



<https://www.socialdevelopment.net/>

<https://www.socialdevelopment.net/icsd-statement-on-social-development/>

INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

ICSD response to the Second World Summit for Social Development: Progress, gaps and actionable solutions

28 August 2025

Introduction

International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) is a non-profit organization comprising individuals and institutions, social development practitioners, scholars and students from multiple disciplines such as social work, social welfare, human services, development studies, and social sciences like sociology, politics and economics.

The ICSD is committed to the cause of social development and has contributed significantly to social development knowledge and practice, research, training and capacity building, both before and since the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development.

ICSD core values

The ICSD believes in and promotes the wellbeing of people worldwide. This recognizes their spiritual and cultural development, the need for religious harmony and peace as central to building a united world. Its core values are human rights, social justice, participation and people-centred development; capacity building of individuals and institutions and realizing the human potential; equal

THE INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

51 YEARS
1974–2025

Mission

To create and spread knowledge of social development

Vision

To be a leading international association dedicated to the study and advancement of the knowledge and practice of social development

Activities

- Convened 50 international conferences on various social development themes collaborating with leading universities, and government & non-government organizations
- Published 45 volumes of its flagship journal, *Social Development issues*, now fully online and free to the public (<https://www.socialdevelopment.net/sdi-articles-access>)

Status

In July 2025, the ICSD achieved special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

opportunities and access; antidiscrimination, security, diversity and solidarity.

Social development is inherently intersystemic, intersectoral and needs to be integrated in social and economic policies and programs to ensure comprehensive development across multiple dimensions and levels. Thus, **the ICSD embraces the values and principles of the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 on Social Development and wholeheartedly supports the Second World Summit for Social Development (SWSSD) in reaffirming its commitments to those values and goals.**

ICSD and the trajectory of social development

The trajectory of social development since the Copenhagen Declaration, through the Millenium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, shows that years of concerted efforts have significantly reduced poverty levels in many parts of the world. Human development indicators - such as education, health, gender, and life expectancy - show good progress, but much more remains to be achieved.

Progress and the drive for equality have been greatly hampered by the coronavirus pandemic, climate crisis, rising cost of living, conflicts and wars, religious intolerance, populism and the vulnerable situation of migrants and refugees. In addition, trade wars, distrust, socio-economic uncertainty, multi-dimensional poverty, and neo-colonial tendencies, have significantly constrained advances in social development.

The **Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development**, adopted in 1995 at the [World Summit for Social Development](#), is a landmark agreement that prioritizes people-centred development. It commits governments to tackling poverty, promoting full employment, and fostering social integration as key objectives. The declaration recognizes the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental factors for sustainable development.

Thus, the ICSD stands with the SWSSD to reaffirm its commitment to the social development approach and its values and goals, to identify and address gaps, and accelerate progress. The ICSD looks forward to contributing to the implementation of the final Political Declaration to be adopted at the SWSSD on 4 to 6 November, 2025.

In particular, **the ICSD affirms its commitment to advancing knowledge and innovative practices through research and actionable solutions that are proactive and responsive to the pressing challenges of our time:** poverty eradication and hunger; full productive employment and decent work for all; social integration; climate resilience and a just energy transition; and harnessing technology and artificial intelligence to advance social development.

About this consultative response

This consultative document is a response to the [Draft Political Declaration of the SWSSD](#). It aims to raise the voice of the ICSD and seeks to identify and address gaps in social development, and to advance its progress.

To proactively and constructively contribute to the SWSSD, the ICSD followed an inclusive process to develop this response. The ICSD Board appointed a committee, which conducted a special forum at the 24th ICSD Biennial International Conference to seek inputs for the SWSSD from ICSD members and the conference participants. The forum focused on the gaps and challenges encountered in implementing the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as additional commitments to be included in the SWSSD.

A few ICSD leaders participated in regional consultative meetings (Africa and the Asia-Pacific) organized by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. The deliberations and a draft resolution of the 11th ICSD Asia-Pacific branch conference were referenced. A representative of

the ICSD also participated in the 63rd session of the Commission for Social Development in New York from 10-14 February 2025. In crafting this response, the committee members have also drawn on their long and rich experience of social development in different contexts over the years.

The Draft Political Declaration to be adopted at the SWSSD was circulated to all ICSD members for their comment. The response below includes all the feedback received from members of the ICSD Executive Council and the Board of Directors who endorsed the document. The response is aligned with the three priorities and related cross-cutting issues that will be deliberated at the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Qatar, 4-6 November 2025.

This response is a synthesis of these contributions and serves as a basis to engage ICSD members and their organizations in the lead up to the Summit.

