

GPSPD

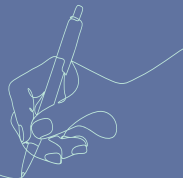
eHabari



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division

I wake up in the morning in a warm bed - join an online physical fitness class. Take a shower, order groceries from an online local market and cooperative, take the high-speed train to work to attend an important meeting, return home, work some more, get the medical reports for my grandma from telemedical doctor and have her medicines delivered via drones. In the evening, I have supper with family where my father tells us his story from the vocational school he is attending to learn new skills. Then, later in the evening, we all walk over to a public park to watch a concert, where we catch up with friends and other family members. Tomorrow after work, I will attend a skills-building class, where the elders and community leaders teach cultural heritage, crafts and sustainable living techniques.



This could be a normal day in the life of an average African by 2050. It is a dream where Africa's social life will be characterized by a harmonious blend of sustainability, accessibility, cultural richness, and strong community ties. People live in balance with nature and each other, valuing human connections and environmental stewardship and using technology for convenience and to enrich lived experiences. This approach creates resilient, vibrant, and inclusive communities where everyone thrives.

This requires planning and urgent action NOW.

This also requires overcoming the scars left by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, an additional 35 million people were pushed into extreme poverty – in a region that already houses more than half of the world's poor. And over 80 percent of the workers in the informal sector were left to fend for themselves.

(continue page 2)

“ People live in balance with nature and each other, valuing human connections and environmental stewardship and using technology for convenience and to enrich lived experiences. ”

This needs to change. That's why in "[Our Common Agenda](#)" the UN Secretary General calls for "[building new social contracts](#)," which include a strong emphasis on quality education for all, measures related to fair labour markets and fair taxation, Universal Health Coverage, and "a new generation" of social protection measures.

To turn this dream into a reality, our division has been working towards defining what that new social agenda looks like and how to frame social policies to achieve this dream. The timing couldn't be more appropriate as we are in the midst of reviewing many international compacts.

- In April/May 2024, we presented the 10-year review to the Conference on Population and Development. It also marked 30 years of the [International Conference on Population and Development](#) – a compact adopted in Cairo in 1994 that transformed global thinking on population and development issues and defined a bold agenda, placing people's dignity and rights at the heart of sustainable development. The regional review was done in collaboration with UNFPA and the AUC.

- In October 2024, we are presenting the 2nd review of the [Global Compact on Migration](#) – the compact was adopted in December 2018 in Marrakesh. It is the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. This is being done in partnership with IOM and the AUC.

There are two other significant milestones coming up in 2025:

- As the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) turns 30 next year, we will be presenting the regional review for Africa in October/November 2024. This review assesses the progress made on gender equality and women's empowerment in the last 5 years since the last review and identifies the gaps that exist still. This review is being done with the UN-Women and the AUC.
- The year 2025 marks 30-years since the [Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development](#). The Declaration represented a unique consensus on three key objectives of social development, namely, eradicating poverty,



promoting full and productive employment, and fostering social inclusion, and set out a holistic approach to achieve them. To commemorate this declaration, the [Second World Social Summit for Development](#) in November 2025 aims to reinvigorate support for the commitments made in Copenhagen, while also aligning with the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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First step to building a new social contract...

To educate or not to educate?

Following up on the UN Secretary General's Transforming Education Summit held in September 2022 and anticipating the theme of AU's 2024 Summit on "Educate an African fit for the 21st Century," for ECA's 5th Session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and gender (November 2-3, 2023), we drafted an issues paper that discussed how education could be used as a lever to build new social contracts.

Indeed, Goal 4, on access to high-quality education and lifelong learning, can be a catalyst in advancing other Goals. Equipped with the right knowledge and skills, people can make informed decisions, pursue healthy lives and respond to national and global development challenges. Education is therefore a smart entry point for tackling other Goals (see figure I).

With spending on education below the level recommended by UNESCO for most countries and with much inefficiency in spending, there is a lot to gain by concentrating on this sector.

