

The Social Summit did not attempt to formulate a broad definition of social development. It chose instead to prioritise three basic issues: poverty, unemployment and social integration. There was clear insistence on the need for an integrated vision of the problems. Development and social policies should recognise the interaction of social, economic and cultural factors and aim for «improvements for all» that encourage social cohesion in a framework where human rights are respected, democratic structures are strengthened and «people-centred», equitable, participation-based development is favoured. Equity questions are central to the statements and concerns that arose from this conference, even though no specific commitment was made on the issue. The prioritised issues of poverty and distribution, the generation of productive employment, and social integration inevitably opened the way for a more detailed and precise definition of «equity» and how it relates to sustainable social development.

The equity issue ran right through the Beijing Summit. Equity is one of the core concerns of the situation of women. The demands were for a deepening and fuller extension of human rights –women’s rights are human rights– as women have historically been oppressed and underprivileged.

EQUITY: A CONTROVERSIAL CONCEPT

Equity is often preached with reference to groups and individuals, distribution rules and the way people are treated, in terms of political, social or economic goods. Firstly, we must accept that there are different ways to tackle the issue of equity, and that these depend to a great extent on the coverage

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and content attributed to the term, of the dimensions determined, and the theoretical emphasis with which we mark the limits of the debate.

Equity can be based on characteristics that people share (by which they merit being treated in an «equitable» manner) or on rules or norms which establish how the distribution of goods should be carried out.

When we speak of equity in relation to the characteristics of people, we are talking of equity in treatment: in this sense, equity is the «impartiality» with which treatment is given to individuals. Treatment according to the prevailing rules, whatever these may establish, is always equitable as it is based on the principle of impartiality.

When we talk of equitable rules for the distribution of goods or outcomes (benefits or costs), we establish that certain benefits or charges must be distributed among people according to certain characteristics. Thus, a benefit like the right to vote, or a charge like taxes, fall on individuals by virtue of certain characteristics (eg, age in the first case, and income in the second).

What criteria are used to distribute benefits and costs and what characteristics are privileged? Here, the discussion of equity is mixed up with problems of justice. **The forms in which society distributes goods and services and assigns values constitute the most basic sources of inequalities.** The origin of the concept of justice tends to be rooted in these forms. Rawls, author of an important contemporary essay on justice, defined the principles of justice as those which serve to judge how institutions distribute goods and outcomes.

A first criteria of equity established by Rawls is based on the supposition that the distribution of benefits is more equitable the bigger the group of people receiving them compared with the number excluded (for example, universal suffrage). A second criteria is that of «proportional» equity, as described by Bobbio: we are inclined to consider the assignment of greater benefits to the more needy or a progressive income tax more equitable. The problem of the rules of pro-

portional equity lies in how this proportion is established: in this case it is the concept of «needs», with all the complexities this implies, that determines the criteria of proportionality. **The principle of equal satisfaction of needs postulates a minimum level of basic needs that are substantially identical for everyone. An unequal distribution of resources is needed to even out the benefits: the bigger the basic unsatisfied needs of some, so much bigger «should be» the benefits they receive.**

We know that the «relevant» characteristics for establishing rules of equity are relative to the type of benefits or charges to be distributed: in the previous example, age is relevant for the vote and wealth is relevant for taxes. Characteristics like race or gender, meanwhile, would be irrelevant here.

Rawls' argument postulates that when the time comes to determine which characteristics of people would be relevant for determining their duties and rights, we can appeal to the intuitive notion that people born in different social positions have different expectations of what life will offer determined by the economic, political and social systems. Social institutions appear to favour certain initial positions compared with others and the principles of social justice should be applied to these basic positions. Thus the economic and social inequalities should be judged in terms of the long-term perspectives of the social group in the least advantageous position. The priority is simple: priority must be given to the most needy, to those individuals whose total life perspectives position them «at the bottom of the heap». The justification of this order of priorities is that **we do not earn the natural and social contingents which influence our well-being by merit (talent, our childhood environment and class background). Consequently, the differences in benefits derived from such contingencies are morally arbitrary.**

The «liberal idea of equal treatment» goes hand in hand with the idea of equal opportunity: if people are essentially equal, then the differences in rewards are not justifiable, and the idea of what someone «merits» and «deserves» will depend on what an individual does (the effort made, their greater moral and intellectual disposition, etc.) and the reward they receive will be based on this. But here we come up against the conflict between justice in the distribution of professional and educational opportunities and justice in the distribution of economic and social rewards. This second aspect of «equity» distinguishes «equal opportunity» from «equality of outcome».

The principle of equal opportunity covers the redistribution of access to the various positions in society, but not to the distribution of the positions themselves. In other words, it supposes making the benefits accessible to all on a competitive basis. The principle of equal opportunity is built on a redistributive basis: equal rights are not enough to make the opportunities accessible to the socially disadvantaged. **Unequal**

distribution is needed to bring the less well off up to a common starting level, that is: legal privileges and material benefits are needed for the economically underprivileged.

However, the principle of equal opportunity has been responded to using the principle of equal outcomes by affirming that equalities at the outset do not resolve inequalities at the finishing line. Hence the need to intervene in the «competitive» process, which leads people to different starting points, and in this case, the redistributive criterion is even more radical. The equality of outcomes can be achieved only by containing the effects of equal opportunity: this can be done by creating a lower and upper limit, that is, a floor under which individuals cannot fall and a roof over which they cannot climb. Roofs and floors by definition violate the sanctity of individual achievements associated with equal opportunity, and therefore, the equality of results is a far more controversial measure and its relationship with liberalism is complex.