Commitment I. Eradication of Poverty

- a. **One hundred and seventeen governments across the world adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and committed themselves to the goal of eradicating poverty** in all its forms as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. National economic and social protection policies and strategies were to be developed to tackle the root causes of poverty.

The causes and extent of poverty

- b. **Poverty and hunger remain a pressing global concern caused by multiple structural and systemic factors** including wars, conflict, forced migration, global warming and climate change and its impact, intolerance to cultural diversity and inequity around the world.
- c. **Considerable strides have been made in reducing extreme poverty** (defined as living on \$2.15 per day) from 37.9% in 1990 to 8.5% of the world's population in 2024¹. Likewise, a similar proportion, 8.2% of the world's population experience hunger².
- d. Poverty levels are highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. In some regions of the world reversals occurred due to weak economic growth, limited job opportunities, rising conflict, inflation and external shocks like the coronavirus pandemic that pushed 73 million people into extreme poverty. Recovery levels have been uneven while the world's poorest countries have not recovered from the impact of the pandemic. **Projections are that 7.5% of the world's population will remain in extreme poverty by 2030 and that the SDG target of zero poverty and zero hunger is unlikely to be met.**

The impact of poverty

- e. Many people still live near the poverty line and remain vulnerable to falling back into extreme poverty even **when exposed to minor socio-economic shocks**.
- f. **Besides income poverty, more people continue to experience poverty when a multidimensional poverty lens is applied.** Approximately one billion individuals or 13.5% of the world population experience multidimensional poverty³. This is due to weaknesses in health, education and social service systems, persistent discrimination and cumulative social disadvantage that limit the development of people's coping capacities, resilience and human capabilities making it difficult to exit out of poverty. These factors deepen economic and social inequality.

- g. Groups of **people who are disproportionately affected by extreme poverty** are people living in rural areas, women and girls, older persons, people with disabilities, refugees and other marginalized groups.
- h. Gender disparities are evident across all life stages, making **women and girls more vulnerable to poverty throughout the life cycle**. More women than men, especially younger women aged 25 - 35 years old, are living in extreme poverty. This is due to systemic inequalities and discrimination that limit their access to economic resources, increase their disproportionate share of unpaid care work, and expose them to higher levels of gender-based violence⁴.
- i. Poverty undermines human wellbeing, acting both as a cause and a consequence of poor outcomes across multiple dimensions. It is **closely linked to mental health challenges**, particularly among children, young people, women and adults exposed to chronic stress, trauma, and social stigma. Those living in poverty are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders, with **limited access to mental health support**. In education, poverty is a major barrier to girls' schooling, affecting attendance, participation, and learning. Economic constraints prevent families from affording school-related expenses. Consequently, they often require girls to contribute to household income, or they generate income through practices such as requiring payment of a 'bride price' or by performing caregiving responsibilities, which lead to **high dropout rates in education**.
- j. Poverty also directly contributes to **poor physical health**. It forces people to live in unsafe conditions without clean water, proper sanitation, or adequate shelter. It increases vulnerability to disease, cost of access to healthcare and essential medicines, and results in malnutrition and missed vaccinations, especially among children. **Ultimately, poverty weakens social cohesion**. Nearly half of the world's extreme poor live in contexts marked by fragility, conflict, and violence⁵. Here **poverty and hunger fuel exclusion, instability, and a breakdown in trust and community structures**, further entrenching cycles of deprivation.

Strategies for poverty eradication

- k. The phenomenal expansion of social protection in the form of **cash transfers in low- and middle-income countries** has contributed significantly to the reduction in extreme poverty. Nevertheless, the recent expansion of social protection has **benefitted men more than women**, and two billion people are still not covered or are poorly covered by social protection. **Much more needs to be done to improve benefit levels and access to social protection universally⁶**, while **gender sensitive social protection policies** are required to address gender-specific needs and concerns.⁷
- l. Alongside cash transfers there is a need to **improve the link between social assistance, social insurance, labor market programs, livelihood support programs and services**, to better protect people against complex risks, meet multifaceted needs of a socio-economic, psychosocial, physical and educational nature, and overcome systemic barriers. This **will require more comprehensive and integrated social protection systems** that build people's capabilities and resilience, promote gender equality, and support them in finding pathways out of poverty.
- m. There is **a need for greater intersectoral and multidisciplinary cooperation** between social development practitioners - social workers, community development workers, primary health care workers, educators and care workers - to strengthen the implementation of social protection policies through labor market and other social programs and social services.
- n. **Innovative evidence-based strategies** are being implemented around the world to reduce poverty, tailored to meet the needs of different groups of people that are left behind. **Social**

developmentalists could contribute to documenting and critically evaluating innovation, working with its partners in learning about bringing these strategies to scale.