At the moment, the money that is spent does not reach the right people. For instance, according to UNESCO data on public spending, 37 per cent of educational resources reach the richest 20 per cent of children, while only 10 per cent reaches the poorest 20 per cent (figure II) In addition, many geographic and socioeconomic inequities prevent the full potential of many people from being harnessed. For instance, the odds of completing any of the three levels of education are stacked against rural dwellers and the poor (figure III). There is room to design

inclusive and equitable high-quality education policies that can improve the efficiency of these limited resources and help bridge the gap between rich and poor by ensuring lifelong learning opportunities for all. If directed correctly, education spending can also improve intergenerational mobility (figure IV).

While the effectiveness of the education system depends on various factors, we highlighted the **3 As** :

- **Affordability**
- **Accessibility, and**
- **Applicability**

– that are key in making education policies more efficient, equitable, and inclusive, and in addressing the structural barriers posed by poverty and inequality.



Affordability

- Education should be made more affordable by providing subsidies and cash transfers that can alleviate the financial burden on the poor.

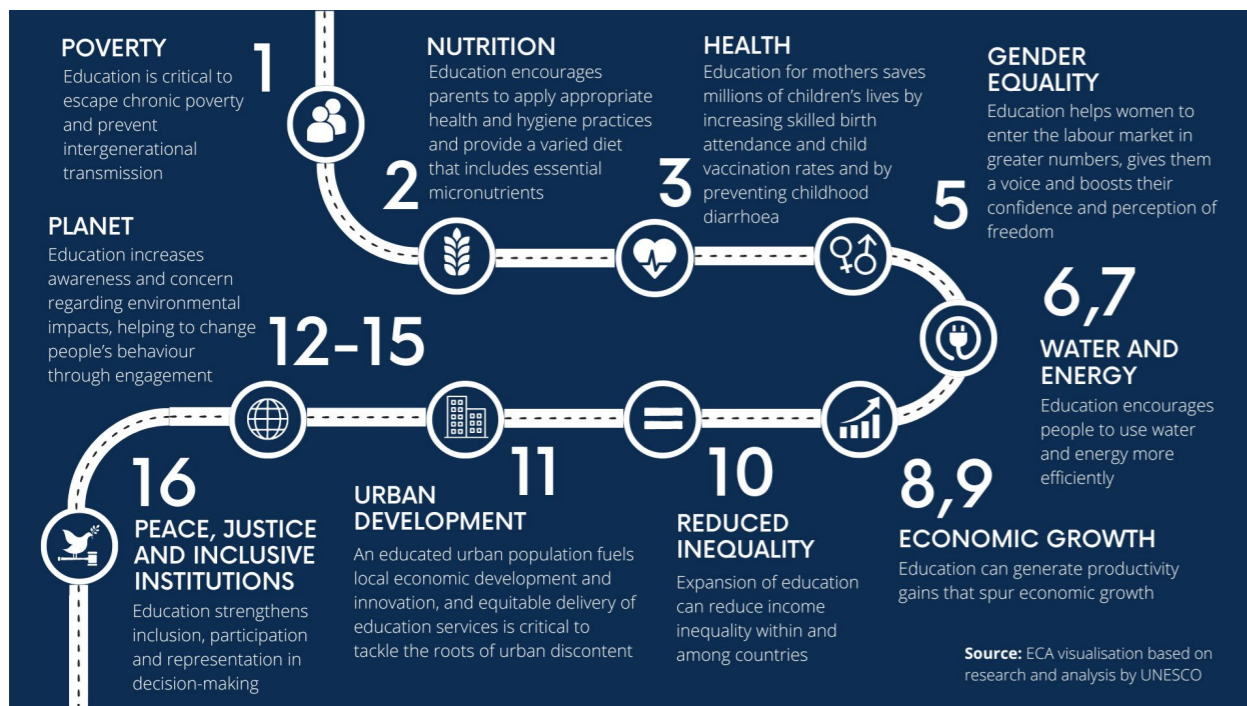
Accessibility

- To schools and services should be improved through better urban planning and transportation.

Applicability

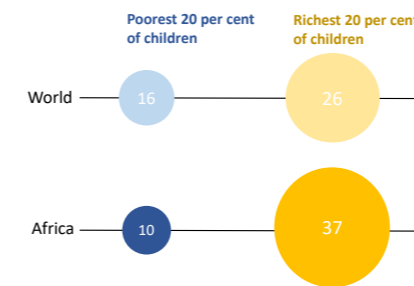
- Education programs should be redesigned to improve quality, strengthen institutional credibility, and align education with employable skills.