Finally, a third distinction is whether our use of the term equity refers to positions of individuals or groups. When «moral equality» is postulated it always departs from an individual point of view. Preferences are individual and the individual is the model with which we measure the results. **However, equality as a political issue appears in the measure to which groups (classes, ethnic groups, women) campaign for this.** And it is the equality of groups (women, workers, ethnic groups, etc.) that frames public debate on equity at the close of this century. **To a large extent, when the discussion of equality is «individualised» it is also «depoliticised».**

It is worth mentioning a certain drift which is becoming more important in discussions on equity. While this drift appears to enrich the debate, it also makes treatment of the issue more complicated. Most traditional discussions on equity set out from the basis of a «focal variable» from which the comparisons and judgements were made (such as income, wealth, opportunities, liberties, happiness, satisfaction, usefulness, etc.). Arguments were characterised by a uniform treatment of the subjects. The prevalent a priori egalitarian notion was the principle that «all people are equal» and, as a consequence, diversities were only incorporated «in the second instance».

Today the possibility of adopting various focal variables is recognised and the corresponding rankings of equity associated to them produce contradictory judgements: the equity resulting from one focal variable tends not to coincide with that obtained when the same pair of subjects are compared from another, recognising that, eg. *«[e]qual opportunities can lead to very unequal incomes. Equal incomes can go hand in hand with different meanings of wealth. Equal wealth can coexist with very unequal happiness. Equal happiness can be accompanied by very different satisfaction of needs.*

Social Equity			
	Public expenditure in education to % of GNP 1993-94	Percentage of population with access to safe water (rural/urban ratio) 1990-96	Percentage of population with access to health services (rural/urban ratio) 1990-96
Regional averages			
East Asia and the Pacific	2.9	0.6	n/d
Europe	5.4	n/d	n/d
EX - USSR	5.4	0.7*	n/d
Latin America and the Caribbean	3.6	0.64	n/d
North Africa and Middle East	3.6*	0.6	0.8
South Asia	3.5	0.9	n/d
Sub Saharan Africa	5.5	0.5	n/d
All countries			
Afghanistan	n/d	0.13	0.21
Albania	n/d	n/d	n/d
Algeria	5.6	0.70	0.95
Angola	n/d	0.22	n/d
Argentina	3.8	0.38	0.26
Bahamas	3.9	n/d	n/d
Bahrain	4.7	n/d	n/d
Bangladesh	2.3	0.97	n/d
Barbados	7.5	n/d	n/d
Belize	5.7	n/d	n/d
Benin	n/d	1.29	n/d
Bhutan	n/d	0.72	n/d
Bolivia	5.4	0.41	0.68
Bosnia & Herzegovina	n/d	n/d	n/d
Botswana	8.5	0.91	n/d
Brazil	1.6	0.81	n/d
Brunei Darussalam	3.6	n/d	n/d
Burkina Faso	3.6	n/d	0.89
Burundi	3.8	0.58	0.79
Cambodia	n/d	0.51	0.63
Cameroon	3.1	0.75	0.72
Cape Verde	4.4	n/d	n/d
Central African Rep.	2.8	0.39	0.34
Colombia	3.7	0.58	0.84
Congo	8.3	0.13	0.72
Costa Rica	4.7	0.92	n/d
Cuba	6.6	0.72	n/d
Chad	2.2	0.35	0.00
Chile	2.9	0.83	n/d
China	2.6	0.58	0.83

Social Equity			
	Public expenditure in education to % of GNP 1993-94	Percentage of population with access to safe water (rural/urban ratio) 1990-96	Percentage of population with access to health services (rural/urban ratio) 1990-96
Djibouti	3.8	n/d	n/d
Dominican Rep.	1.9	0.00	0.80
Ecuador	3.0	0.61	0.29
Egypt	5.0	n/d	0.99
El Salvador	1.6	0.54	n/d
Equatorial Guinea	1.8	n/d	n/d
Eritrea	n/d	n/d	n/d
Ethiopia	n/d	0.21	n/d
Fiji	5.4	n/d	n/d
Gabon	3.2	0.56	n/d
Gambia	2.7	0.00	n/d
Ghana	3.1	0.59	0.49
Guatemala	1.6	0.56	n/d
Guinea	n/d	1.12	0.70
Guinea-Bissau	n/d	2.09	n/d
Guyana	5.0	n/d	n/d
Haiti	1.4	0.62	n/d
Honduras	4.0	0.82	0.64
Hong Kong	n/d	0.96	n/d
India	3.8	0.93	0.80
Indonesia	1.3	0.68	0.92
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	5.9	0.84	0.75
Iraq	n/d	0.48	0.80
Jamaica	4.7	n/d	n/d
Jordan	3.8	n/d	0.97
Kenya	6.8	0.73	n/d
Korea, Dem. Peo. Rep.	n/d	n/d	n/d
Korea, Rep. of	4.5	0.76	1.00
Kuwait	5.6	n/d	n/d
Kyrgyzstan	n/d	0.00	n/d
Lao Peo. Dem. Rep.	2.3	0.85	n/d
Lebanon	2.0	0.92	0.87
Lesotho	4.8	1.32	n/d
Liberia	n/d	0.16	0.60
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	n/d	1.00	0.85
Madagascar	1.9	0.12	0.23
Malawi	n/d	0.40	0.36
Malaysia	5.3	0.69	n/d
Maldives	8.1	n/d	n/d
Mali	2.1	0.93	n/d
Mauritania	n/d	0.97	n/d
Mauritius	n/d	1.05	1.00
Mexico	5.8	0.62	n/d
Moldova	n/d	0.18	n/d
Mongolia	5.2	0.58	n/d
Morocco	5.4	0.19	0.50

Source: UNDP, UNICEF.

