

SHORT SUMMARY

RETHINKING SOCIETY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

INTERNATIONAL PANEL ON SOCIAL PROGRESS

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After four years of work, the **International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP)** has launched its report on “**Rethinking Society for the 21st century**” in **July 2018**. The report recognizes a global loss of faith in both socialism and capitalism since the 1990’s and therefore dares to ask existential questions about the roots within our societies, striving for an answer to the question in what kind of society we want to live in. The report includes not only insights from the whole variety of social sciences but also perspectives from all geographical and cultural backgrounds. The report sees current progress threatened by several challenges and wishes to address these in order to benefit a wide majority of the world’s population. It acknowledges that there is a vast amount of different ideas and perspectives on how to create progress that can be applied to different contexts.

The report contains two introductory and two concluding chapters, with three main parts in between. These three main parts successively deal with socio-economic, political, and cultural issues, each one of them providing an outline on the main issues being discussed in the respective area.

This short summary includes the main conclusions of each chapter as well as emphasizing possible applications for the pacific region in particular. There will be a conclusion of these applications by use of reference to the “State of Pacific Regionalism” Report which was published by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in 2017.

As there have been innumerable opinions on what social progress is ultimately determined by, the introductory defines social progress as a development that includes “equal dignity, basic rights, democracy, the rule of law, pluralism, well-being, freedom, non-alienation, solidarity, esteem and recognition, cultural goods, environmental values, distributive justice, transparency and accountability”.

While the human race has never had more possibilities, it also faces “severe challenges due to growing inequalities, political conflict and environmental threats”. The report names a

market that is detached from social development as the biggest obstacle to social progress. While some of the dominant political actors of the 20th century seem to be on decline, the report identifies new actors that have emerged over the past years.

The first part treats socio-economic transformation.

The report considers wide inequality in income and wealth as an intrinsically retarding social progress while simultaneously emphasizing that there are multiple forms of inequality, such as inequality in resources, opportunities and capabilities, which have to be addressed just as much. The report also emphasizes the negative impact of inequality on social cohesion and the number of social conflicts. It names three ways to act against financial inequality: Policies that support the poor and vulnerable, policies that foster a wide and strong middle class, and policies that redistribute wealth from the top to the bottom. Actors in the Pacific should therefore try to address all forms of inequality and elaborate strategies that meet the requirements of individual contexts.

The report points out the various implications economic growth has had on the environment, social organization, and the creation and (unequal) distribution of wealth. It advises policymakers to mitigate these negative effects while preserving the positive ones. Here again, the report emphasizes the importance of facing the different forms of inequality. It also favors the protection of the environment, which appears especially considerable for Pacific decision-makers in sight of climate change and the depletion of natural resources. The report furthermore approaches another major trend, urbanization. It stresses the duality of cities, visible in their contribution to the shaping of our societies but also as obstacle to social equity. It also sees cities as spaces with the highest gender inequality, structurally neglecting women's rights.

The next segment provides an overview over modern capitalism, with a focus on institutions and corporations. It acknowledges that both of them can contribute to and inhibit social progress. It notes the huge wealth created by modern capitalism as well as the inequality that went along with this. The report points out that inequality in wealth also creates inequality in access to resources and opportunities. It considers corporations capitalist institutions that have increasingly aimed at delivering value for their shareholders instead of the common population. This idea has increased inequality globally. In possible regards to the Pacific region, the report points out how natural resources in the Global South are being extracted by multinational corporations. It also criticizes the unbalance of power between the North and the South that is reflected in the multiple global financial institutions. This unbalance has also contributed to rising inequality. The report mentions the importance of the state's role in modern capitalism. It shows the diminishing interventions of states in economical processes since the 1980s and suggests new ways of strengthening the state's potential to influence corporations. The chapter concludes that corporations are inhibiting social progress intrinsically by their structure and demands a reform which delivers progress for all people and not only the corporation's stakeholders.

The next part of the report treats questions of employment and work in general. The report states that employment is exposed to structural change driven by two main factors:

Whereas technology and globalization shape the future of work quite asymmetrically depending on the respective context, demographic change has had special impact in terms of a diversification of social groups who are getting employed. The integration of women, older workers and migrants in the labor market has had various implications, one of them being increased discrimination in the labor market. The report recommends anti-discrimination rules and increased influence on social patterns. New types of employment require workers to be increasingly flexible. Both employees and employers must be supported in their socially acceptable adjustment to this trend. Collective bargaining is named an effective tool in negotiations to work out better working conditions. The report stresses the importance of skill formation at all stages of education, with special importance coming to early childhood education which is considered insufficient in many medium and low income countries. Early childhood education is of special importance to the creation of equal opportunities and independent lives outside poverty. The report also states that the various forms of unemployment policies can turn into another factor of rising inequality between different social groups. It does not expect technological progress to reduce the demand for labor. It concludes by recommending policy makers to support the required flexibility of workers while guaranteeing standards of working conditions, non-discrimination and further skill formation in coverage of all types of work.

