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**YOUTH, GENDER AND SOCIAL
PROTECTION: REBUILDING SYSTEMS
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

TWO GENERATIONS SURVIVING AUSTERITY

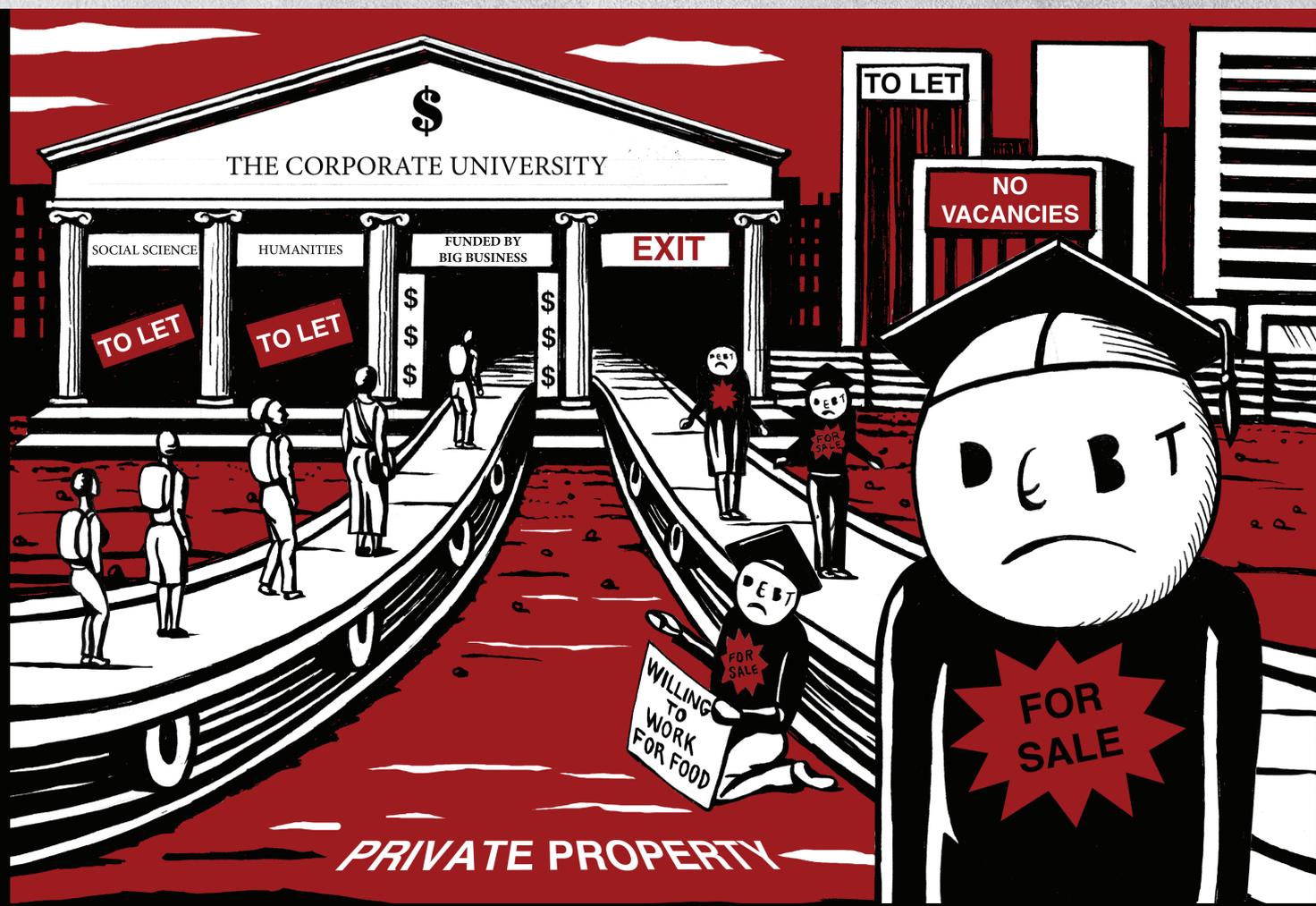
As the world gears up to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, challenges facing young people are high on the agenda.

Two generations of young people—Millennials born in the 1980s, and Generation Z born in the 2000s—have lived through an era of failed trickle down neoliberal theories, relentless austerity and imbalanced globalisation. Millennials were born into the first decade of structural adjustment programmes, often called ‘the lost decade’. Generation Z was born into the Great Recession of 2008 and have grown up through a second ‘lost decade’ of austerity, while the richest 1% have cornered 82% of the world’s wealth. The prospects for young women and men’s access to education, decent work, affordable health care and housing are grim. We have to do better.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have considerable say in what governments do in terms of policy, including

prescribing minimalist approaches to social protection, and so countries’ policy space to develop their economies according to democratic principles is seriously hampered by austerity, privatisation and forms of globalisation that privilege capital over people.