* Average for developing countries.

Social Equity			
	Public expenditure in education to % of GNP 1993-94	Percentage of population with access to safe water (rural/urban ratio) 1990-96	Percentage of population with access to health services (rural/urban ratio) 1990-96
Mozambique	n/d	n/d	0.30
Myanmar	n/d	0.64	0.47
Namibia	8.7	0.48	0.48
Nepal	2.9	0.68	n/d
Nicaragua	3.8	0.35	0.60
Niger	3.1	1.20	0.00
Nigeria	1.3	0.48	n/d
Oman	4.5	n/d	0.94
Pakistan	2.7	0.84	0.35
Panama	5.2	n/d	n/d
Papua New Guinea	n/d	0.20	n/d
Paraguay	2.9	0.14	0.42
Peru	n/d	0.24	n/d
Philippines	2.4	0.87	n/d
Rwanda	n/d	n/d	n/d
Saint Vincent	6.7	n/d	n/d
Samoa (Western)	4.2	n/d	n/d
Saudi Arabia	n/d	0.74	0.88
Senegal	n/d	0.33	0.85
Seychelles	7.4	n/d	n/d
Sierra Leone	n/d	0.36	0.22
Singapore	3.3	0.00	n/d
Solomon Islands	4.2	n/d	n/d
Somalia	n/d	n/d	n/d
South Africa	7.1	0.54	n/d
Sri Lanka	3.2	0.59	n/d
Sudan	n/d	0.49	n/d
Suriname	3.6	n/d	n/d
Swaziland	6.8	n/d	n/d
Syrian Arab Rep.	n/d	0.85	0.88
Tajikistan	n/d	0.60	n/d
Tanzania, U. Rep. of	5.0	0.40	n/d
TFYR Macedonia	n/d	n/d	n/d
Thailand	3.8	0.94	1.00
Togo	6.1	0.78	0.00
Trinidad and Tobago	4.5	0.92	0.99
Tunisia	6.3	0.95	n/d
Turkey	3.3	0.65	n/d
Uganda	1.9	0.58	0.42
Uruguay	2.5	0.06	n/d
Uzbekistan	n/d	0.60	n/d
Vanuatu	4.8	n/d	n/d
Venezuela	5.1	0.94	n/d
Viet Nam	n/d	0.89	0.80
Yemen	n/d	0.63	0.40
Zaire	n/d	0.29	0.43
Zambia	2.6	0.34	n/d
Zimbabwe	8.3	0.65	0.83

Source: UNDP, UNICEF.

And this can be associated with very different freedoms of choice. And so on...»¹

Lastly, it is worth taking a moment for the most important differentiation: the relation between the distribution of economic goods and political influence, prestige and social power. The objective of «equity» in pluralist theory (and the greater part of democratic theory) is to impede the accumulation of inequalities: ie, to maintain certain political independence from the sources of social and economic power in such a way that success in one sphere cannot be converted into success in another. This is particularly important in understanding the relationship between political and economic equalities.

POLITICAL EQUITY AND ECONOMIC EQUITY: A CASE OF CONFLICT?

The constitution of a political community exists according to a certain conception of the «equality» of those belonging to it. This equality, however minimal it may be in terms of its practical consequences, always implies a rupture with the prevalent social, economic and cultural inequalities.

Political equity is central to any conception of democracy. Democracy, up to a certain point, implies political equality. A basic principle of political equity is the liberal principle: one person, one vote. This ideal implies a roof and a floor: no preference can be totally ignored by the system, nor can any preference group predominate. The floor from which political influence is exercised is made up of institutions such as universal suffrage.

However, «political equality» goes no further than the right to vote and this is the dilemma of collective action in mass societies: the decisions processed in daily politics assume complicated negotiations between groups possessing basic associative resources with which to apply pressure in line with their demands. Obviously, not all groups have the same capacity for applying pressure nor do they manage to optimise their organisational resources.

The idea of «political equality» must transcend the individualist point of view and take into account the equality of groups and organisations. Those most deprived in the economic sphere tend also to lack all power in the political sphere; their demands are not even formulated in a suitable way for input in the political system.

Therefore, in order to transcend the «one person, one vote» perspective, a definition of «political stratification» must be adopted. This should refer to the differences in the amount of

¹ Amartya Sen: *Inequality re-examined*, page 2, Harvard University Press.

influence or power exercised by individuals or groups over governmental policies. It may even include a notion of «political inequality» referring to the differences between the capacity of individuals and groups to influence political decisions.