Figure I | Education as an anchor for other Sustainable Development Goals



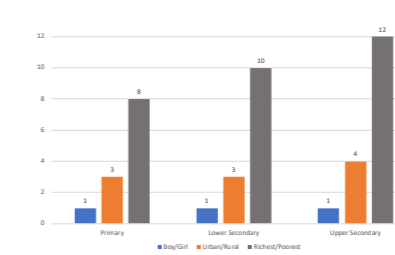
Source: ECA, adapted from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Sustainable development begins with education: how education can continue to the proposed post-2015 goals", 2014.

Figure II | Percentage of public education resources reaching the richest and poorest, 2019



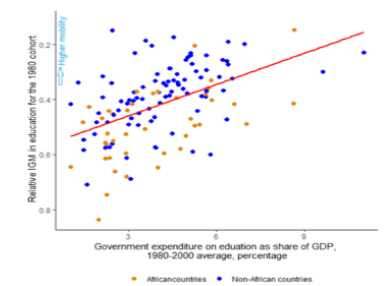
Source: ECA adapted from World Inequality Database on Education and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Figure III | School completion likelihood ratios in Africa



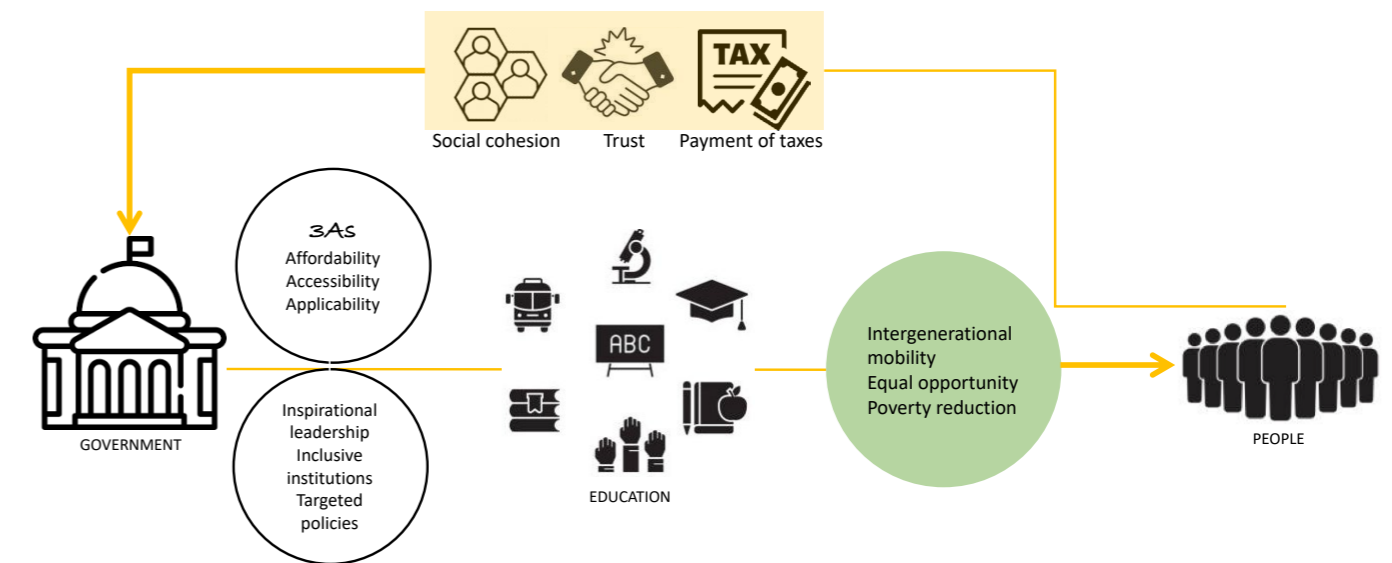
Source: UNICEF, Transforming Education in Africa: An Evidence-Based Overview and Recommendations for Long-term Improvements: Calculations based on data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
Note: Odds ratios measure a statistical correlation between demographic, location, household income and completion rate.

Figure IV | Relative intergenerational mobility in education and public expenditure on education



Source: ECA estimates-based World Bank (2018a) and Global Database on Intergenerational Mobility
Note: The red line is a fitted one.