Finally, the first part of the report treats the topic of social justice, well-being and economic organization. The report sees the world threatened by a plutocratic elite becoming more and more dominant. It refers to the so called Easterlin paradox that indicates that a rise in income does not cause a rise in subjective well-being, which is depending stronger on relative wealth in comparison with other members of a society. The report emphasizes the feature of markets as indispensable part of economic processes but simultaneously stresses the variety of other economic systems apart from the dominating neo-liberal one. It presents a short draft to an alternative system of economic principles, with equality as key to social development. The cornerstones of this system are built by wage compression, universal welfare programs, asset redistribution, and the democratic governance of firms. The report furthermore challenges several persisting economic dogmas. It does not agree that globalization is a fundamental obstacle to egalitarian policies, seeing the state in numerous possible roles as actor towards redistribution. On the other side, it acknowledges certain trends in the Global North concerning migration that might threaten social cohesion. The report shows strong doubts about the persistent existence of the prevailing economic system, even believing to see first signs of a “change of heart within the economic discipline”. It recommends “a more progressive income tax, a global tax on wealth, and a global basic income” as possible actions that could be taken, showing awareness of the much higher global governance that would be required to enforce them. Pacific decision-makers could question prevailing economic patterns in their own context on the base of the report’s conclusions while trying to advocate for such changes in international institutions.

The second part of the report deals with political reformation, governance and societal transformations.

It begins with a chapter about the paradoxes of democracy and the rule of law. The report sees unequal distribution of wealth as trigger for the crisis of legitimacy because this inequality has caused unequal opportunities in terms of the capacities to influence public decision making. Neo-liberalism has not only attacked key institutions of democracy but even threatens the coincident growth of economy, equality, the rule of law and democracy that was originally promised. According to the report, the “very conception of democracy as liberal democracy” is put under pressure. The predominant neo-liberal concentration on corporate profits over public good has, in combination with the previous named factors, triggered a crisis of representation within democracies. And still, the report criticizes that “fundamental issues of inequality” remain unaddressed. The report also considers several processes of economic domination to prevent judiciary from fulfilling their allocated tasks. Still, alternative visions of democracy which prefer participation and deliberation over delegation and majority decisions have been developed.

The report emphasizes the negative effects of violence on social progress. Despite a rise of armed conflict since the early 2000's, the overall number of armed conflicts and weapons in development has declined. Still, the report sees little chances to further reduce the spread of nuclear weapons in particular, even though it stresses the huge importance of both nuclear and ordinary disarmament. However, the report also emphasizes that all forms of inequality and marginalization, including gender inequality, increase the risk of violence in all forms, right up to civil wars. In sight of the current gender equality situation in many pacific states, this point should be given special concern.

The next chapter addresses various types of international organizations, intergovernmental organizations in particular. The report criticizes the domination of a few countries from the Global North who structurally oppress the wishes and needs of other countries. Still, the relationship between the Global North and the Global South remains utterly complex. Communication between international organizations and such on lower geographical levels depict a huge challenge, as well as limited financial funding.

The report furthermore analyzes the main powers by which our world is governed. Governance is hereby defined as “the exercise of power organized around multiple dispersed sites operating through transnational networks of actors”. The chapter wants to challenge the associations with governance of our time which mainly focus on a loss of governmental control in various fields due to the increase of neo-liberal policies. The chapter then addresses the multiple other ways of how governance can be understood and implicated, referring to matters of finance, investment, trade, labor and environment. Details can be taken from the original report or the IPSP's executive summary (links provided at the end of this document).

The next chapter deals with the topic of media and communications. “Media” is being referred to as “technologies for the production, dissemination, and reception of communication”. The report acknowledges the necessity of equal access to media for social equity and is aware of the huge expenditure of media over the past decades. The report stresses the diverse and even controversial implications media can have on its users, depending on the context. Pacific decision-makers should be aware of this. The report is

particularly referring to the following features of media: Increasing power of corporations over governments by power over media, the importance of equal access to media, the impact on citizens' daily life, and concerns regarding surveillance and environmental costs. The full version contains an action plan listing various measures.

The final chapter of the second part treats several questions, problems and possible solutions regarding inequality and democracy. This chapter sets out the main principles on which democracy is based, simultaneously asking how these abstract principles can be applied to the complex reality we live in. It names *public equality* as one of the main principles, which, generally speaking, means that democracy aspires to create a society in which all citizens are treated equally, with the same equal rights and opportunities. The report also names the main challenges to democracy in the 21st century, being all types of inequality, some implementations of globalization, and possible threats through science and technology. Again, the unequal distribution of wealth as impediment to equal decision making is stressed. This very short summary should not deceive over the enormous complexity of the topic that is treated more intensely in the original versions.

