

This is one of an initial five Policy Briefs developed by the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender at the University of Pretoria, for the Irish Embassy Pretoria, as a follow on to training provided by the Centre to Irish Aid personnel at the University from 18 – 21 April 2016. The aim of these Policy Briefs is to expand briefly on a core topic area relevant to the intersections between HIV and AIDS, gender, gender-based violence and sexualities, providing the reader with a brief background, an examination of key issues and setting out challenges for those working in the field.

Context

Despite the commitments made to human rights and fundamental freedoms after the Second World War, inequalities in wealth, income and opportunity have remained persistently widespread between and within countries.¹ Sustained and entrenched inequality is concerning because it has negative effects on growth and sustainable development.² Social and economic inequality is also a concern because it can result in disempowerment and can impact on people's lives and their ability to exercise human rights.

To counter the growth in inequality, social justice has been proposed as a process and goal to challenge the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities around the world. Broadly, it involves the fair and just distribution and redistribution of goods, opportunities and power in societies.

The most prominent social justice theorists are John Rawls and David Miller. For Rawls, social justice is about protecting equal access to freedoms, rights and opportunities and taking care of the least advantaged members of society.³ Rawls' theory, which is sometimes called distributive justice, is based on two key

1 Inequality is generally measured in terms of income inequality and wealth inequality and can be measured between or within countries. For a summary analysis of some of the most recent statistics on wealth and income inequality, see Jason Hickel, 2016 "Global Inequality may be much worse than we think" published by the Guardian and available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/apr/08/global-inequality-may-be-much-worse-than-we-think>.

2 Era Dabla-Norris, Kalpana Kockhar, Frantisek Ricka, Nujin Suphaphiphat and Evridiki Tsounta, 2015 "Causes and Consequences of Income Inequality: A Global Perspective" published by the International Monetary Fund and available at <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2015/sdn1513.pdf>.

3 For a summary of John Rawls position, as explained in his 2003 book *Justice as Fairness*, see Matthew Robinson, "What is Social Justice" available at <http://gjs.appstate.edu/social-justice-and-human-rights/what-social-justice>.

principles:

- the Liberty Principle: each person must have the same claim to basic rights; and
- the Equality Principle, with two components: the first is that offices and position must be open to all people, so that there is fair equality of opportunity. The second, known as the difference principle, is that where social and economic inequalities exist, they must serve and benefit the least advantaged members of society.

For David Miller, social justice should ensure that good (advantage) and bad (disadvantage) are distributed across society and determine the ways in which resources are allocated. Whether a society is just or unjust will depend on whether the advantages and disadvantages are allocated appropriately in a society.⁴ For example, if there are big differences in health or education in a society, this suggests that society is unjust.

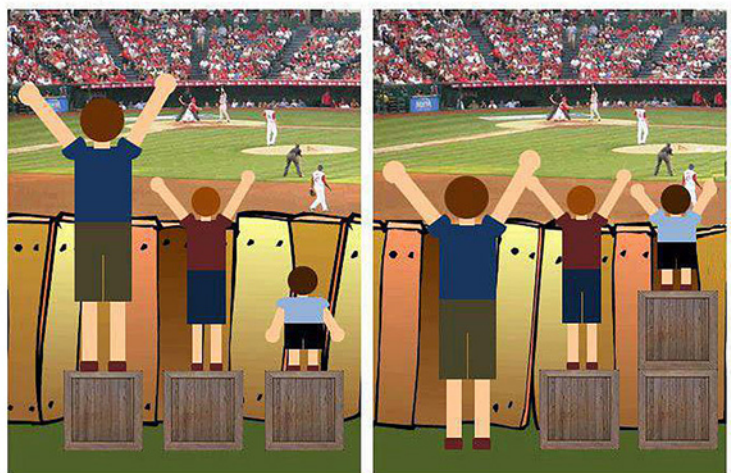
So, social justice calls for alternative distributive principles, which should bring about equality of rights, equality of opportunities and equality in living conditions among people in society.

- Equality of rights. This is the most fundamental form of equality, which recognises that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights";⁵
- Equality of opportunities, which requires stable social, economic, cultural and political

4 David Miller, 2003, *Principles of Social Justice* explained by Matthew Robinson, "What is Social Justice" available at <http://gjs.appstate.edu/social-justice-and-human-rights/what-social-justice>.

5 Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 1948.

Equality is not always Justice



This is EQUALITY

This is JUSTICE

conditions to allow all individuals to fulfil their potential and contribute to the economy and society; and

- Equality in living conditions for all individuals and households. Although inequality in income and wealth depends to some extent on personal and particular circumstances and is in many ways inevitable, social justice aims for inequalities in living conditions to be kept within a reasonable and acceptable range.