Figure V | Conceptual Framework of dynamics for the redesign of the social contract in the education sector



Source: ECA visualization

It is also the right time to reflect on whether education curricula are fit for the jobs of the future. At a pan-African conference on education in 1960, African leaders had questioned whether colonial education was relevant for the development needs of Africa and called for action to be taken to ensure that education produced “human-level expertise” and graduates that could use technology “for social economic development and wealth creation”. Even as leaders are cognizant of the need to change the curricula, this would require strengthening the teaching and learning of the sciences and developing a mindset for social development. This task is daunting as it would

require investment in teacher development programmes, the review of school curricula at all levels, and new school infrastructure, including Internet access. However, it is not impossible given the impact it will have on future generations and the future of Africa.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint on how to build a new social contract through the education sector, it is quite clear that a symbiotic relationship is needed between Government and people (figure V). Governments are responsible for ensuring that people have the requisite skills for jobs. People, for their part, should pay their taxes to

provide their Governments with the means to deliver the services that enhance their well-being. Such a social contract would hinge on inspirational leadership, inclusive institutions and targeted policies. A robust social contract would involve all sectors of society, from children and young people to parents, from employers to teachers and researchers, and from activists to cultural and religious leaders. A whole-of-society approach will ensure a virtuous cycle of trust between each Government and its people, resulting in policies that deliver equal opportunities, create intergenerational mobility and reduce poverty.

**STAY
TUNED**

for more
on building new social contracts and improving the quality of education , among others, in our next edition...



OUR STAFF VOICES



In this edition, we feature our economist, Ms. Eyerusalem Siba, who has joined the Urbanization and Development Section recently. Her work cuts across all 3 sections of our division, namely, gender equality, social policy and urbanization.

Jalal: Welcome to the division! Let’s begin by traveling the road you took to get here.

Eyerusalem: Thanks for the warm welcome and it’s great to be here talking with you about my journey! Being the newest staff to ECA in GPSPD, I feel privileged to feature in the division’s inaugural newsletter. Prior to joining ECA as a Social Affairs Officer in the Urbanization and Development Section (UDS) of GPSPD, I was a Research Fellow at the Brookings Institution working on diverse aspects of African Development focusing on inclusive private sector development, sustainable urbanization and resilient trade and value chains, with gender and skills as crosscutting themes. I have also consulted for the AfDB, World Bank, OECD and AUC, UN Office of Special Advisor to Africa, and provided thought leadership to diverse impact investors and served as team task leader on projects related to these

topics, many of which are funded through competitive bidding. In my earlier professional life, I worked as a research fellow at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden where I did my PhD and MSc in Economics and lived for 10 years before I moved to the US in 2015.

Jalal: What has been the most rewarding journey so far?

Eyerusalem: I have worn multiple hats, moving from academia to a think-tank world and now at an international organization. Despite the challenges in these transitions, I have enjoyed my role in connecting the academic and the policy world. Through my writings, I have communicated complex research findings to a diverse and non-technical audience. I have enjoyed the thought leadership in engaging with impact investors and on the ground policy makers. This helps scholars like us ask the right questions and provide answers that are not



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only academically rigorous but are also relevant to our stakeholders on the ground and for the daily challenges of decision makers. I have enjoyed leading and being part of competitive bidding to raise funds for research and to pitch its impact, the process of which forces scholars to live through the project at inception stage and to ensure that critical enablers of real-world impact are in place. I have also quite enjoyed mentoring early career scholars and social leaders in programs such as Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI), Princeton's Internship in Civic Services, and various U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Programs. It was a pleasant surprise

to receive just last week an African traditional attire from Botswana from my former intern whom I hosted as part of YALI about 7 years ago.

Jalal: How can urbanization agenda be linked to no-poverty goal?

Eyerusalem: I am so glad you asked! This was a topic of one of my blogs, which was cited by the Economist in 2016. But let's first understand what is "Urbanization Agenda"? If one thinks of it from the angle of assisting inclusive structural transformation, where cities are melting pots for those migrating from rural to urban areas, then urbanization agenda has a

lot to offer in eradicating poverty globally. Not only from the perspective of productive job creation but also from the angle of reaping the benefits of Africa's demographic transition. But I would like to convince you or at least stress that "urbanization agenda" is also a way to see inclusive economic and social development through a spatial lens. Development doesn't happen in a vacuum! The way we govern, plan and manage places ultimately determines development outcomes in trade, investment and social development. If you are wearing your spatial lens, then spatial industrial policies, transformative place-based investments,

and orderly migration assistances are all intertwined with urbanization agenda that are indicative of triggers to pull to end poverty in Africa. This, of course, necessitates charting new models of governance for place-based and participatory leadership in which development meets where communities are.