Commitment II. Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All

- a. Commitment 3 of the Copenhagen Declaration calls for the promotion of full employment, enabling the achievement of secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen, productive employment and work, and ensuring the basic rights of workers with the participation of employers and workers.

Employment trends and factors influencing participation

- b. Global employment trends have shifted significantly over the last three decades. The global unemployment rate, currently at 4.9%, is at its lowest since 1991⁸. This is a positive trend. Regional variations in employment exist with persistent higher rates of unemployment in low and lower-middle income countries. **Economic growth is expected to decelerate, which will slow down employment, particularly in low-income countries.**
- c. **Women and youth continue to face higher rates of unemployment** with youth unemployment remaining stagnant at just under 13% globally⁹. This continues to be a critical challenge as more young people, **particularly youth from marginalized communities**, struggle to access education and work.
- d. **Employment growth** is integrally connected to factors such as economic conditions in different regions and countries; technological changes; demographic changes; government policies including geopolitical tensions and trade barriers; and the effects of climate change. **Social factors play a role too**, such as discrimination and bias in employment access; a lack of access to education and training; the levels of health and wellbeing of the work force; psychosocial issues such as mental health and substance misuse; and a lack of employment and labor market knowledge and information. Care burdens experienced by women pose significant barriers to female labor market participation and people with disabilities continue to experience persistent labor market exclusion.
- e. The reduction in unemployment over time **masks the reality that a great deal of work remains precarious in nature**. Currently just under 7% of employed people still live below the poverty line. In low-income countries almost 40% of those working continue to live in poverty, pointing to the fact that quality of work is a critical factor in driving poverty rates¹⁰.
- f. **Migration has more than doubled since 1995** with most migrant workers and refugees coming from emerging markets and developing economies. **These workers often face legal, systemic and health care related vulnerabilities** including a lack of decent work opportunities, social protection and family support for repatriation of deceased workers.¹¹
- g. **Digital transformation and automation of work processes presents a risk of labor displacement and employment losses**. It will continue to compound existing labor market inequalities with the gains in productivity and innovation being concentrated in high-income regions. This will aggravate and widen disparities between high and low- and middle-income countries.

Ensuring the basic rights of workers and inclusive growth

- h. Instead of prioritizing economic and employment growth over social goals, **the value of pursuing social development goals simultaneously** is affirmed by the social development approach adopted at Copenhagen in 1995. Since then, there is growing consensus that inclusive economic and social development may be more achievable when economies and societies are structured in ways that promote equal opportunities, social inclusion, and the enjoyment of labor rights, and where societal benefits are shared more equally.
- i. These ideas feature prominently in the **decent work agenda** which was adopted in 1999 and is incorporated in SDG 8. With five years to the Agenda 2030 deadline, **progress towards this goal has stagnated** and significant challenges¹² are evident in different regions, with Africa being furthest behind. For example, the world has failed to reach the 2025 target set by the UN to end child labor¹³.
- j. While the decent work agenda has been a positive and widely accepted policy ideal, achieving it has been more challenging. This is because **structural factors hinder inclusive growth**, while the **social costs of technological and energy transitions will negatively affect employment growth** in many parts of the world.
- k. There is a **lack of social recognition for the value and quality of care work** in social development. Integrating care work into social and labor policies will advance the rights of care workers and improve the quality of social care.

Policy advancements and innovation

- l. Many countries now have some form of **minimum wage legislation** such as national and sectoral wages, or a hybrid of the two. These measures provide a base floor below which wages should not fall. The challenges in realising this ideal are related to concerns about its negative employment effects; issues of compliance and enforcement; a lack of knowledge and information of worker rights; balancing the level of the wage with employer capacity; and displacement of vulnerable workers, such as farm workers, by machinery. Further, specific groups of workers such as domestic workers and care workers in private households are particularly vulnerable to exploitation as governments lack enforcement capacity.
- m. **Active Labor Market Programs (ALMPs)**, including **Public Employment Programs (PEPs)** have proved to be critical to expanding access to employment, demonstrating the important role that states play in ensuring access to work opportunities.
- n. **Worker organizations**, including those representing informal and non-standard workers, **are critical in shaping policy**. Expanding access to micro-insurance for informal workers has been spearheaded by informal worker organizations, which are also advocating for access to public health, basic services and water and sanitation.
- o. **Companies too are critical in promoting full employment and decent work**. As partners in national and global efforts, they are investing in new sectors such as renewable energy, that have potential to create jobs. Where they invest in worker reskilling, they can limit job losses in times of economic, technological and energy transitions. They should also be held to decent work

standards. There is considerable scope for **integrating social development goals and strategies into corporate social responsibility and investment policies and programs.**

