



# Research for Social Change



# UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

## MISSION

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues.

Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

To this end, we:

- focus on the often neglected social content and impacts of development processes and the role of social institutions, relations and actors in shaping development policies and pathways;
- engage researchers, policy makers and civil society actors from around the world in generating and sharing knowledge, in order to shape policy within and beyond the UN system;
- mobilize and strengthen the research capacity of individuals and institutions in developing countries through collaborative inquiry; and
- provide a space for the exchange of ideas, giving prominence to marginalized viewpoints, often challenging mainstream development thinking and offering alternative policy options.

*“In a period when all too much social science research has succumbed to pressure to conform or lost itself in confusion, the work of UNRISD stands out because of its clarity, commitment and creativity.”*

*Jayati Ghosh (2003), Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India*

## GOVERNANCE

UNRISD is an autonomous United Nations institute, with a mandate established by a Bulletin of the Secretary-General.

- The Institute is governed by a Board of independent scholars and practitioners, approved by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The Board is led by a Chairperson appointed by the Secretary-General.
- The Director of UNRISD, appointed by the Secretary-General, reports biennially on behalf of the Board to the United Nations Commission for Social Development.

## UNRISD AND THE UN SYSTEM

UNRISD staff serve on a number of UN system committees and task forces, participate in expert group meetings, make presentations at hearings, give seminars and training courses, and contribute to assessments of programmes. UNRISD also undertakes collaborative research with other UN agencies on issues of common concern.

Our institutional location and autonomous status within the UN system provide a unique space to undertake independent research, ensure a neutral ground for open debate and discussion, and guarantee access to channels of policy influence in the international system.

*“‘Too good to be true’ was our initial reaction to facts about the output of the Institute, a reaction that has not faded now that we have understood how UNRISD can do so much with so little.”*

*Deepak Nayyar, Signe Arnfred,  
Sten Johansson and Tapio Salonen (2006),  
Sida Evaluation 06/46*





RESEARCH

The UNRISD research agenda responds to urgent development problems and knowledge gaps, and addresses development challenges of concern to the UN system and its member states. Topics are determined through a consultative process with stakeholders and are approved by our Board.

- We undertake cross-country comparative and multidisciplinary studies that:
- focus on the interconnectedness between social, economic and political dimensions of development, emphasizing the need to understand the role of social policies for inclusive development;
  - adopt a structural approach to understanding poverty, inequality and exclusion, focusing not only on specific groups or sectors, but on the nature of the systems and processes that expose certain groups to vulnerability and perpetuate poverty and inequality;
  - recognize that processes of social change are political processes involving competing or conflicting interests, power relationships, diverse forms of organizing and participation;
  - assess the policies and processes needed to achieve desirable social outcomes under different economic and political circumstances.

“ There were good reasons for creating UNRISD. The approach to development policy placed excessive emphasis on economic and technological aspects, in which social dimensions were largely ignored. ”

Jan Tinbergen (1993), Nobel Laureate in Economics and first Chair of the UNRISD Board

1960s

- Pioneering Social and Human Indicators of Development**
- Potential and Limits of Planning and Technology
  - Measuring Social Development
  - Rural Cooperatives and Regional Development

**2010–2014: Social Development in an Uncertain World**  
Our current research agenda confronts the challenges of social development in a context of crisis and uncertainty. Findings are feeding into discussions and debates shaping the post-2015 development agenda.

- Two central questions frame our current projects.
- *What is the role of social policy in supporting sustainable and fair economic growth, democratic participation and social justice?*
  - *What political and institutional arrangements, forms of participation and activism can support sustainable and equitable development outcomes?*

- Current Topics**
- Towards Universal Social Security in Emerging Economies
  - New Directions in Social Policy: Southern Alternatives
  - South-South Migration and the Role of Social Policy
  - Migration and Health in China
  - Politics of Domestic Resource Mobilization
  - Financing Social Development in Natural-Resource-Rich Economies
  - Understanding Gender-Egalitarian Policy Change
  - Gender, Labour Markets and Social Policy
  - Gender, Agriculture and Food Security
  - Potential and Limits of Social and Solidarity Economy
  - Social Dimensions of Green Economy and Sustainable Development

COMMUNICATION

To inform and influence the development research, policy and advocacy communities, we use a range of communication and dissemination channels.

**Events** – including international conferences, research workshops and our Seminar Series.

- Publications** – including:
- research and policy briefs
  - papers authored by researchers involved in UNRISD projects
  - books co-published through academic publishers
  - journal articles and special issues
  - flagship reports, such as *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World (2005)* *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics (2010)*

Visit [www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org) for the latest research updates, event information, news and views from researchers in our network, and free immediate access to over 1,000 titles.

**Sign up for our eBulletin**, a bimonthly digest of our latest news, as well as commentaries on topical issues and debates.

Join us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

UNRISD research is coordinated by a core staff of about 10 researchers based at the United Nations in Geneva. Our projects involve researchers in academic and other institutions around the world.

Our global network comprised some 450 researchers in 2007–2011, of whom 45 per cent were from the South and nearly half women.

Research is supported by a Communications and Outreach team, and a small administrative staff.

FUNDING

UNRISD depends entirely on voluntary contributions from national governments, multilateral donors, foundations and other sources. The Institute does not receive funding from the regular budget of the United Nations. The Institute’s operating budget is approximately \$4 million per year.

In supporting UNRISD, our donors contribute to the crucial but often neglected goal of assuring a diversity of views and voices on development issues.

1970s

- Debating the Social and Political Dynamics of Modernization**
- Agricultural Cooperatives
  - Food Systems and Society
  - Green Revolution
  - UN “Unified Approach to Development”

1980s

- Promoting a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach to Social Development**
- Measurement and Social Indicators
  - Popular Participation
  - Refugees, Returnees and Local Society

1990s

- Anticipating the Social Effects of Globalization**
- Crisis, Adjustment and Social Change
  - Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development
  - Ethnic Conflict and Development
  - Integrating Gender into Development Policy
  - Political Violence and Social Movements
  - Rebuilding War-torn Societies
  - Socio-Economic Impact of the Production, Trade and Use of Illicit Drugs

2000s

- Taking Global Responsibility for Social Development**
- Social Policy and Development
  - Poverty Reduction and Policy Regimes
  - Gender and Development
  - Democracy, Governance and Well-Being
  - Civil Society and Social Movements
  - Markets, Business and Regulation
  - Identities, Conflict and Cohesion
  - Information Technology and Society



50 Years of Research for Social Change

UNRISD was established in 1963 as part of the first United Nations Development Decade.





*“ For decades, UNRISD has been a pioneer in crossing boundaries of geography, discipline, methodology and knowledge, providing a model for rigorous and relevant research in an increasingly integrated world. ”*

*Michael Edwards (2003), then Director,  
Governance and Civil Society, The Ford Foundation*

*“ UNRISD has come to stand for path-breaking ideas, innovative approaches and new thinking. By examining the social dimensions of global challenges, UNRISD helps ensure that the issue of people’s security is always in our line of sight. And in the process, it truly has helped to shape a vision of a better world for all. ”*

*Juan Somavía (2003), then Director-General, ILO*



[www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)



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See [www.unrisd.org/funding](http://www.unrisd.org/funding) for details.

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