

[CONCISE GUIDES
to the UNITED NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS]

SDG10

**Reduce
Inequality
Within and
Among
Countries**

UMESH CHANDRA PANDEY, CHHABI KUMAR,
MARTIN AYANORE *and* HANY R. SHALABY

SDG10 – REDUCE
INEQUALITY WITHIN AND
AMONG COUNTRIES

CONCISE GUIDES TO THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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SDG10 – REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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PREFACE

Throughout human history people have considered the reduction of inequality to be moral obligation. However, beyond being an ethical issue, the fight against inequality also promotes economic and social cohesion, the health of the population and democracy. The last few decades have seen unprecedented levels of inequality, which seriously impinge upon the socioeconomic fabric of society and jeopardise the sustainability of our planet. There is widespread acceptance that extreme inequalities harm every part of society and hinder the functioning of the economy because the productive potential of people living in poverty is under-utilised. Further, a high level of inequality tend to reduce worker's productivity (as cited in *SDG Watch Europe.*, 2018).

According to the latest Oxfam report, published in January 2018 before the Davos summit, 82 per cent of the world's wealth created in 2017 went to the richest 1 per cent, while the income of half of the world's population stagnated (Oxfam International, 2018). The report also pointed out that the number of billionaires had the highest increase in 2017, adding a new billionaire every other day. This report is revealing and shows the depth of inequality that we face today as a global community.

This book attempts to present the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional challenges of inequalities faced within and among countries. The situation is dynamically evolving and poses a defining challenge of our times. Inequalities

directly or indirectly affect everyone and are often driven by social, cultural, ethnic, economic and political factors. It is now being increasingly recognised that inequalities are a serious threat for sustainable development. The post-Millennium Development Goal (MDG) development agenda of the United Nations included 'Reducing Inequalities' as a priority. Reducing inequality within and among countries, therefore, becomes a necessity rather than a choice. The complex nature of the problem makes the realisation of an equitable society a formidable challenge for the global community. It has become clear that no single policy change, group, organisation or government alone can reduce inequality. Efforts and strategies that work require broad stakeholder consensus, building support among multiple stakeholders. In addition, there is a clear call for countries to embrace inclusive and sustainable development practices that will not roll back the successes already made in advancing human growth and development.

The challenge of inequality not only affects individuals and economies, but has a wider implication for the environment and the current phenomenon of climate change (Boyce, 1994, p. 1). The degrading environment further aggravates inequalities as poor people are the principal victims of such environmental degradation. This scenario can jeopardise efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and initiate a vicious circle of widening the gaps between individuals, communities and countries as a whole (Boyce, 1994, p. 176). Apart from economic inequalities, those arising out of social factors like gender, age, disability, migrant or indigenous status, caste, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc., influence the level of access to productive assets, health and educational status which ultimately creates further inequalities. An individual's capacity to confront these factors, which breed inequalities and limit chances of success, is significantly conditioned by group ascription. Disadvantaged social

groups are often vulnerable due to their place of residence, lack of social capital or discrimination. Such groups receive lesser returns on investments as they have unequal access to resources. This adversely affects their well-being, diminishes their capacity to participate and ultimately prevents them from benefitting from development. It is therefore absolutely vital to address these group inequalities, the identities which form such groups, and understand how they interact with public institutions and the labour market. An effective course of intervention requires a multi-stakeholder approach at various levels, covering several dimensions. A strong commitment from national governments, along with sustained and well-coordinated policy implementations, would go a long way to addressing the current and future challenges of inequality.

This book provides an overview of the underlying driving factors, various manifestations and existing status of inequalities around the world. It explores the complex nature of various forms of inequality and the impact of this phenomenon on the realisation of the SDGs. It is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the concept of inequality and its major influence on economic growth, poverty reduction, social and economic stability and the sustainable development of any country. Furthermore, it illustrates the concerns related to the global rise in inequality across various dimensions and the repercussions for realising the sustainable development agenda. The second chapter focusses on explaining the conceptual framework of inequality and the philosophical, economic and sociological understanding of this complex phenomenon. A brief overview of prevalent inequalities in terms of opportunities, capabilities, consumption, income, liberty, security, participation, ownership and inter-generational transmission is also given. The third chapter describes the prevailing trends in inequalities across developing, middle income and developed countries. A comparative

discussion on the variations and emerging trends based on the context and different situations within and across countries is made in order to develop an understanding of the mechanisms and processes involved in, and influencing its manifestation. The fourth chapter highlights the major challenges faced by individuals, communities and countries as a result of the existing gaps in various dimensions of life and their impact on the sustainability of the development process. The fifth chapter describes the types and drivers of inequalities, outlining the various types of inequalities existing within and across countries and the different impacts they have on different individuals and communities in terms of further marginalisation and widening of existing gaps. The sixth chapter outlines the multi-dimensional implications of inequality on economic, social and environmental dimensions and their defining influence on the realisation of the global development pathway of SDGs as mandated by the United Nations, outlining its interrelationship and interdependence with all the other goals. The seventh chapter brings out the urgent need to make a coordinated and concerted effort to introduce various context specific measures and policy interventions in order to cover existing gaps.

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