The one-size-fits-all austerity and privatisation conditionalities imposed by the IMF, World Bank and transnational capital limit the provision of social goods and services, concentrate profit, exploit labour, and put simply, transfer wealth from the public to private and from the poor to the rich. The neoliberal project, funnelled through the IMF and World Bank, is to ultimately retrench the state and reduce its remit to regulate global financial capital. This must be rejected.



WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATES: THREE DECADES OF SOCIAL PROGRESS

In order to reverse the economic, social and environmental disasters that have intensified in the first two decades of the 21st Century and to advance new paradigms toward 2030, we need to learn lessons from the successes and failures of the pre-neoliberal era, to the post-War and post-Independence era, when the world experienced an unprecedented three decades of very high rates of social progress through state interventions on economic and social policy.

Welfare states facilitate intergenerational and individual social mobility. A 2018 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹ report shows that in OECD countries, upward mobility for people with less educated parents tended to increase for people born between 1955 and 1975, but then stagnated for those born after 1975. Since the 1990s, a time of neoliberal ascendancy, the trend in social mobility has been negative.

Similarly, in a series of *Scorecards on Development* (2001, 2005 and 2015), the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), identified sharply slower rates of economic growth and reduced progress on social indicators in the vast majority of low and middle-income countries in the period of 1980-2000 compared to 1960-1980.

It is often forgotten that developmental states lent as much importance to human development as they did to economic growth since the one would not be possible without the other. Most policies were designed to achieve social and economic objectives on the basis of multi-sectoral integrated development plans for which an array of government departments, agencies and state-owned enterprises were set up.

Drawing lessons from seventy years of development policy analysis, the 2017 UN World Economic and Social Survey emphasises that development is both multidimensional and context specific, and driven by the structural transformation of countries towards economic diversification, stable growth and improved living standards.

It is ironic, therefore, that the World Bank and IMF have been wilfully disregarding demonstrable evidence of the role of welfare and developmental states in the Global North and South in advancing social progress and promoting policies that do the opposite, that too in the name of progress.

Despite the persistence of the World Bank and IMF on pushing further State spending cuts on social protection, particularly universal social protection, no government should abdicate its primary responsibility to provide social protection to all citizens, including by passing the buck to private entities. History has shown that scaled up social protection through free or affordable health care and education for all and/or social security benefits (eg. unemployment benefits and pensions) and employment centred economic policies have contributed to progress in both developed and developing countries.

Indeed, numerous UN agencies and civil society organisations have equally emphasised the need to bring back long term and proactive state involvement and ramped up public investment in order to address the youth crisis, entrenched extreme and working poverty as well as to build resilience against climate change.

1. OECD 2018. A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/broken-elevator-how-to-promote-social-mobility_9789264301085-en



FILLING THE GAPS IN SOCIAL PROTECTION COVERAGE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Even as global demography has shifted in favour of young people, governments have fallen short on their commitments to young people precisely because they follow policy prescriptions that have created multiple crises that young people are now forced to confront. Looking towards the future, states are faced with a fundamental contradiction between policies that fulfil their human rights obligations on the one hand, and one the other those that give priority to the demands of mainly multinational capital.

The challenges of youth unemployment, economic instability and climate change, and the commitments to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for much more investment in the public sector, greater pressure from citizens and an end to the dogma of 'small government at all costs'.

Furthermore, the rollout of the Social Protection Floor Initiative and the inclusion of universal

social protection in the SDG targets provide an opportunity to close gaps in social protection coverage for young people by designing policies that address their specific needs over and above the general benefits of social protection. If successful, this initiative could make a significant difference to reducing the high levels of youth poverty and insecurity. Social protection uses a life cycle approach, and young people have differentiated interests, needs and circumstances requiring responsive policies. The first step will be to collect much better age and gender disaggregated data that informs the formulation and implementation of policies.

Young people should not simply be seen as beneficiaries of services. Governments should open opportunities for them to participate in their delivery through public sector employment that ensures decent work, lifelong skills development and professional mobility that nurtures public leaders of the highest standard.

TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE FOR TODAY'S YOUNG GENERATIONS

Universal social protection programmes provide a foundation for a solidarity and a rights-based social contract with young people as they transition into adulthood. In order to be sustainable, social protection has to be part of an agenda for social, economic and ecological justice which seeks to overturn the destructive neoliberal status quo that the IMF and World Bank are steadfast in maintaining.