The image above, is a basic representation of the kind of equality that is required by social justice. It shows how it is sometimes necessary to diverge from strict equality where this will benefit the least advantaged members of society.

Inequalities are driven by a complex range of factors and can either be inherited or circumstantial. Demographic factors, like gender, sexual orientation, educational level and HIV status can cause or worsen inequalities. In some cases, for example with educational level, an attribute can be both a cause and an outcome of inequality. So gender inequality might mean girls may not be prioritised for education, and at the same time not being educated deepens gender inequality by reinforcing unequal access to work, resources and social power for women.

More and more, attention is being paid to the ways in which gender contributes to high levels of inequality in society. There is growing agreement that harmful ideas around masculinity and femininity, which suggest specific qualities, roles and behaviours associated with being a man or a woman, may deepen inequality between men and women in society.

Evidence

Women and girls are often denied access to schooling and healthcare and have fewer opportunities in the workplace. In 2015, the World Economic Forum reported that the global gender gap across health, education, economic opportunity and politics has closed by only 4% in the past 10 years, with the economic gap closing by just 3%, suggesting it will take another 118 years to close this gap completely.⁶ Because of these gaps, women are often not afforded access to positions of power and thus do not always have the opportunity to provide input with regard to the policies and programmes that very directly impact on their own lives.

Closely linked with this, attitudes and beliefs about the role and behaviours expected of women (and

⁶ World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2015 available at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/>.

of course men) also result in high levels of gender-based violence being perpetrated against women and girls, often without consequences.⁷ The fact that gender-based violence disproportionately affects women shows how human rights violations have a gender component to them.

Another cause of inequality can be the economic frameworks in place in different countries. Development and economic policies, and how laws, policies and institutions operate, result in different distributions in the economic benefits and burdens among people. Even when they are intended to boost growth and lessen poverty, they can contribute to inequality.⁸

Studies of East Asian development in the 1960's and 1970's, for example, show that although women received relative gains in education and labour market experience, the strong focus on deploying women as low wage workers in some sectors produced gender earning inequalities throughout the 1980's and early 1990's.⁹

In Africa, donors, NGO's and governments have historically believed that poverty among rural women would be reduced most effectively if women were self-employed in micro enterprises, rather than if they entered into wage employment in the formal sector. This has also proved to be true in other developing parts of the world. Research has shown how increased access to micro-finance and women's consequent ability to enter into micro enterprising, increases autonomy.¹⁰ However, more recent studies suggest the evidence for this is limited and many development theorists are proposing that increasing women's access to wage employment would greatly improve the well-being of rural women. While the ability to take part in informal economies could be empowering for women and potentially lower, for example, intimate partner gender-based violence, researchers suggest that understandings of gender roles may influence the way a community receives micro enterprises that has been set up by women. In

⁷ International Conference on Population and Development, 2014 "Beyond 2014 Issue Brief: Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality" available at http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Gender_Equality.pdf.

⁸ Lamont, Julian and Favor, Christi, "Distributive Justice", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/justice-distributive/>.

⁹ Günseli Berik, Growth with Gender Inequality: Another Look at East Asian Development in Ann Zammit, Günseli Berik and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, 2008 Social Justice and Gender Equality: Rethinking Development Strategies and Macroeconomic Policies available at [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?Read-Form&parentunid=91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA&parentdoc-type=documentauxiliarypage&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA/\\$file/1BerikRodgers.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?Read-Form&parentunid=91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA&parentdoc-type=documentauxiliarypage&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA/$file/1BerikRodgers.pdf).

¹⁰ Rahman, Aminur, and B. Lynne Milgram. 2001. "Women & Microcredit in Rural Bangladesh: An Anthropological Study of Grameen Bank Lending." *Anthropologica* 43.2, pp. 281.

some cases men would, for example, refuse to trade with or support female run informal businesses.¹¹

Intersectional exclusion and inequality

Gender-aware analysis since the early 1970s has shown that men and women are affected differently by economic development, agricultural transformation and industrialisation. However, an early focus on gender alone is increasingly being improved by looking at the role of class, ethnicity and other social differences, since these aspects tell us more about different kinds of men or women in a given society.¹² This approach recognises the intersectional and compounding nature of inequalities that constrict life chances.¹³ For example, to be black, lesbian, female and working class might, in some societies, mean multiple and reinforcing inequalities. In this case that person experiences a particular, and difficult, form of disempowerment and social exclusion.