- p. **Labor market support programs are proving to be crucial in supporting unemployed youth and women** who are not in education and training, particularly in rural areas. These programs provide access to services and resources that develop relevant skills to improve employability; they overcome information gaps, aid job search, and facilitate work experience, mentorship and job matching and placements. Some of these programs are proving to be effective, especially in developing countries. **Critical success factors depend on context and design features** such as combining employment interventions with services, profiling participants and providing tailored support¹⁴. Supporting unemployed youth in finding pathways to employment and sustainable livelihoods is an urgent priority in countries with large youth unemployment rates; successful programs require innovation, testing and scaling up.
- q. **Newer strategies are being piloted** to provide support to social assistance beneficiaries among the working age population. They aim to increase income flows through the provision of additional support and enhanced capabilities to strengthen their livelihood capabilities and outcomes.
- r. **Digital tools could help identify beneficiary needs** through data mining and analytics that link job seekers with tailored support. Promising directions¹⁵ are emerging in designing and scaling up such solutions, but more needs to be learnt about how to do this efficiently and effectively in different contexts. **There is a need to balance the use of technology with human expertise and service user perspectives to improve social outcomes.**
- s. **Evidence-based solutions should be explored** to advance full productive employment and decent work in relation to inclusive growth and a just energy transition.

Commitment III. Social Integration

- a. Commitment 4 of the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 is concerned with ‘fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, participation of all people including disadvantaged and vulnerable persons’.
- b. **Social integration is recognized as a multi-dimensional process involving inclusion in economic, social, political, and cultural systems, alongside recognition and respect for identity.**
- c. Since 1995 global income inequality has been slowing due to decreasing inequality between countries. But income inequality is rising within countries. **Globally, extreme wealth continues to exist alongside extreme poverty¹⁶.** There is growing recognition of the intersection of inequality with other social characteristics such as race, age, ethnicity, religion, education level, disability and migrant status including place of residence. High inequality continues to undermine social integration, erodes social cohesion, constrains social participation, lowers economic growth and increases social and economic exclusion.

From commitments to action

- d. Progress has been made through the adoption and implementation of the Millenium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are integral to Agenda 2030. This

progress aligns with the SDG principle of “Leaving No One Behind” and requires that structural, institutional, social and material barriers to full participation be dismantled¹⁷. **More countries are adopting national development plans that reference and prioritize the SDGs¹⁸. There is need for greater engagement of citizens and communities in local development plans, which remain poorly funded and implemented.**

- e. **Social development’s legal foundations have improved** as more countries have institutionalized social policies, and some governments have recognized social rights in their constitutions. The **right to social security** is now enshrined in nearly 70 percent of national constitutions, with **provisions for health and education** included in more than 80 percent¹⁹. In 2006 the UN Convention on the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD) was adopted. Other standard setting instruments serve to **protect the rights of people against all forms of racial discrimination, human trafficking and uphold the rights of migrants, refugees and Indigenous Peoples**. These conventions and newer treaties include protections for children, women, and economic, social, cultural and religious rights, and demonstrate a growing global commitment to human rights, the recognition of marginalized groups, and the advancement of social equality²⁰. **Advancing these rights through generating knowledge, practice-based solutions and monitoring and advocacy to further social integration is needed.**

Challenges

- f. Despite the expansion of social development frameworks, **a significant gap persists between legislative commitments and the realization of these commitments on the ground**. Many factors impede implementation, including inadequate funding, a lack of human and financial resources, poor infrastructure, low knowledge and skills, poor governance, corruption, a lack of evidence-based decision making, barriers to multidisciplinary cooperation, and inefficiency and duplication in service provision, to name a few. These failures have eroded public trust in democratic institutions, which has given rise to populism and nationalism. Such movements are a threat to social stability and in ensuring peaceful societies. Geopolitical tensions are resulting in the withdrawal of much-needed development assistance for vulnerable populations and a reneging on past agreements on development assistance, with funds being diverted to domestic programs and military expenditure.
- g. **Reducing the gap between policy intentions and implementation requires adequate levels of funding** for social development, strong enabling institutions, capable and transformative leaders, adequately trained staff, organizational capacity, data driven decision making and engagement with users and beneficiaries of programs.
- h. **High levels of indebtedness**, especially in low-income countries, force governments to prioritize debt repayments over social spending on education, health, social protection infrastructure, and community development. Indebtedness undermines the social development ecosystem, weakens institutions, and leads to economic stagnation. Underinvestment in social development in turn impacts on economic progress. There is urgent need to close the annual financing gap of \$4 trillion to achieve the SDGs. States and governments committed themselves at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development²¹ held in Seville in June 2025 to tackle the debt crisis, mobilize investment for development, reform the financial system, create fairer taxation, make investments in social protection and care, as well as support micro, small and medium enterprises as job creators.