To build a better future for today's young generations, the forces of exclusion, precarity, inequality and jobless growth produced by the current models of neoliberal globalisation have to be stopped.

The only way to push for change is through people power and new types of leaders: young people have proved they can be catalysts and leaders for positive change. It is a cross generational responsibility to make sure that happens.



AN EYE ON THE INVISIBLE: YOUNG WOMEN, CARE WORK AND DECENT JOBS

Women in the labour market under trade liberalisation regimes that promoted global value chains in agriculture, textile export processing zones and tourism, now find themselves in double jeopardy. On one hand, they are faced with greatly reduced state social services like health, which support their unpaid care responsibilities. On the other hand, paid employment in the global care or value chains offer little or no security, and are largely defined as indecent jobs according to International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards under its decent work agenda. To keep costs down, employers prefer flexible contracts which offer no job security, nor contributory social security benefits, maternity or parental leave.

Largely done by women, unpaid care work has been given no economic value and little recognition. Likewise, paid care work is also invisible, underpaid, exploitative, insecure and unregulated, mostly falling outside of labour laws and protections, thus devoid of social security.

Yet the care economy is growing. The ILO estimates there are at least 67 million domestic workers over the age of 15 worldwide, 80% of whom are women. About 17% of domestic workers are migrant workers. According to ILO, paid domestic work employs about 14% and 11% of women in Latin America and Asia respectively². The global care chains employing mostly young migrant women from the Global South are a direct result of structural adjustment programmes and drastic spending cuts for public services.

As public provisioning of care is withdrawn by the state, women are forced to pay for care and domestic services in order to enter or stay in the labour market. Care work is therefore displaced onto poorer and poorer women, from the global north to the global south, and from

urban to crises-ridden rural areas. Since it is largely migrant women from the Global South who step in to fill the care gap left by the state, global care chains are inherently racialised and gendered, characterised by exploitative and precarious conditions.

Care work – both paid and unpaid, as well as the global value chain sectors which are among the biggest employers of women, need to be recognised and a critical eye kept on these employers to ensure the redistribution of care tasks and social protection measures, including labour standards, between the government, market, society and men and women. This should be in line with the ILO's Decent Work agenda³.

For young women, their invisible household care burdens as daughters, spouses or wives, access to good health services or care facilities, and lack of decent work conditions all create barriers to the enjoyment of their rights, often multiplying the risk of violence and abuse in the workplace and home. Well-funded universal social protection floors can go a long way to opening up new pathways of empowerment, to start with by reducing their disproportionate levels of time poverty and giving them better control over their lives.

Rolling out universal Social Protection Floors as a basic minimum to ensure social justice requires action on multiple fronts, not only economic policy, but also various types of social discrimination and exclusion against disadvantaged groups of adolescent and young people - women, people of colour, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and LGBTIAQ+ people.

To be transformative for young women, social protection policy must address multiple and intersecting discriminations based on gender, sexuality, age, race, religion, class and caste that perpetuate multiple inequalities.

2. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/domestic-workers/lang--en/index.htm>

3. Four goals are: 1) creating decent and productive employment 2) promoting access to social protection systems 3) respect for core labour standards; 4) social dialogue. Gender is a cross-cutting goal.



EXPANDING FISCAL SPACE FOR UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

Understanding social protection as a transformative economic and political project to realise adolescent and young adults' right to self-determination is key to its success. Social protection is not charity, a handout nor an act of kindness, it is a human right ⁴.

Globally, however, only 29% of people enjoy access to comprehensive social security. The majority of the 71% who do not are located in the developing world. It is widely recognised that large numbers of young people either have no social protection at all or their right to social security is progressively constrained by roll backs in social benefits, or precarious and informal work.

Evidence shows that a commitment of just 1–2% of GDP or 5-10% of national budgets would be enough to provide everyone with a minimum standard of social security, challenging IMF and World Bank notions that basic social security schemes are unaffordable for poor countries, or indeed wealthier countries with large poor populations.

The IMF's stance on social protection has also been harshly criticised by an open letter signed by seven UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs⁵. The Special Rapporteurs noted that the IMF's preference has been for

targeted means-tested social support for the poorest – an approach its own staff found to be more expensive and inefficient compared to a universal approach. Moreover, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) in its 2017 report, *The IMF and Social Protection* states that the IMF's preferred choice of expert advisory support is the World Bank and, despite guidelines for collaboration with the ILO on labour market and social protection issues issued in 1996, many staff interviewed for the evaluation were unaware of these guidelines⁶.

Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights recently argued that “to date, the IMF has been an organization with a large brain, an unhealthy ego, and a tiny conscience. If it takes social protection seriously, rather than making a tokenistic commitment to minimal safety nets, it can show the world that it has actually learned from its past mistakes.”⁷

Social protection is highly affordable by almost all states – developing and developed – and is already being implemented in many countries, some with significant successes at reducing poverty and offering opportunities for youth. The ILO's reviews of fiscal space have found many examples of ways that governments have themselves been innovative in creating fiscal space to finance social protection floors⁸.

4. The right to social security is a long established right in international human rights standards. In 1948, most the world's countries affirmed the right to social security in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and again in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC), and again in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. Complementing these and other relevant human rights instruments, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention 1952 has been given further effect through the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) to provide guidance on the establishment of social security systems.
5. UNOCHR Special Procedures 2017 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Development/IEDebt/Open_Letter_IMF_21Dec2017.pdf
6. Tan, Ling Hui. | International Monetary Fund. | International Monetary Fund. Independent Evaluation Office. Washington, DC : International Monetary Fund, 2017
7. Alston P. 2018. Report to the Human Rights Council of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourcePDF.action?id=55137>
8. Ortiz I., Cummins M. and Karunanethy K. Fiscal Space for Social Protection and the SDGs: Options to Expand Social Investments in 187 Countries International Labour Office. - Geneva: ILO, 2017 (Extension of Social Security Series No. 48) https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_383871.pdf



REBUILDING SYSTEMS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

We need to:

- ✦ **Bring back long term and proactive state involvement, build state capacity and ramp up public investment** so states can deliver on their primary constitutional and international human rights obligations. This will help address the entrenched youth crisis, extreme and working poverty, and climate change, resulting from receding states capacity and intervention. Robust and effective social systems require the necessary institutional capacity of both national and local state agencies. This includes ensuring that institutions have the necessary financial and human resources to deliver those services.
- ✦ **Recognise social protection as a human right and roll out universal Social Protection Floors as a basic minimum to ensure social justice.** To be transformative for young women, social protection policy must address multiple and intersecting discriminations based on gender, sexuality, age, race, class and caste that perpetuate multiple inequalities.
- ✦ **End austerity and create fiscal space to finance universal social protection floors.** National governments must commit between 1–2% of GDP or 5–10% of their budgets to provide every person within their jurisdiction with a minimum standard of social security. These can be financed by expanding fiscal space through diverse measures, including, re-allocating public expenditures; increasing progressive tax revenues; eliminating illicit financial flows; adopting a more accommodative macroeconomic framework.
- ✦ **End privatisation of public services and scale up public financing for universal, free and accessible public services,** including services to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work. A priority of revitalised public services agenda must be the elimination of gendered inequality of opportunity, particularly through ramped up support to the care economy and genuine valuing of women's labour that goes to sustain it. This must be supported by decent work in public sector, by ending wage bill caps and job cuts.
- ✦ **Close gaps in social protection coverage for young people** by designing policies that address the specific needs of young people over and above the general benefits of social protection.

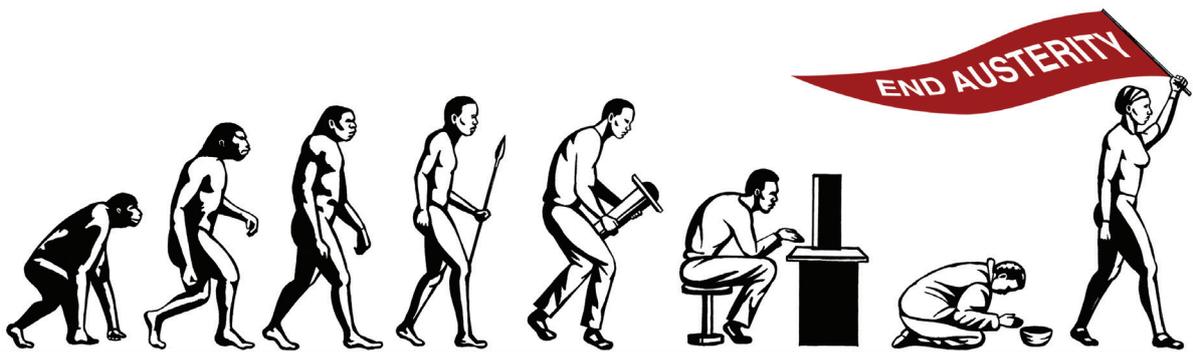


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REVOLUTION



social protection is a right