Strategies

Global strategies for advancing social justice and sustainable development

Globally, commitments to social justice were reflected in the Millennium Development Goals and reaffirmed in the Sustainable Development Goals, which set targets for ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all.¹⁴

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets 17 sustainable development goals (SDG's) for the next 15 years in the following five areas: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.¹⁵

11 Kabeer, N., 2012. Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: labour markets and enterprise development. International Development Research Centre, 44.10, pp.1-70. Available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/genderInstitute/about/resources/NailaKabeer/kabeerWomensEconomicEmpowermentLabourMarkets.pdf>

12 Günseli Berik and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers "Engendering Development Strategies and Macroeconomic Policies: What's Sound and Sensible?" in Ann Zammit, Günseli Berik and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, 2008 Social Justice and Gender Equality: Rethinking Development Strategies and Macroeconomic Policies available at [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentid=91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA&parentdoctype=documentauxiliarypage&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA/\\$file/1BerikRodgers.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentid=91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA&parentdoctype=documentauxiliarypage&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/91E1E3A0620D9D72C12578D5005447DA/$file/1BerikRodgers.pdf)

13 Naila Kabeer, 2011 "MDG's Social Justice and the Challenges of Intersecting Inequalities" published by the Centre for Development Policy and Research and available at <https://www.soas.ac.uk/cdpr/publications/pb/file66938.pdf>

14 The 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2016 are available at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

15 For a summary and resources on Agenda 2030, see <https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/sustainable-development.html>

The SDG's include, as SDG 5, the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as a dedicated and stand-alone goal.¹⁶ This has been welcomed as it places women at the centre of the development agenda.

The goal sets targets for, among other things:

- ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.

Although these targets are expected to advance the empowerment of women, they also reflect a firm commitment to the human rights of women and in this way, the achievement of gender equality has been described as a "shared vision of social justice and human rights."¹⁷

Regional strategies for advancing social justice and sustainable development

The Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan adopted by the Southern African Development Community sets out a comprehensive development and implementation framework intended to guide development in the SADC region until 2020. The plan identifies HIV and AIDS, gender and poverty as crosscutting issues that are mainstreamed into all key intervention areas. The framework recognises that social circumstances, including social norms, discrimination, gender inequality, male dominance in sexual decision making and high levels of sexual violence reinforce inequality as well as HIV prevalence in the region. Following from this recognition, the guiding principles of the framework include gender sensitivity, a commitment to human rights and participation by marginalised groups as key objectives of the development plan.

Ireland's *One World One Future* Policy for International Development

The Irish government's international development work aims to actively eliminate poverty and inequality throughout the world. Ireland's *One World One Future* policy promotes a social justice and

16 For an analysis on the importance of including dedicated gender equality goals as part of the SDG's, see https://www.unngls.org/images/UN-NGLS_Brief_for_OWG_on_SDGs-GenderEquality-Jan_2014.pdf

17 Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2015, Statement at the High Level Thematic Debate on Advancing Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, UN headquarters available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/3/pga-ed-speech>

development agenda, which is closely aligned with the overall aims of the SGD's. The policy sets six priority areas for action under three main goals that relate to social justice and development.¹⁸

Three goals:

- reduced hunger, stronger resilience
- sustainable development, inclusive economic growth
- better governance, human rights and accountability.

Six priority areas for action:

- global hunger
- fragile states
- climate change and development
- trade and economic growth
- essential services
- human rights and accountability.

This policy was based on the acknowledgement that inequality harms economic growth and causes social and political unrest. Ireland's *One World One Future* policy is also firmly rooted in a commitment to closing the gender gap, addressing gender-based violence and ensuring that women have greater access to and control of productive resources and opportunities. In carrying out the *One World One Future* policy in Africa, efforts are also guided by Ireland's Africa Strategy, which sets out a comprehensive framework for Ireland's political, development, business and economic relations and priorities with Africa.¹⁹

The Africa Strategy is similarly rooted in a strong commitment to advancing social justice and supporting the development of economic and other opportunities while advancing the interests of the least advantaged members of society, particularly women and people who are disproportionately impacted by HIV.

A key aspect of this work is partnering with civil society organisations which promote good governance and human rights in general, and with those working to challenge gender norms, oppose gender-based violence, support survivors of gender-based violence and promote access to health and wellbeing for women, more specifically.

18 Irish Aid, 2013 "One World One Future policy for international development" available at <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/one-world-one-future-ire-lands-new-policy.pdf>.

19 Irish Aid, 2011, "Africa Strategy" available at <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/africa-strategy.pdf>.