- i. **Discrimination and exclusion** based on a person's ethnicity, national origin, migrant status, First Nations and other Indigenous People's status, race, caste, age, religious and disability status, sexuality, place of residence (or lack thereof), and gender, often give rise to systemic barriers that restrict full and equal participation in social, economic, political and community life. These barriers tend to persist regardless of individual capacity or effort and are strongly associated with reduced social wellbeing. Contributing factors include lack of political voice, historical and structural disadvantage, colonial legacies, linguistic and cultural exclusion, religious beliefs, discrimination, unequal access to resources and services, and embedded systemic conditions that reinforce cumulative disadvantage over the life course.
- j. The 1995 Copenhagen declaration on social development (under Annex I, point 3) identified the importance for governments to respond more effectively to the **material and spiritual needs of diverse individuals, families and the communities**. There is need for greater emphasis on the promotion of religious tolerance and the recognition of the spiritual needs of people.
- k. **Indigenous Peoples experience exclusion** in their pursuit of economic and social development, leading to shorter lifespans, poor health, inadequate educational opportunities, and higher unemployment rates. **Effective inclusion strategies must take account of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples** such as individual rights, cultural preservation, health, education and self-determination²².
- l. Over the past three decades new challenges for social development have emerged in relation to the intersection of global financial, health and environmental crises including **growing armed conflict, violence, war, terrorism and genocide**. The latter challenges point to the need for a **stronger recognition of social development's role in peace-building** at local, regional and global levels.
- m. **The prevalence of misinformation is a threat to social integration** as it feeds conflict, xenophobia, tensions between social groups, lowers trust, and increases polarization in communities. Misinformation produces othering, drives disbelief in institutions and social interventions such as vaccinations, and fosters negative attitudes towards accepted social values. **Social development needs to develop strategies to counter misinformation**.
- n. The **growth of new digital technologies and the changing nature of work** further complicate the challenges of inclusion and social protection. These developments call for new directions in social development requiring both new knowledge and practice solutions or the retooling of established and tested social interventions to changed circumstances.

Pointers for practice-based research

- o. Since 1995, a **diverse range of social development policies and programs** have taken root in countries in the Global South to eradicate poverty, build human capabilities and promote individual and collective empowerment²³. These include social protection systems, social work and community development services, public employment initiatives, entrepreneurship support, feeding schemes, and enhanced measures to increase access to health care, education, housing and infrastructure for basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation. Many of these policies and programs are delivered at the local level, strive to be people centred, promote community participation, and integrate human rights and social and economic justice principles.

These approaches represent critical social investments that promote social integration, advance sustainable development and support peace and security.

- p. Future social development policies and strategies must explicitly recognize, protect, and support **gender-diverse persons**, whose ongoing exclusion limits progress toward meaningful social integration. They frequently experience barriers to healthcare, legal identity, safety, and participation. Promoting the dignity, rights, and inclusion of all gender identities is essential to realizing the broader vision of just and equitable societies.
- q. Where social development scholars and practitioners are advancing innovative and transformative interventions, there is **much to learn about how to dismantle structural barriers and interrupt cycles of historical and cumulative disadvantage**.
- r. **Evidence-based interventions** developed by ICSD scholars and partners such as **financial capability and asset building** (FCAB) to promote equitable economic and social wellbeing have gained worldwide attention²⁴. FCAB is also advocated for inclusion in cash transfer programs around the world focusing on children, youth and families, people with disabilities and older persons. These and other **innovations** are well documented in academic journals, in secondary sources, and in grey literature, but more implementation experience needs to be documented in countries in the Global South. A lack of resources, capacity constraints, and a lack of research funding are ongoing barriers.
- s. There is also need for partnering with a range of stakeholders to **build capacity for social service systems strengthening**. **Applying an implementation science lens** to the translation of social development ideas into practice can support global knowledge exchange and scale-up of promising interventions.
- t. **Monitoring SDG progress on social integration** remains challenging due to the **difficulty of capturing outcomes across sectors** on concepts such as social inclusion, inequality, participation, peacefulness, and the involvement of marginalized groups²⁵. In contrast, indicators in areas such as health, education, gender equality, social protection, and access to basic services are more consistently tracked and reported. There is scope for researchers, practitioners, civil society organizations, academic institutions and governments to work together to **improve the monitoring of indicators of social integration drawing on multidisciplinary expertise**. Advancing knowledge development and transfer, especially with an emphasis on equity, is vital to enhancing social integration and fulfilling the commitment to leave no one behind.
- u. Addressing today's complex global challenges requires expanded use of **multidisciplinary consortia to co-create social development solutions**. Greater engagement is needed among scholars and practitioners to collaborate in multidisciplinary teams, including communities of practice, to **strengthen knowledge and skills for multidisciplinary interventions and policy implementation**. Embracing new forms of collaboration and leveraging diverse expertise will enhance the field's relevance and responsiveness.
- v. More attention should be given to **building social development institutions and strengthening relationships among the state, civil society, communities, and the private sector** to harness resources and knowledge to improve social development outcomes. These partnerships are essential for mobilizing resources and expertise to ensure that policies and programs are

responsive to local needs, grounded in inclusive participation, and delivered through coordinated and sustainable systems. Without such partnerships, innovations and solutions to social integration will remain fragmented and difficult to scale.