The final one of the three main parts of the report deals with Transformations in Values, Norms and Cultures.

First of all, it addresses social progress and cultural change. The chapter discusses how a general definition of social progress as done in the report could be applied to the variety of different cultures without universalizing them. It discounts the prevailing theory that modern trends like higher education, literacy, urbanization etc. invariably lead to a strictly individualized society as the Western democracies are considered to be today. Instead, the report argues that human beings naturally strive for social networks to move in and that not only modernization can lead to a perversion of individualism (e.g. fascism, Stalinism), but also that societies which rely on collectivism can result in both progressive and pathological forms. These findings leads the report to the conclusion that social progress does not necessarily cause a loss of traditions and dis-embedding of individuals. Additionally, various forms of progressive societies are possible, following the theory of "multiple modernities". The report also states that the prevailing core assumptions of modernization theory have caused now excluded cultures to develop new forms of society to protect their original culture and identity. The report also concludes that this currently dominating modernization theory can inhibit intercultural understanding and learning intrinsically. Still, the question remains how to develop general principles that can help achieve social progress despite of the enormous diversity of the current cultures. Of special interest to Pacific Islanders can be the segment of this chapter that treats the question on how to realize gender equality without losing key elements of the previous cultures. The executive summary is here referring to a detailed case study of Islamic law that is provided in the full version but could still serve as inspiration for other leaders around the globe.

The next chapter of the report deals with religions and social progress. The report numerates several reasons for the persisting importance of this topic: A vast majority (80%, number growing) of the world's population identifies with some kind of religious practice,

religion has impact on social, public and civic life, and religion can serve as important promoter for several goals which facilitate social progress that are shared with secular groups. Thus, religion can be called neither inherently peaceful and social progress-promoting nor inherently violent and progress-inhibiting. The report recommends strong partnerships between religious and secular groups who share similar goals, while simultaneously warning of the danger of inter-religious conflicts. Additionally, the report emphasizes the potential of religion to inspire people as promoter for social conflict, which could be of utter relevance for Pacific church leaders. The executive summary literally states: *“policy makers pursuing social progress will benefit from careful attention to the power of religious ideas to motivate, of religious practices to shape ways of life, of religious communities to mobilize and extend the reach of social change, and of religious leaders and symbols to legitimate calls to action”* (Page 46).

A similarly important role to people's lives is held by family ties. Here, the report focuses mainly on the question how the necessary balance between income and care within a family can be ensured in the 21st century, and how families themselves can flourish without limiting the potential of individuals to maintain “agency, equality and dignity”. The report emphasizes the diverse – positive as well as negative - effects family bonds can have on individuals that derive from families' outstanding role in their lives.

The report states that the juridical and social situation in terms of gender equality has tendentially improved. It emphasizes the importance of financial support by the government for families with children. Preventive measures are strongly recommended when children are to be protected. The report also recommends to support all types of close relationships and to provide public goods like health, education etc. in order to facilitate the balance already addressed above. A strong inheritance tax is named as measure to diminish inequality between families.

The report furthermore draws a global comparison in terms of the “contours of human life”, which, according to the report, include “childhood and adolescence, reproduction, the experiences of health, illness, disability and death”. The report constitutes a massive inequality between different regions regarding the self-determination and well-being of individuals during these contours.

The report also discusses the contribution of education to social progress. Fostering humanistic, civic, and economic progress by its multiple features, education is considered to be a “central tool for social progress”. The report sees the purpose of education to not only convey mere knowledge, but also to clearly emphasize its civic and humanistic focus. The executive summary contains an extra box regarding the historical and philosophical roots of these purposes. By expanding access to and improve the quality of education in all stages of life, from early childhood to higher and vocational education, an increase in equality, dignity and productivity can be ensured. Special emphasize is put on the role of teachers as educators. The report recommends to make use of the possibilities of new technologies without considering it a universal remedy.

The last chapter of the third and last main part treats the matter of belonging. It is argued

that belonging can have three dimensions: First, a mostly subjective way of identifying oneself, by which an individual expresses a feeling of belonging to a certain social group. Second, belonging as solidarity can lead to a mobilization with other people who share similar political goals or cultural and social backgrounds. Third, belonging in the meaning of some form of un-alienated life constitutes a condition in which the individual overcomes the prevailing trend towards extreme individualist mentality which allows him to act cooperatively towards a common good. Social progress is promoted when these three dimensions hold a relationship with identity as driving factor, supported by social cohesion and solidarity which is caused by solidarity and un-alienation, that becomes “more rather than less inclusive”. Governmental action and democratic mobilization as tools to increase solidarity within a society are considered fundamental in the building and maintaining of this relationship. The full version includes more specific and detailed conclusions. The chapter ends with the thesis that the ideal of belonging is fundamental to all modern philosophical theories and must therefore not be lost if social progress as the pursuit of liberty and equality is still to be promoted.