The combination of «one person, one vote» and «equal opportunities», is not enough to do away with economic inequality, but rather, to live alongside it. However, the coexistence of democracy («one person, one vote») with economic liberalism (market) depends on the effect of «economic inequality» on «political equality». **Because economic inequality affects social, political and legal equality, it is the most objectionable of all inequalities.**

Theoretical reflection on economic equity has mostly been developed in the framework of analysis of the welfare state, and specifically in studies of income distribution and its possible measurements. This has been the case regardless of whether these studies deal with inequality of income, wealth or usufruct, encourage the adoption of «objective or normative (measures) of inequity» or are associated to the achievement of the maximisation of social objectives or aggregates and their possible conflict or compatibility with efficiency. In fact, the traditional academic economics associated equity with the notion of efficiency: the best or optimum situation is reached when two subjects share in such a way that at least one improves their lot without the other losing out.

Recent refinements, however, recognise the existence of a wide diversity of dimensions involved in the problem (liberties, rights, income, primary goods, needs, etc.). These argue that the multi-dimensionality of the complex diversity of socio-economic situations «*contributes different ways of seeing the lives of different people, and each one of the perspectives has its corresponding vision of equity*».

*«This plurality – that of evaluating the advantages of different people – is reflected in different visions not only of equity, but of any other social concept by which individual advantage comes into play in a substantial manner in the information base. For example, ideas on ‘efficiency’ would have exactly the same plurality, related to the choice of space. Efficiency increases in an unambiguous way if there is an increment of the advantage for each person (or an advance for at least one person, with no backsliding for anyone else) but the content of this characterisation depends on the form in which the advantage is defined. Formally, there are a multiplicity of ideas of efficiency exactly similar to those we have seen for equity, related to the plurality of spaces.»*²

Through the government, political equality can come into

play to increase or reduce economic equality. But it is more likely that the contrary will occur: economic inequalities will be translated into political influences. In other words, political inequality and inequality in other areas are closely related. Economic resources can be converted into political influence despite all efforts to limit this process, varying in vigour and effectiveness from nation to nation.

The equality issue has become a political issue insofar as the State has been given responsibility for the economic and social welfare of individuals and groups. Public policies, governmental involvement, and State intervention in the economy have been at the centre of this debate. The notion of the «welfare state» politicised economics like no other, and put the issue of equality on the agenda of the western democracies in an unprecedented manner. Thus, for example, governments have been called on to reinforce equal opportunities by removing artificial discriminatory barriers. However, the equality «of condition» requires governmental intervention of a different kind.

At the same time, the «politisation» of the economy assumed that society would organise itself to accept collective responsibility for the supply of services to remove the effects of illness, unemployment, poverty, etc. The argument for the «welfare state» assumes that, **if the market economy is left up to its own devices, it will produce enormous inequalities. Those worst positioned in the resulting stratification will also lack the resources to make their demands effective. The «redistribution-based» welfare policies aim to increase the freedom of the worst off by «rectifying» the injustices in distribution created by the market.** The increased liberty and capacity for influence of the worst off (political equality) has, in practice, gone hand in hand with social integration policies through the universalisation of basic health and education services and incorporation into the labour market. All these are forms of «extending social citizenship,» which contribute to the exercise of «political citizenship.»

SOCIAL EQUITY, RIGHTS AND CITIZENSHIP

In a context of globalisation where the market is gaining greater weight and importance, it appears that social well-being and equity issues cannot be resolved exclusively through market mechanisms. Although various studies show that greater State intervention does not generate «linear» results in a

² *Ibid* page 25.

direction towards greater equality, it is associated with more equitable outcomes.

The problem of social equity in the present day is linked to the discussion of social policy and the broader concept of citizenship. Marshall³ in what has become a classic text, distinguished the various contents of citizenship: the civil, political and social. The distinction between these spheres and their implications led to the concept of citizenship appearing as a central point in the formulation of rights, surpassing the purely formal and procedural aspects.

Marshall defined **civil citizenship** as the right of individuals to live according to their own choice, implying the freedom of expression and beliefs, and justice before the law. These rights can include women's citizenship, their reproductive and sexual rights, and the citizenship of ethnic minorities and their right to use their language and maintain their customs, or that of the religious minorities to practice their forms of worship or belief.

Political citizenship was developed in the nineteenth century and implies electing and being elected, the right to participate in the exercise of political power. Although this dimension of citizenship has advanced throughout this century, it has still not been achieved sufficiently in reality. Hence the importance of the concept of «empowerment» in the women's and feminist movements.

Social citizenship has been the slowest to advance and has been strengthened in the present century. It refers to the prerogative of each person to enjoy a minimum standard of economic well-being and security. It thus implies the right to social security, salaries, social benefits, health, education, etc. Social citizenship operates in a truncated manner for broad sectors.

Social citizenship meets obstacles in the system of social stratification itself, which weaken its development.⁴ The extension of social rights expressed in a system of services – health, education, housing, etc.– cannot have as an objective equality of income or economic equality. Social equity is distinguished conceptually from economic or political equity insofar as the implementation of social rights can bring about an improvement in the quality of life but not a change in the basic system of social stratification derived from market logic. But the recognition of social citizenship can change the form of this however difficult it is to modify wealth, income or power distribution. A «minimum floor»⁵ – a set of essential

goods and services for all people, independent of their level of income– can be assured.