Strengthening the social development workforce

- w. **A critical oversight** in both the Copenhagen Declaration and the SDGs **is the lack of attention to workforce strengthening**, particularly for social workers, care workers, community development workers, community health practitioners, teachers and other professionals and paraprofessional essential to delivering services. **These professions remain undervalued and underrecognized**, yet no sustainable social progress can occur without strategic investment in this workforce.
- x. Beyond the professional workforce, local, national and international **volunteers play a crucial role in advancing social development** by fostering solidarity, civic engagement, and inclusive participation²⁶. Volunteer efforts have contributed meaningfully to the implementation of the SDGs in areas such as peacebuilding, gender equality, health, and social protection. Locally embedded and well-supported volunteer initiatives can strengthen community resilience, expand access to services, and promote collaborative approaches to development and strengthen social cohesion. Standards and frameworks are emerging to guide ethical, context-sensitive, and impact-oriented volunteering practices²⁷.

Commitment IV. Cross-cutting Issues

IV.1 Harnessing technology and artificial intelligence to advance social development

- a. Since the 1995 Copenhagen commitments, **digital technologies have advanced** from basic internet access and mobile communications to sophisticated systems powered by artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies are transforming how societies and local communities work, learn, and interact. **Yet billions still lack connectivity, infrastructure, and digital literacy**, with the widest gaps in rural and remote areas, and least developed countries, most of them in the Global South. **Without digital inclusion, these divides risk deepening inequalities** in employment, education, healthcare, and civic participation.
- b. **Digital technologies have the potential to promote social development** through enabling people to communicate, access information, and manage daily and professional tasks. Computers and typing software can be used in community training centres to build employable skills; mobile devices can allow rural farmers to access weather forecasts and market prices; the internet can enable online job applications and remote learning; cloud platforms have allowed small businesses to store, share, and protect records; and productivity tools have supported entrepreneurial initiatives.
- c. Building on digital technologies, **artificial intelligence**, including machine learning systems, natural language processing, and generative AI (such as large language models) has the potential to open new possibilities. **In education**, AI-powered adaptive learning platforms can provide personalized lesson plans and real-time feedback to students in under-resourced schools; generative AI

chatbots can support teachers by drafting lesson notes and translating materials into local languages.

- d. **In healthcare**, AI-enabled image recognition tools can improve early disease detection, telemedicine platforms can connect rural patients to urban specialists, and AI can be used to allocate limited health resources more effectively based on its ability to predict.
- e. **In social services and welfare service delivery**, AI can enhance targeting and outreach by identifying vulnerable households, improving the efficiency and transparency of benefit distribution, and ensuring that assistance reaches those who need it most. Digital tools can be used to conduct social work assessments, inform interventions, monitor service provision and evaluate programs. AI can also be used to analyse administrative data to inform more efficient service provision.
- f. However, there are **risks that come with technology** such as the spread of **misinformation** which undermines social integration and wider social development goals.
- g. Even as we advance a Just Energy Transition and decarbonisation, **the shift to clean energies can displace jobs**. In the workplace, the integration of technology is **accelerating structural shifts in labor markets**. Low-skilled jobs are increasingly automated, creating opportunities for high-skill employment, but also significant risks of exclusion for workers with limited skills, further **entrenching the disadvantages faced by technologically marginalized groups**. The rise of gig and platform-based work, such as ride-hailing, food delivery, and on-demand cleaning, offers flexible income opportunities, but often comes with low pay, insecurity, and a lack of social protections, **deepening socio-economic precarity**.
- h. The advancement of technology presents **opportunities to drive prosperity, expand the global digital economy, and advance inclusive social development**. Our commitment is to **harness these technologies for the public good** by addressing societal and developmental challenges in a responsible, inclusive, and human-centred way, while protecting people's rights, safety, and dignity.
- i. **Responsible development, and the appropriate deployment and use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence must be guided by principles** that ensure their appropriate use, human rights protection, transparency and explainability, fairness, accountability for outcomes, effective regulation, safety, appropriate human oversight, ethics, and data protection. This **includes addressing risks** such as bias in automated decision-making, privacy violations, and the spread of misinformation. **Without ethical governance, inclusive design, and context-specific approaches, these tools risk entrenching rather than dismantling structural inequalities.**