Critiques and challenges

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and other social justice targets set regionally or domestically requires dedicated and organised political and economic goals and policies at many levels.²⁰ Social justice requires not only broad based and sustainable economic growth but also economic justice and coherent redistributive policies, access to employment opportunities and more enabling conditions for optimal human development.

Achieving this is extremely difficult because, as some critics have pointed out, in reality there is no central distribution point: no single person or group is entirely responsible for controlling all the world's resources.²¹ To add to this, social justice and alternative economic distributive principles have also been dismissed as being incompatible with liberal market societies and with the idea of individual freedoms.²² This is because social justice principles may allow for taking goods, resources and opportunities away from some people to benefit others, those more in need.

But it is worth noting that many critics of social justice have admitted that certain market interventions *should* be pursued to bring about greater income equality. It should also be remembered that the aims of social justice are in reality much broader than simply economic redistribution. As discussed in the section above, strategies for social justice are focused on a range of goals, including greater equality of opportunity, gender equality, greater access to healthcare and social services, protection of the least advantaged members of society and ensuring optimal conditions for sustainable development.

So a social justice approach, which involves a complete overhaul of economic and social systems will promote, rather than limit, democratic principles and individual freedoms. It is good for everyone.

Within this broad approach, a specific focus on gender, women and gendered inequality remains relevant.

20 The International Forum for Social Development, 2006 "Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations" published by the United Nations and available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ifsd/SocialJustice.pdf>.

21 Robert Nozick, 1974 "Anarchy, State and Utopia" at pages 149 to 150.

22 In particular, the Libertarian school of thought claims that social justice aims may constitute an infringement on individual rights and freedoms. See Matt Zwolinski, 2011 "The Libertarian Critique of Social Justice" available at <http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/2011/09/the-libertarian-critique-of-distributive-justice/>.

Issues to flag

- Vigilance about this approach is also necessary, to ensure that unintended consequences – for example, women’s empowerment should not come at the expense of any other social grouping – are avoided. This does not mean that power, resources, and capital cannot be shared or fairly distributed. However, it points to the fact that gender and work towards social justice within the field of gender, are anchored in socio-political and economic contexts that ought to be considered and thoroughly understood. An ongoing commitment to multiple forms of evidence of what works, and emerging trends in gendered inequality, is a cornerstone of the Irish Aid approach, and must remain so.
- Social justice theory is embedded within the paradigm of universal human rights and humanitarianism. While striving towards the global attainment of these values, one ought to be sensitive towards, and aware of cultural diversity and the specific cultural contexts into which one enters. Failure to pay adequate attention to these diversities may make the implementation of policies framed within a social justice paradigm more challenging.
- A social justice paradigm is often used to inform policy and law making. It is importance to be aware that this does not necessarily imply that it would trickle down to the everyday lives of women.

References and resources

- (i) For resources on social justice, see Matthew Robinson, “What is Social Justice” available at <http://gjs.appstate.edu/social-justice-and-human-rights/what-social-justice> and Lamont, Julian and Favor, Christi, “Distributive Justice,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/justice-distributive/>
- (ii) Era Dabla-Norris, Kalpana Kockhar, Frantisek Ricka, Nujin Suphaphiphat and Evridiki Tsounta, 2015 “Causes and Consequences of Income Inequality: A Global Perspective” published by the International Monetary Fund and available at <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2015/sdn1513.pdf>
- (iii) World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2015* available at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/>
- (iv) International Conference on Population and Development, 2014 “Beyond 2014 Issue Brief: Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality” available at http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Gender_Equality.pdf

- (v) Ann Zammit, Günseli Berik and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, 2008 *Social Justice and Gender Equality: Rethinking Development Strategies and Macroeconomic Policies*.
- (vi) Naila Kabeer, 2011 “MDG’s Social Justice and the Challenges of Intersecting Inequalities” published by the Centre for Development Policy and Research and available at <https://www.soas.ac.uk/cdpr/publications/pb/file66938.pdf>
- (vii) The Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2016 are available at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- (viii) For a summary and resources on Agenda 2030, see <https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/sustainable-development.html>
- (ix) Irish Aid, 2013 “*One World One Future* policy for international development” available at <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/one-world-one-future-irelands-new-policy.pdf>
- (x) Irish Aid, 2011, “Africa Strategy” available at <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/africa-strategy.pdf>
- (xi) The International Forum for Social Development, 2006 “Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations” published by the United Nations and available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ifsd/SocialJustice.pdf>
- (xii) For a critique of social justice, see Matt Zwolinski, 2011 “The Libertarian Critique of Social Justice” available at <http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/2011/09/the-libertarian-critique-of-distributive-justice/>

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