The idea of this «floor» has varied, **and at present it is understood that public responsibility does not end with the provision of social services.** Social citizenship also implies the creation of player–subjects who emancipate themselves from the basic limitations imposed by poverty and the dependence on assistance provided by State policies. From this perspective, social equity is understood as the access to basic services of all people in society, not on the basis of compassion or pity, but in terms of rights.

The concept of social equity is tightly linked to analogous concepts of vulnerability and exclusion, which discloses a dimension that was prioritised in the Summits: social integration. Concern for **social development** was a central axis in both the Social Summit and the Fourth Women's Conference. There have been important transformations in the vision of development in the past decades. This is clearly reflected in the declarations and commitments assumed. It is recognised that the economic dimension alone is not enough to achieve development, since social and environmental dimensions are essential to achieving sustainability.

Traditionally, the concept of development had an eminent economic connotation. As a result, national action plans and policies centred almost exclusively on economic growth, neglecting the human dimension. In recent years, this economic-based conception is being revised as it is increasingly recognised that economic growth does not necessarily bring well-being to the whole population.

Hence there is an increasing movement away from «measuring» growth in mainly quantitative terms towards more qualitative evaluations. The view that measurement of human development must not only consider economic expansion, but also the equitable distribution of its product, is becoming progressively stronger.

«Sustainable» development refers to the satisfaction of current needs through the rational and suitable use of existing natural resources without negatively affecting the resource supply or the fate of future generations. The new development paradigm, then, aspires to both economic growth and access by all people to effective exercise of their economic, social and cultural rights, participation in political life, and the full exercise of liberty. Development must consequently be of the people, by the people and for the people; it must be at

3 T.H. Marshall: *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*, 1973. Greenworld Press.

4 Argument taken from Bustelo and Minujin «*La política social esquivada*», UNICEF, Regional Office. Presented at the First Congress of the Interamerican Centre for Development (CLAD), Rio de Janeiro 1996.

5 For an overview of the various proposals on a «floor,» basic income, BIEN, etc. and the details of these see Chapter Two of *Real Freedom for All*. Philippe Van Parijs, Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1995.

their service. Human rights are an essential component of sustainable development.⁶

The importance given to equity at the Summits does not appear to be separate from the notion of citizenship, if this is understood to be the rights and responsibilities of people in relation to the specific communities in which they have full membership. The content that 'citizenship' has assumed through history has varied, becoming broader and more complex with the struggles of excluded sectors – women, ethnic and religious minorities, rural populations, and other vulnerable groups of society.

EQUITY AT THE SUMMITS: MAIN AREAS AND CONCERNS

The promotion of equity between men and women, ethnic and religious minorities, rural and urban populations and different generations, is a condition that runs transversally through the various commitments.

Equity between the sexes is a fundamental issue that received special attention at the Summits. The inequality between men and women of access to basic services (education, health, etc.) and in the economic and political spheres (productive activities, employment, resources, the exercise of power, etc.), and the particular and serious forms in which poverty affects women, are core themes that run through the Social Summit and, obviously, the Beijing Conference. Both adopted the objective of promoting women, starting with the explicit recognition that inequity in their social, political and economic situations exists in all societies. The Beijing Conference also stressed the need to eliminate violence against women, the full application of human rights instruments for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and the need to implement mechanisms to promote the advancement of women by integrating a gender perspective in legislation, policies, programmes and projects.

There are three basic players in the achievement of commitments assumed at the Summits: the national governments, civil society and its organisations, and the international community. The Social Summit declaration announced: *«We acknowledge that it is the primary responsibility of States to attain these goals. We also acknowledge that these goals cannot be achieved by States alone. The international community, the United Nations, the multilateral financial institutions, all regional organizations and local authorities, and*

*all actors of civil society need to positively contribute their own share of efforts and resources in order to reduce inequalities among people and narrow the gap between developed and developing countries in a global effort to reduce social tensions, and to create greater social and economic stability and security. Radical political, social and economic changes in the countries with economies in transition have been accompanied by a deterioration in their economic and social situation. We invite all people to express their personal commitment to enhancing the human condition through concrete actions in their own fields of activities and through assuming specific civic responsibilities.»*⁷

The role of civil society and its organisations, participating and intervening in the formulation and application of decisions that affect the functioning and well being of society, is one of the key instruments highlighted at both events. *«Effective implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the Summit requires strengthening community organisations and non-profit non-governmental organisations in the spheres of education, health, poverty, social integration, human rights, improvement of the quality of life, and relief and rehabilitation, enabling them to participate constructively in policy-making and implementation.»*⁸ For this to occur, the capacities and opportunities of the whole population must be increased, and its organisations must be supported and encouraged, particularly those of the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Legislative and regulatory frameworks and consultative mechanisms should be established in such a way that civil society organisations participate in the design, application and evaluation of social development programmes and strategies. Civil society organisations must themselves constitute mechanisms that broaden the bases of citizenship and «empower» citizens.

The eradication of poverty is a declared central objective. This implies an attack on a main cause of inequity at national and international levels. Beyond the differences in levels of development among countries, there is a phenomenon that is common to them all: the deepening of poverty of the most disadvantaged groups and communities. There is not only an abyss between the rich and the poor, but between the poor and the poorest; the abyss is not only between regions and countries, but also between the different sectors within each country. Hence one of the measures assumed at the Copenhagen Summit was *«the elimination of hunger and malnutri-*

⁶ Discussion of development taken from *«La Realización de los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales. Informe final sobre los derechos humanos y la extrema pobreza»*, presented by UN special rapporteur Leandro Despouy. UNESCO. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13.