The report ends with two concluding chapters.

The first one deals with the multiple directions of social progress. It emphasizes the different concepts of progress and elaborates why some developments have created progress in one area but inhibited it in another. The report uses the examples of financial governmental support, gender equality, and the creation and distribution of economic growth in regards to its environmental effects. It sees the uneven distribution of wealth as incorporated by modern forms of capitalism, but fails to give answers why other forms of inequality prevail. The report emphasizes the effect uneven distribution of assets can have on democratic processes and demands to have the market serve the needs of democracy instead of being the overall measure for progress. The report also names two alternatives to current policies: A Global Basic Income (GBI) and “Democracy by lot”, meaning that some democratic representatives are not selected by election, but by random election. Pacific policy makers can deliberate in which extend these suggestions could be applied to their respective contexts.

The second concluding chapter deals with the contribution of the social sciences to policy and institutional change. Even though a major part contains (self-)reflections about the role of social sciences in a democracy, some interesting insights could still be taken from this chapter. First of all, the chapter treats six different policy domains - Economics; Education; Environmental Protection; Health Care; Development; and Science and Technology – regarding the possible help and historical influence for and on policy makers that social sciences have had in these respective domains. These questions can help decision makers evaluate their own possible benefits. Furthermore, the report points out some “key themes” that could be concluded: Special emphasize is put on the questionable role of markets in current capitalism and on the question of inequality. But the report also stresses the need for discussion and disagreement within social sciences – aware that this can also lead to problems when it comes to decision-making – and suggests that social sciences might play

an important role in the communication between leaders and population. The report also suggests that it can be social sciences in particular who provide information about democracy, participation etc. to counteract the growing mistrust in representation, expertise and science itself. Leaders might invest political capital in strengthened networks and cooperation, as far as such or similar problems can be applied to the respective context.

This short summary also contains a concluding chapter with separate applications for the Pacific regions. The suggestions which could be found during the previous parts of the summary are brought together to a cohesive picture of possible, useful advice that could be taken from the report. Base is the State of Pacific Regionalism Report 2017. The focus will lie on internal problems that can actively be changed instead of merely reacted upon, since “Rethinking society in the 21st century” also suggests applications for decision – makers who can actively influence these problems. The author of this short summary wants to alert readers that whereas the previous parts has been a mere summary of the IPSP’s original report, the possible applications for the Pacific are more likely to contain subjective evaluations of the author, even though it was certainly tried to convey the expected view of the IPSP as precisely as possible.

The State of Pacific Regionalism Report 2017 mainly addresses the following internal threats for the Pacific region: Depletion of natural resources, ongoing advances in technology, regional conflict, and rising inequality. This section will try to address the first three challenges by suggesting possible implications in the domains environmental protection, democracy and governance. Rising inequality will be addressed separately.

The report considers the increasing environmental destruction one of the existentially threatening challenges of the 21st century. It recommends a strong protection of the environment. It also explicitly warns of exploitations of natural resources in the Global South by multinational corporations. Based on this, Pacific States could question the cooperation with such enterprises, naturally depending on the particular case.

Furthermore, the threat to low-paid jobs by technology could be reacted upon by extended education: The IPSP’s report does not expect the overall amount of jobs to decline and emphasizes the importance of life-long education several times. Investment of political and financial capital in education seems advisable.

Several changes in the way democracy and governance are executed can be applied to the Pacific region: An increased participation in democratic processes, improved communication between leaders and population and more precise cooperation between organizations on different geographical levels are likely to foster social progress and inhibit social conflict. The apprehension mentioned in the State of Pacific Regionalism Report that the upcoming referenda might trigger conflict should not be seen as contradiction to the IPSP’s recommendations, as not the mere act of increased self-determination but the general circumstances of the referenda might be the reasons for conflict.

Gender inequality is not considered an outstanding possible trigger for regional conflict, yet the IPSP’s report mentions this several times.

Both the State of Pacific Regionalism as the IPSP's report address inequality as problem of utter importance. Pacific leaders should consider a great amount of political and financial capital in attempts to decrease gender inequality in the Pacific region. The IPSP's report clearly points out that gender equalities has serious negative impact on various fields that can both promote and in inhibit social progress. Naturally, all other forms of inequality should be addressed similarly.

Finally, the author of this short summary strongly recommends to read the executive summary, respectively parts of it, in order to get a more precise imagination of the models and recommendations developed by the IPSP in their report. The link for download, as has already been provided at the beginning of this summary, can be found here:

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