about specific groups of people; about their issues or deficits (income, disability) that need to be addressed (although all these are important. It is **essentially relational**. This is clear if we think about gender: women's disadvantage is clearly relational, as are disadvantages rooted in ethnicity, race or other group characteristics. So too for the poor: poverty is often a function of the kind of relationships poor people are in to others – directly clientelist relations, debt, or mediated through markets or other institutions in which they are embedded. And markets are themselves social structures – embedded in these relations of inequality – as too of course are legal systems and other accountability or recourse mechanisms designed to protect individual rights.

A global social protection floor, or the goals of the MDGs, may then be a critical step and part of the solution to the social problems we face; but as we argued in 1995 and would still argue: *'The problem is more fundamental: social institutions have not just been ignored, they have been considered as obstacles to progress and have been ruthlessly dismantled'*.

At all levels from local to global, market forces and powerful economic actors - corporations, financial institutions, have weakened or undermined many social institutions – trade unions / worker representation, families and communities – though of course the last couple of years has seen inspiring examples of the power of social movements to insist on change, with varying results.

The undermining of social institutions and the state took place under a period of particular – neoliberal - economic policies. Instead, power was transferred to institutions that have consistently ignored the social implications of their actions (but which are not accountable eg through the legal and rights-protection mechanisms) while passing responsibility for absorbing the damage to NGOs, communities, families, women - which in turn often have reduced resilience and capacity to respond, and limited voice or ability to participate in the processes that matter.

We see this process from the financialisation of the economy, growing inequality (the ‘Occupy’ movement) and commodification and privatisation even of those goods and services (as the High Commissioner pointed out recently) that are fundamental to the achievement of human rights (basic health and education, water, food/nutrition).²

And as we saw yet again with the recent financial crisis, we have increasingly sophisticated information and data flows on all sorts of economic and trade indicators -- reflecting the priorities of the global system and embedded in the institutions that dominate international policy making. But we are bad at tracking social changes: partly of course these play out over a longer time frame: at the extreme, the effects of infant malnutrition that has lifelong negative impacts, but where reversals in progress can be very rapid.

Citizenship and social policy

What concrete steps can be taken to promote an enabling environment for development in an era of globalization? An enabling environment and capability enhancing policies are critical for the realization of rights, grounded in claimable entitlements. Here I want to point to a major area of UNRISD research over many years – one that does not get much attention elsewhere in the UN system given the sectoral focus of most agencies.

Rights are realised largely at the national level (through states as duty bearers) and thus grounded in (though not limited to) notions of citizenship. A strong entry point for any discussion of the concrete realisation of rights is therefore that of citizenship. And one key channel for the realisation of many aspects of citizenship and rights from the mid-20th century was through the social policy regimes established in a range of welfare and developmental states. The concept of citizenship became a strong foundation for forms of identity, solidarity, mutual support at a national level in many countries undergoing the highly disruptive (socially/institutionally) structural transformations associated with industrialisation.

Central propositions of citizenship reflected also in rights and the right to development would involve 3 key propositions: Equality in individual and human rights; Free and universal political

² UNRISD research on the Social and Political Dimensions of the crisis documented many of these issues: See Utting, Peter, Shahra Razavi and Rebecca Varghese Buchholz. 2012. *The Global Crisis and Transformative Social Change*. UNRISD/Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

participation; and state responsibility to ensure adequate standards of human welfare. Social policies were in many ways a response by states – in many different ways – to address these issues of equity, capabilities and participation.

UNRISD research on social policies in development context illustrates these processes, drawing on the experience of countries that successfully ‘developed’. Effective ‘transformative’ social policy aims to ensure standards of welfare for all, but is necessarily more than *protection*. Of course it aims to protect people (by right / entitlement) from vagaries of life, life cycle changes, market and other shocks.. But beyond this, in a development context, it needs to enhance capabilities that create a productive labor force, and contribute to productive goals, ensuring economic growth that is widely spread.

Social policy also needs to have a distributive role – either to enhance the progressive or counter the regressive impacts of economic policies. If economic policies are based on assumptions that inequality is not an issue, and we abandon economic policies that could be more equitable in terms of primary distribution (such as demand side or full employment policies), we then need stronger redistributive policies or we are left with greater needs for safety nets and social assistance.

And finally – and perhaps often weakest or most ignored – social policy should share or reduce the private and family burden and particularly on women – of social reproduction – the necessary work that goes into raising children, keeping a labour force healthy and nourished, caring for the sick and elderly.

These 4 critical functions of social policy – protection, production, distribution, reproduction – in different weights are fundamental to determining the welfare, equity, and productivity, outcomes we see in different development contexts.

Where social policy is reduced only to its minimal protective function, as residual to a particular economic strategy – as has been the case in recent decades – we tend to see greater inequality, a breakdown in social cohesion, less capacity of countries to develop, and a greater burden on women.

These social policies are of course principally national level policies – rooted in notions of solidarity, citizenship and rights at a national level: what are the implications of greater global integration on these possibilities for transformative change? However, in an age of globalisation, where national and local institutions are often weakened, or stronger claims or capacities for protecting rights lie at the level of international trade, investment, or property rights regimes, how can these issues be dealt with by the international community, and do we need to revisit the earlier fragmented and inconsistent steps towards a debate on global citizenship seen at Copenhagen?

As we noted in 1995: 'There is a stronger international dimension to socio-economic welfare – here the effects have not been so positive: people's life chances are being fundamentally affected by decisions taken in international forums that are profoundly unrepresentative and unaccountable – and that permit global markets to wreak havoc with the livelihoods of many of the world's people'. Can we signal a fresh determination to guide the process of globalisation in a more positive and cohesive direction, how far have we moved, where (and why) have we failed? What kind of 'global social policy' arrangements, tax regimes (eg Tobin taxes) or development partnerships could genuinely have a transformative impact?