IV.2 Social development and the just energy transition

- a. Since the Copenhagen declaration was adopted, various agreements were reached between governments to limit global temperature rise to below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels. Developed and developing countries committed to reducing carbon emissions while developed countries agreed to provide financial support for developing countries to transition to renewable energy. These agreements are not binding on countries, but **progress has been made in establishing a political consensus and framework for future action.**

- b. SDG 13 on Climate Action encourages governments to adopt urgent social and economic measures to combat climate change and mitigate its impacts on people's everyday lives and livelihoods. **This includes protection and support** through establishing more shock responsive social protection policies; ensuring greater disaster preparedness and the provision of social relief; compensation for people affected by the social and economic costs of the transition to cleaner energy; and reskilling the work force affected by these changes. **Governments are also encouraged to integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies, and planning, as well as improve education and awareness-raising on climate change.**
- c. Recognizing the immense power and influence of multinational corporations and local companies, **corporate individuals and leaders have an obligation to promote social development and the achievement of the SDGs.** Concerted efforts are required to ensure that greater harmony is achieved between the needs of people and the sustainability of the planet. Consequently, corporate leaders must engage authentically with diverse publics and marginalized communities, pursue their endeavors ethically, free of corruption, and act responsibly to sustain both people and planet.
- d. **Communities that are well endowed with natural sources of energy** such as wind and solar, **will be most affected by the transition to cleaner energy** in that they are being targeted for the establishment of these new renewable energy projects. **This is resulting in tension and conflict** between communities, private sector renewable energy companies, and governments, about who should bear the social and environmental costs of the transition, how the resources derived from these projects may be equitably distributed, and how communities may be better involved in ensuring a just transition.
- e. Several countries have developed or are in the process of adopting just energy transition plans. **This provides opportunities for affected communities to influence decision making processes to safeguard their interests.**
- f. There is significant scope for engagement by social development scholars and practitioners to ensure that these processes are **community driven, people centred, inclusive of those affected by the changes,** and are focused on investing in both economic and social development strategies that empower those most affected.

Commitment V. ICSD commitments to advancing social development knowledge and practice worldwide

- a. **We affirm our commitment to advancing knowledge and innovative practices through research and actionable solutions that are proactive and responsive** to the pressing challenges of our time: poverty eradication and hunger; full productive employment and decent work for all; social integration including gender equality; climate resilience and a just energy transition; and harnessing technology and artificial intelligence to advance social development.
- b. The ICSD will **continue to disseminate leading edge knowledge about social development** through our global and regional conferences, webinars and branches, social media platforms,

and research and practice-based networks, to identify appropriate responses to the changing global context.

- c. The ICSD **recognizes indigenous knowledge systems** in social development and will actively work towards the decolonisation of knowledge.
- d. **Social development is integrally linked to racial justice.** The CSD commits to working with others to promote anti-racist practice and dismantling of systemic discrimination.
- e. **Social development is integrally linked to achieving gender justice.** More gender sensitive social policies are needed to advance this goal.
- f. **The ICSD was recently granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).** Through this new status, we will amplify our collaboration with international partners and civil society organizations, contributing to global forums on social development with grounded insights from research and practice.
- g. The ICSD will **actively work towards strengthening the legal foundations of social development and its institutionalization** through monitoring progress at community, national, regional and global levels.
- h. The ICSD supports efforts to **integrate the commitments made at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development** held in Seville in June 2025, **into the SWSSD Political Declaration** to advance progress central to the achievement of the SDGs.
- i. ICSD members will contribute to **document and critically evaluate innovation**, actively working with its partners and communities in **co-creating knowledge and learning** about bringing these strategies to scale.
- j. ICSD members will contribute to improve the **monitoring of indicators of social integration, drawing on multidisciplinary expertise.**
- k. ICSD members will continue to **promote the integration of the social development approach in the education and training** of social workers and social development practitioners. Social development knowledge systems need to **recognize the significance of indigenous knowledge systems and local perspectives.**
- l. The ICSD will advocate for the recognition of and investment in **social development workforce strengthening.**
- m. The ICSD will advocate for **greater investment in volunteering infrastructure** and inclusive partnerships that **recognize volunteers** as essential contributors to sustainable development and social integration.
- n. The ICSD will **harness multidisciplinary collaboration and partnerships in research-led teaching, in research and in social interventions** to bridge the gap between research and teaching.

