Research for Social Change

UNRISD generates knowledge and insight on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues, working with its global networks to undertake interdisciplinary research and policy analysis, and position social equity, inclusion and justice at the centre of development thinking, policy and practice.

Research on neglected issues for poor countries
UNRISD generates knowledge and convenes research from the global South on the often neglected social consequences of development policies and pathways. This research enables countries, especially those left furthest behind, to solve local problems, combat poverty and develop sustainably. It provides them with analysis and evidence to design policies and implement strategies that transform the economic, social and political structures that produce marginalization.

Generating knowledge to tackle complex development problems
UNRISD’s holistic approach means considering issues in an integrated way: UNRISD research focuses on the intersections between the key policy domains of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—social, environmental and economic—while daring to address the politics of policy change and the challenges of financing and implementing an ambitious transformative agenda.

Capacity building in and for the global South
One of UNRISD’s greatest assets is its extensive network of researchers, policy makers and civil society actors, and the collaboration it enables between global North and South in the co-production of knowledge and mutual learning to produce evidence-based, policy-relevant research.

Bringing Southern knowledge into global debates and policy making
UNRISD uses its global convening power to promote under-represented viewpoints, including from the global South, often challenging mainstream development thinking and offering alternative policy options.

Priority Concerns
ENDING POVERTY
REDUCING INEQUALITIES
PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY
REALIZING HUMAN RIGHTS
ATTAINING SOCIAL JUSTICE WITHIN ECOLOGICAL LIMITS

IMPACT NUMBERS*
360 research outputs
128,820 publication downloads
141,581 video views
3,991 participants in UNRISD events
262 opportunities for influence via events and advisory activities
294 Southern researchers benefited from UNRISD capacity building
109 countries in which UNRISD has conducted research

*2016–2018
Impact Stories

Transformative Social Policy for Development

Building local capacity to solve local problems: Every year UNRISD helps strengthen the capacity of mid-level and senior development officials and decision makers from African countries with an annual two-week course run by the UN African Institute of Economic Planning and Development (UN-IDEP). Participants gain knowledge on how to integrate economic and social objectives in their social policy making. Largely based on UNRISD’s Social Policy in a Development Context research, it is taught in part by UNRISD staff.

Sustainable research networks: The Social Policy in Africa Conference (2017 / 2019), co-hosted by the University of South Africa, CODESRIA and UNRISD, is a space for exchange, debate and networking between African scholars working on transformative social policy. UNRISD acts as a bridge to the global development space and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

Civil society uptake of pioneering analysis of unpaid care work: UNRISD research has provided key arguments and evidence for major advocacy and action campaigns, such as ActionAid’s Making Care Visible and Oxfam’s Innovations in Care. These projects use UNRISD knowledge to raise awareness, provide practitioners with tools for action and policy influence, and have a concrete impact on women’s human rights and gender equality in the global South.

Gender research influencing national policy processes: A workshop on UNRISD research findings in Indonesia, which recommended that women’s rights groups and champions in state institutions work together to design gender-egalitarian policies, brought together civil society activists and the National Commission on Women. Their coordinated advocacy resulted in the issue of domestic workers’ protection being included in the Indonesian Parliament’s 2016 National Legislative Programme.

Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development

Sharing policy expertise on climate change in coastal cities: UNRISD brought researchers, practitioners and policy decision makers based in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, and Jakarta, Indonesia, into dialogue with international specialists based in Europe to exchange knowledge and policy-making experience, and produce a position paper. Further collaboration is planned to delve deeper into innovative, integrated and inclusive solutions that tackle not only people’s exposure to climate-related hazards, but also the root causes of their social vulnerabilities.

SSE Knowledge Hub for the SDGs: An open Call for Papers hosted by UNRISD for the United Nations Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy generated 350 abstracts from over 45 countries, including 28 in the global South, critically examining the role of SSE in implementing the SDGs. 150 of these papers are being presented at conferences in Asia and Europe in 2019, made available on the open-access Knowledge Hub, and informing the work of the UNTFSE to raise policy makers’ awareness of SSE as a means of implementation of the SDGs.

Cross-cutting Activities

United Nations Learning Advisory Council for the 2030 Agenda: UNRISD was appointed to the Council as one of the most relevant and knowledgeable thought leaders in the United Nations, The purpose of the Council: to challenge conventional thinking and develop new insights on knowledge and learning around key global and national SDG-related challenges to support capacity building of UN staff and development partners at the national level.

Turning inequality on its head—amplifying Southern voices: The UNRISD Call for Papers, Overcoming Inequalities in a Fractured World: Between Elite Power and Social Mobilization, generated over 1,000 responses, from which 40 were selected for an international conference. About half of the presenters were from the Global South and half were women. There was also strong representation of early-stage researchers, demonstrating UNRISD’s convening power, commitment to promoting innovative emerging research, and amplifying voices that are not often heard on a global platform.

“UNRISD has a unique ‘inside–outside, independent–networked’ position; it is a sought-after and trusted partner for other UN entities and for member states. There is potential for this role to grow further.”

— UNRISD Stakeholder Meeting, April 2019