⁷ *Social Summit Declaration*, paragraph 27.

⁸ Social Summit, Programme of Action, paragraph 85.

tion; the provision of food security, education, employment and livelihood, primary health-care services including reproductive health care, safe drinking water and sanitation, and adequate shelter; and participation in social and cultural life. Special priority will be given to the needs and rights of women and children, who often bear the greatest burden of poverty, and to the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and persons.»⁹

In the Programme of Action, the list of various ways that poverty shows itself includes social discrimination and exclusion, which are in flagrant contradiction to the principles of equality and non-discrimination consecrated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For women, poverty is due, among other factors, to: insufficiencies and inequalities in access to education and training; dependence and the lack of economic rights; and unequal access to employment, markets and resources. Inequality in economic structures and policies requires, therefore, special attention.

At the Copenhagen Summit, special emphasis was put on **employment**, one of the three core issues of the meeting. The promotion of full employment and the preparation of all women and men for productive employment were made priorities for economic and social policy. Greater growth rates in productive employment are meant to satisfy people's aspirations for participation in economic and social life, to help eradicate poverty and assure equity, and to preserve social cohesion.¹⁰ Main objectives of the Social Summit were access to work in general and equitable access to work by men and women; integration of the formal sector; protection of migrant workers; the prohibition of forced and child labour; participation of employers and workers in government programmes and job creation and unemployment reduction strategies. To achieve these aims, it will be necessary to improve access to credit, land, information and infrastructure for small businesses and the most disadvantaged groups, including especially women, young people, the disabled, and other groups particularly affected by unemployment and structural underemployment.

«According to official estimates, more than 120 million people are unemployed world-wide and far more underemployed, a circumstance which causes great personal suffering, general social disintegration and a great deal of economic damage (...) The current levels of unemployment and underemployment constitute a high human cost for so-

ciety as a whole and the unemployed in particular, which is translated into greater poverty, marginalisation, exclusion, inequalities, less well-being, and a loss of dignity.»¹¹ **The social and economic dimensions of equity are tied to access to employment, and this must be assured for all people.**

Education and health are two areas that were emphasised at the Summits. Universal and equitable access to education and primary health care stand out in the commitments. In both areas, access by various groups is inequitable. Access to education is seen as fundamental to breaking with past inequalities and reaching a more equitable society. In turn, policies and programmes for the improvement of education and training contribute to the creation and extension of employment as well as improvement of quality, as the two areas are not independent.

*The improvement of access to education is an essential objective: people are the greatest natural resource of a country, and hence the need to invest in them. Education must eliminate gender-based inequalities and recognise the particulars of various social groups. Thus, the declaration of the Copenhagen Summit calls on governments to «[r]ecognize and respect the right of indigenous people to maintain and develop their identity, culture and interests, support their aspirations for social justice and provide an environment that enables them to participate in the social, economic and political life of their country».*¹² The right to education is recognised, but also the right to education that matches the various groups and cultures. In addition to access, **equity also means that differences are respected and that a model that steamrolls over cultural specifics is not imposed.**

As for disparities in the access to education, the Beijing Conference stressed not only the need to eliminate illiteracy among women, but also the need to increase their access to professional training, science, technology and permanent education. Egalitarian access to these areas will also provide women with greater access to decision-making, an area where women are under-represented in most nations.

Inequality also shows itself in an area as basic as access to health. Here, both Summits called for universal access by «making particular efforts to rectify inequalities relating to social conditions and without distinction as to race, national origin, gender, age or disability».¹³ The guarantee of

⁹ Social Summit, Commitment 2b.

¹⁰ United Nations Social Development Commission. Report on the 35th period of sessions (February 25 to March 6, 1997). Official documents, 1997. Supplement No. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Social Summit, Commitment 4, f.

¹³ Social Summit, commitment 7.

universal, non-discriminatory access to the basic health services includes access to drinking water and sanitation, as well as nutrition education and disease prevention programmes.

EQUITY, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND EXCLUSION

The Summits put special emphasis on the issue of social integration, which is tightly linked to the achievement of equity. The fourth commitment of the Copenhagen Summit promotes *«social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons»*. To achieve this commitment, measures must be implemented against all forms of discrimination, and the elimination of racism and xenophobia must be stressed.

The aim of social integration is the creation of a «society for all», in which each person, with their own rights and responsibilities, functions actively. To achieve this, society must be based on *«respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law.»*¹⁴

It is in the context of social integration that the concept of «equity» rears its head most strongly in the face of its equivalent, the concept of «equality.» The universalism of equality has hidden the specific interests of women and other groups and minorities, as well as the seriousness of their exclusion. There is manifest tension between this universalism and particularism, or in other words, between the battle for equality and the right to difference. **The universalisation of equality has been important in setting the stage, but it has hidden the specific interests of the various groups that make up society, and it has disguised the various forms of exclusion. The concept of equity implies starting from the differ-**

ences, taking them into account, respecting them, and preventing them from being translated into manifestations of social exclusion or barriers to rights, goods and services.