Jalal: Do you believe that we can attain SDG Goal 1 and Goal 5 by 2030? What can we do to accelerate the progress?

Eyerusalem: I think team Keiso (at Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section) and team Saurabh (at Social Policy Section) are better placed to give succinct answers on how to end poverty and achieve gender equality by 2030. But it seems to me that a lot needs to happen in the next six years to achieve Goals 1 and 5, given the reversals of development for the past few years due to diversity of shocks, including a global pandemic, which has transformed us all in ways we didn't anticipate. From my experience as team-task leader of ending rural hunger and food security in Africa, better targeting of support programs, building community assets when

breaking into promising agri-businesses and related value chains, and better access to opportunity-hubs for those moving out of lagging regions are needed to fast-track progress and promote upward mobility of the bottom billion.

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 I invite readers to read my commentary on why some gender support programs, particularly for women entrepreneurs, fall short in developing countries.
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Again, reverting to the "Urbanization Agenda", my colleagues at UDS are working hard at decent job creation, urban social protection, accessibility, and inclusive and expanded local finance. I usually get fired up talking about gender issues drawing from research and lived experiences of being a working mother in diverse

settings of care-economy. We may run into deep conversations around shift in mind sets, collective actions, and upending historic systems of exclusionary structures, let me just end by saying that we shouldn't try to 'deliver' empowerment, rather we should promote agency and bottom-up leadership for women and girls for their rightful place in the world. I invite readers to read my commentary on why some gender support programs, particularly for women entrepreneurs, fall short in developing countries.

Jalal: What some policy agenda/ research could GPSPD advance in the coming years?

Eyerusalem: By virtue of being a newcomer, and not knowing that there is such a thing called Annual Business Plan, I developed a few pages on what I envision/ wish to contribute to GPSPD's agenda. Of course, during the first few weeks of onboarding I learned that GPSPD is doing great things to advance social and economic inclusion in Africa. I believe GPSPD could do even more especially in areas of decent and Productive job creation, Sustainability and Skills foresight, and

Transformative place-making (i.e. innovative models of place-based investment that build on community asset, promote joint-ownership of strategic assets, and foster social cohesion), to further advance inclusive social and economic development in the continent, leveraging forward looking knowledge products, deploying futures thinking around sustainability, and putting spatial lens to brainstorm multi-year and multi-disciplinary initiatives led by its great minds and inhouse capabilities.

Jalal: Any departing thought/final words?

Eyerusalem: In my professional career, I have benefited from support system around me from schoolteachers to professors to colleagues to impact investors who generously believed in my vision and my ability and invested their resources and time and supported me, even at times where I thought I failed, for that I am forever grateful! I raise four flags (Ethiopia, Denmark, Sweden and the United States) in my home as a reminder of the debt I owe to individuals and governments and for their



I believe GPSPD could do even more especially in areas of decent and Productive job creation, Sustainability and Skills foresight, and Transformative place-making



generous and unconditional investment in my education and career and personal development. I am looking forward to continuing to cultivate such relationships and learn from colleagues and to building partnerships on topics of common interest for a time well spent at UN ECA.

Jalal: Wish you a great and productive career at ECA, Eyerusalem.

Eyerusalem: Thanks so much and I look forward to my tenure here at GPSPD/ECA!



Last but not the least, please enjoy some of our blogs

[Money is Power: Leveraging Finance to Strengthen Women's Financial Resilience in Africa](#), April 25, 2024

[Sovereign Debt Risks hinder Africa's Developmental Aspirations](#), February 15, 2024

[Peace and Development: Do Megatrends Matter?](#) February 5, 2024

[Realizing Africa's development aspirations through education](#), November 28, 2023

[A New Social Contract for Africa's Developmental Aspiration: What Role Can Education Play?](#), October 27, 2023

[Forging a Social Contract for Reducing Poverty and Inequality in Africa](#), March 13, 2023

For further inquiries, please contact eca-gpspd-directors@un.org