- o. The ICSD will engage its members and partners in developing guidelines **on how best to harness technology and AI to advance social development**. Among others, there is need to build capacity, knowledge and expertise in the appropriate and ethical use of technology to service people left behind.
- p. The ICSD will advocate for **social development policies and plans to be integrated in renewable energy transition policies and plans** to ensure a more just transition.
- q. The ICSD will engage in partnerships to **promote knowledge and awareness of the impact of climate change on people's lives and livelihoods**. This includes advocacy for policy and strategies for environmental sustainability at community, national and global levels.

o o o 0 o o o

Acknowledgement of contributors

ICSD Committee for the Second World Summit for Social Development comprising Lauren Graham (University of Johannesburg); Bipin Jojo (Tata Institute of Social Sciences); Benjamin J. Lough (University of Illinois); Leila Patel (University of Johannesburg); Manohar Pawar (Charles Sturt University); Chathapuram (Ram) Ramanathan (Illinois State University).

Participants of the Forum on the Second World Summit for Social Development: Contribution of the International Consortium for Social Development, held at the 24th ICSD Biennial International Conference, Kochi, Kerala, 8 – 10 January 2025.

Draft Conference Manifesto adopted by the 10th ICSD Asia-Pacific branch biennial international conference participants, the University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development, Diliman, Quezon City, 23 to 25 October 2024.

Data sources and literature searches for this statement were conducted by Khanya Ndlovu and Samson Konlan (Post Doctoral Fellows) and Anthony Kaziboni (Senior Researcher) provided valuable contributions to the section on technology and AI. All three researchers are based at the Centre for Social Development in Africa (University of Johannesburg).

Finally, the feedback from members of the ICSD Executive Council and Board of Directors on different drafts of this document is gratefully acknowledged. Specifically, inputs were received from Lauren Graham (University of Johannesburg), Bipin Jojo (Tata Institute of Social Sciences), Vikash Kumar (North Michigan University), Benjamin J. Lough (University of Illinois), Manohar Pawar (Charles Sturt University), Chathapuram (Ram) Ramanathan (Illinois State University), and Liljana Rihter (University of Ljubljana).

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty#:~:text=Poverty%20At-A-Glance,impacted%20by%20conflict%20and%20fragility>

-
- ² <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-07-2025-global-hunger-declines-but-rises-in-africa-and-western-asia-un-report>
- ³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty#:~:text=Poverty%20At-A-Glance,impacted%20by%20conflict%20and%20fragility>
- ⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/10/world-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-2024>
- ⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-prosperity-and-planet>
- ⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotection/publication/state-of-social-protection-2025-2-billion-person-challenge>
- ⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/10/world-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-2024>
- ⁸ International Labour Office, Trends Econometric Models (ilo.org/wesodata) – Accessed August 2025
- ⁹ WESO25 Trends ExecSum EN.pdf
- ¹⁰ <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/snapshots/working-poverty-rate/>
- ¹¹ un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesapd_2025_intlmigstock_2024_key_facts_and_figures_advance-unedited.pdf
- ¹² sustainable-development-report-2025.pdf
- ¹³ <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/2024%20Global%20Estimates%20of%20Child%20Labour%20Report.pdf>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X18303905#:~:text=Of%20a%20total%20of%203105,employment%20programs%20in%20different%20contexts>
- ¹⁵ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/401541468307671282/pdf/106847-WP-P148963-OUO-9-MISC-Case-Turkey-ENf.pdf>
- ¹⁶ https://devinit.org/files/documents/1323/inequality_global_trends_update_2023_final_version.pdf
- ¹⁷ UNDESA. (2020). Leaving No One Behind: Human Rights-Based Approaches to Social Protection. United Nations.
- ¹⁸ Admos O. Chimhowu, David Hulme, Lauchlan T. Munro (2019). The ‘New’ national development planning and global development goals: Processes and partnerships. *World Development*. Volume 120, 2019, Pages 76-89. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X19300713?via%3Dihub>
- ¹⁹ Oxford Constitutions of the World Data Base <https://www.universal-rights.org/human-rights-rough-guides/a-rough-guide-to-the-human-rights-treaty-bodies/>
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ <https://financing.desa.un.org/ffd4/outcome>
- ²² <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UNDRIPManualForNHRIs.pdf>
- ²³ See data bases of global organizations promoting social development such as UNDESA, the World Bank, UNICEF, UNRISD, Oxford Bibliography of Social Development and academic journals such as *Social Development Issues* and the *International Journal of Community and Social Development*.
- ²⁴ <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781800378421/book-part-9781800378421-33.xml>
- ²⁵ For SDG tracking of social integration see <https://sdgs.un.org/publications>
- ²⁶ <https://swvr2022.unv.org/>
- ²⁷ <https://forum-ids.org/global-volunteering-standard/>