What do we mean by the term exclusion? One is excluded from something the possession of which implies a feeling of inclusion. This covers an enormous variety of situations and material and non-material possessions such as work, family, education, housing, affection, and belonging to community. Two concepts of inclusion are habitually handled, economic and social inclusion. «Economic inclusion» may refer to a nation in relation to the international economy, or to worker in the national labour market. Economic inclusion is closely related to «social inclusion,» as it implies aspects pertinent to the social capital of the family and community, such as health, education, social security coverage and family income.

With regard to social inclusion, people are classified into three large and different groups: the fully included, the vulnerable and the excluded. Individuals are vulnerable who live in unstable situations and who are in danger of falling into the exclusion area.

Exclusion and failure to achieve social integration throw a new light on «equity». In addition to showing the way in which a society distributes (more or less equitably) socially and economically valued goods and services, this new light also shows the positions that determine unequal access. The failure of integration is not only produced by a lack of access to goods, but also by the incapacity of a given society to integrate diverse groups with certain specifications: ethnic minorities, women, homosexuals, unemployed, etc. Studies indicate the two are often strongly related: the «excluded» in the cultural field are also those who are excluded from the economic, social and political fields.

Other concepts which are crucial to democracy and social development, such as justice, citizenship, equality of opportunity and outcome are strongly enmeshed with the idea of equity. In the context of globalisation and rapid change, where part of the planet's inhabitants seem to be excluded from this process, the concept of equity offers a key dimension. Without equity, social development goals can hardly be attained.

¹⁴ *Social Summit, chapter 4, par. 66.*

Gender Equity			
	Gender Development index (GDI)	Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	Percentage of female labour force out of total labour force (FLF)
Regional averages			
East Asia and the Pacific	0.64	0.39	45
Europe	0.86 ¹	0.59 ¹	46
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.73	0.42	33
North Africa and Middle East	0.54	n/d	26
South Asia	0.41	0.23	33
Sub Saharan Africa	0.37	n/d	42
North America	0.86	0.59	42 ²
All countries			
Afghanistan	n/d	n/d	29.71
Albania	0.64	n/d	41.88
Algeria	0.61	0.28	24.25
Angola	n/d	n/d	47.47
Argentina	0.78	n/d	30.67
Armenia	0.65	n/d	45.53
Australia	0.92	0.66	42.59
Austria	0.89	0.67	40.54
Azerbaijan	0.63	n/d	44.00
Bahamas	0.88	0.54	46.58
Bahrain	0.74	n/d	18.45
Bangladesh	0.34	0.27	42.17
Barbados	0.89	0.60	45.68
Belarus	0.79	n/d	48.05
Belgium	0.89	0.59	40.12
Belize	n/d	0.47	22.16
Benin	0.35	n/d	46.97
Bhutan	n/d	n/d	87.44
Bolivia	0.56	0.35	37.30
Bosnia & Herzegovina	n/d	n/d	36.52
Botswana	0.65	0.46	47.39
Brazil	0.73	0.38	35.20
Brunei Darussalam	n/d	n/d	34.01
Bulgaria	0.77	0.49	49.79
Burkina Faso	0.21	0.32	46.45
Burundi	0.23	n/d	49.55
Cambodia	n/d	n/d	54.36
Cameroon	0.44	0.34	37.31
Canada	0.94	0.70	45.16
Cape Verde	0.52	0.42	40.01
Central African Rep.	0.34	0.21	47.33
Chad	0.27	n/d	43.81

¹ Average for industrial countries.

² Average for high income countries.

Sources: UNDP, World Bank.

Gender Equity			
	Gender Development index (GDI)	Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	Percentage of female labour force out of total labour force (FLF)
Chile	0.79	0.38	32.06
China	0.62	0.48	45.97
Colombia	0.81	0.46	35.65
Comoros	0.40	n/d	54.97
Congo	n/d	0.22	42.61
Congo D.R.	n/d	0.21	43.37
Costa Rica	0.83	0.49	29.89
Côte d'Ivoire	0.34	n/d	34.17
Croatia	0.74	n/d	40.70
Cuba	0.70	0.52	37.74
Cyprus	0.84	0.38	39.04
Czech Rep.	0.86	n/d	47.33
Denmark	0.92	0.73	46.01
Dominican Rep.	0.66	0.42	28.96
Ecuador	0.68	n/d	26.31
Egypt	0.56	0.28	31.06
El Salvador	0.56	0.43	34.89
Equatorial Guinea	0.44	0.26	34.95
Eritrea	n/d	n/d	46.56
Estonia	0.76	n/d	50.41
Ethiopia	0.23	n/d	38.84
Fiji	0.76	0.33	27.10
Finland	0.93	0.72	47.74
France	0.93	0.45	44.19
Gabon	0.55	n/d	54.49
Gambia	0.26	n/d	45.15
Georgia	0.63	n/d	46.80
Germany	0.89	0.66	41.74
Ghana	0.46	n/d	51.83
Greece	0.87	0.39	36.32
Guadeloupe	n/d	n/d	44.91
Guatemala	0.51	0.48	26.06
Guinea	0.25	n/d	47.91
Guinea-Bissau	0.28	n/d	40.48
Guyana	0.62	0.47	32.65
Haiti	0.33	0.35	43.61
Honduras	0.54	0.42	28.35
Hong Kong	0.85	n/d	36.36
Hungary	0.84	0.51	43.98
Iceland	0.93	n/d	44.74
India	0.42	0.23	32.07
Indonesia	0.64	0.38	40.64
Iran, Islamic Rep. of	n/d	0.25	25.01
Iraq	0.43	n/d	18.16
Ireland	0.85	0.52	32.70
Israel	0.87	0.48	39.87
Italy	0.87	0.57	37.68
Jamaica	0.73	n/d	45.08
Japan	0.90	0.47	40.53

Gender Equity			
	Gender Development index (GDI)	Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	Percentage of female labour force out of total labour force (FLF)
Jordan	n/d	n/d	27.94
Kazakistan	0.70	n/d	47.29
Kenya	0.46	n/d	48.13
Korea, Dem. Rep.	n/d	n/d	45.02
Korea, Rep.	0.83	0.30	40.47
Kuwait	0.77	0.33	26.50
Kyrgyzstan	0.63	n/d	48.32
Lao, Dem. Rep.	0.44	n/d	46.76
Latvia	0.70	n/d	50.52
Lebanon	0.71	n/d	n/d
Lesotho	0.45	0.45	38.04
Liberia	n/d	n/d	42.72
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	0.66	n/d	17.47
Lithuania	0.75	n/d	47.91
Luxembourg	0.81	0.63	36.86
Macao	n/d	n/d	35.71
Macedonia, FYR	0.73	n/d	41.33
Madagascar	n/d	n/d	48.76
Malawi	0.31	0.26	53.85
Malaysia	0.78	0.42	36.82
Maldives	0.60	0.33	42.46
Mali	0.22	0.24	50.84
Malta	0.77	n/d	26.34
Martinique	n/d	n/d	46.87
Mauritania	0.34	0.18	44.10
Mauritius	0.75	0.42	31.32
Mexico	0.77	0.47	31.63
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	n/d	n/d	169.18
Moldova, Rep. of	0.61	n/d	49.36
Mongolia	0.65	n/d	45.36
Morocco	0.52	0.30	35.12
Mozambique	0.26	0.43	49.24
Myanmar	0.47	n/d	44.75
Namibia	n/d	n/d	40.69
Nepal	0.32	n/d	40.51
Netherlands	0.90	0.66	39.90
Netherlands Antilles	n/d	n/d	42.44
New Zealand	0.92	0.72	43.80
Nicaragua	0.52	n/d	36.47
Niger	0.19	n/d	44.73
Nigeria	0.37	n/d	36.06
Norway	0.93	0.80	45.61
Oman	n/d	n/d	14.62
Pakistan	0.39	0.19	28.46
Panama	0.80	0.46	33.74
Papua New Guinea	0.51	0.23	41.65
Paraguay	0.65	0.34	29.40
Peru	0.66	0.42	28.60
Philippines	0.65	0.46	36.61

Gender Equity			
	Gender Development index (GDI)	Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	Percentage of female labour force out of total labour force (FLF)
Poland	0.82	0.43	45.79
Portugal	0.85	0.56	42.90
Puerto Rico	n/d	n/d	35.26
Qatar	0.71	n/d	11.56
Reunion	n/d	n/d	42.38
Romania	0.73	n/d	44.44
Russian Federation	0.78	n/d	48.56
Rwanda	n/d	n/d	51.34
Saudi Arabia	0.58	n/d	12.34
Senegal	0.31	n/d	41.85
Sierra Leone	0.16	0.27	36.67
Singapore	0.85	0.42	36.81
Slovakia	0.86	n/d	47.82
Slovenia	0.87	n/d	44.90
Solomon Islands	n/d	0.20	46.95
Somalia	n/d	n/d	42.93
South Africa	0.68	0.53	37.41
Spain	0.87	0.54	36.24
Sri Lanka	0.69	0.31	35.75
Sudan	0.31	0.23	29.60
Suriname	n/d	0.46	32.26
Swaziland	0.56	0.37	35.52
Sweden	0.93	0.78	47.75
Switzerland	0.87	0.64	40.91
Syrian Arab Rep.	0.65	n/d	26.87
Tajikistan	0.58	n/d	45.27
Tanzania, U. Rep. of	0.35	n/d	49.48
Thailand	0.81	0.42	46.99
Togo	0.34	0.18	40.46
Trinidad and Tobago	0.84	0.57	36.85
Tunisia	0.67	0.26	30.06
Turkey	0.74	0.25	35.65
Turkmenistan	0.71	n/d	42.21
Uganda	0.32	n/d	52.82
Ukraine	0.68	n/d	48.78
United Arab Emirates	0.73	0.24	10.74
United Kingdom	0.90	0.54	43.14
United States	0.93	0.67	45.63
Uruguay	0.84	0.41	40.41
Uzbekistan	0.66	n/d	46.16
Vanuatu	n/d	n/d	n/d
Venezuela	0.79	0.39	33.33
Viet Nam	0.55	n/d	50.16
Yemen	n/d	n/d	27.22
Yugoslavia, FR (Serbia/Montenegro)	n/d	n/d	41.80
Zambia	0.36	0.30	47.35
Zimbabwe	0.50	0.43	45.65

1 Average for industrial countries.

2 Average for high income countries.