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DISCUSSING THE APPROACHES AND POLICIES IN ERADICATING POVERTY AND ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY, INVOLVING YOUTH AS A PROACTIVE ACTORS

For a large number of sub-Saharan African countries, **rapid and unsustainable urbanization has led to increased inequality**. Children and youth face particular challenges to their wellbeing as they struggle to create safe adult lives. While the Sustainable Development Goals are addressed to poverty reduction, translating such goals into meaningful policy responses that address the needs of the most vulnerable children and the promotion of gender equality remains a considerable challenge in many contexts.

The rural youth in Africa are most affected by poverty. This group is among the most disadvantaged groups because rural African youth often have limited access to educational programs that consider their specific situations and needs. This constraint is particularly relevant to the girls, since families tend to submit them to home labours when not to early marriages. This situation results in high dropout rates at an early age. Academic curriculums are often tailored more toward academic accomplishments and to urban-focused studies than to learning useful skills that have the opportunity to enhance rural livelihoods. The resulting low enrolment rates, coupled with low completion rates, have contributed to the difficult transition of rural youth into quality employment. As a compounding factor, education can be cost prohibitive and is sometimes viewed as unnecessary in an agricultural society that is dependent upon farm working. Therefore, most rural youth remain poor—lacking the resources and skills to be competitive, three out of every four live on less than 2 USD per day.

The already indicated problems are aggravated by a lack of reliable sources of information and data. This is very well evidenced, for instance, by a report published by UNESCO in May 2017 named "Country readiness to monitor SDG 4 education targets: Regional survey for sub-Saharan Africa".

From both urban and rural areas, in many African countries, **young people very often perceive irregular migration as the only means to escape from poverty**. Empirical research done in various countries shows that young people are now much better informed than years ago on the risks of irregular migration; nevertheless, they do not perceive alternatives to it. A research paper called "Going on Thariib (an Arabic word meaning danger, unsafe journey)" discusses the causes and consequences of Somali youth migration in Europe. It was published in 2016 by the Rift Valley Institute and reveals that among the causes of irregular youth migration is the low level of higher education accessible to Somali youth. Somali youth, in other terms, feel frustrated by the lack of opportunities to learn in comparison to international academic standards.

In Latin America, young people today are more educated than their parents were. As a result of exposure to the cultural industry, they have greater knowledge and higher consumer expectations. On the other hand, the rate of youth unemployment is two or three times higher (depending on the country) than is the rate for the rest of the population. Young people have assimilated expectations of social mobility and of a place in society, given the fact that they are more

educated than their parents; however, they are met by a situation in which their real work opportunities are limited and do not correspond to the amount of knowledge they have accumulated during childhood and adolescence.

Youth poverty exists in Europe as well. **A study published by Caritas on Italy reveals that in 2015 around 4,5 million people lived below the poverty line and, within this group, those between 18 to 35 years comprised 20%**, whereas they only represented the 2% of the poor in 2007.
Youth poverty is therefore a global contemporary issue. Assuming the definition of social exclusion taken by the 2014 UNDP Human Development Report ("…the absence of opportunities for an active integration into society …") we can say that to a large extent youth are socially excluded in many contexts, as they lack opportunities. If this is the case, a comprehensive response to youth poverty implies a strong effort, from civil society to governments to financial institutions to private sectors, to break the chains of social exclusion and to valorise the contribution of the youth to poverty eradication and social development.

The **2030 Agenda** is in line with this goal but it requires of course to be translated and contextualized in different countries. **Programmes and policies need to be aligned**, as they are interdependent. Programmes alone can solve specific problems, but in order to scale up their impact, they need to feed comprehensive national policies. Policies alone provide a global framework, that can remain, albeit very good, empty if not substantiated in concrete measurable programmes. We don't start from zero, as we can build our strategies on already successfully tested best practices. I will limit myself to a few examples, trying **to associate some policy and programmatic options to specific Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda**. Only three targets are here indicated, bearing in mind that many others could have been considered.

The second target of the SDG 1 indicates: "By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions". Here, among other options, we can advocate for **conditional cash transfers programs** where the financial aid to poor families is linked to their commitments in favor of the education and welfare of children and adolescents. These schemes have been successfully tested in a number of Latin American countries. Empirical studies conducted in Latin America show that successful programs depend on a clear definition of program goals, adapting program design to a particular country's circumstances, effective communication with beneficiaries, high-quality services and an appreciation of social relations within a given community. What matters in this case is that the eradication of youth poverty should be considered as a cross cutting goal of all the conditional cash transfer programs. At the same time, tailoring the programs to the peculiarities of each country, has to actively involve the youth, through consultative mechanisms. I see here a great opportunity for collaboration between governments and civil societies.

The first target of SDG 4 states: "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes". This target clearly refers to the quality of the education. **The assumption here is that the old dilemma between universal access to education and quality of education has no more reason to exist**. Low enrolment and attendance, as well as high drop out rates are in fact very much linked to low expectations and motivations from the side of youth and their families, as above indicated in the case of rural African regions. Again, as in the case of conditional cash transfer programs, we have to advocate for global processes of consultation hearing the voices of

the youth. Too often educational policies have been defined without considering the wishes and the requests of the final beneficiaries – the children and the adolescents – of such policies. Without pretending of course to provide comprehensive answers, I think that decades of work in the field of education suggest some key priorities, including the following:

- Quality education means not only a high level of teaching, but also an adaptation of the educational policies to the specific needs of each community. For instance, it is not surprising to observe that in many countries in Africa the percentage of access to education for children in pastoralist communities is less than one half the national averages. The point here is that schools are too often not tailored to meet the demands and the life styles of pastoralist, nomadic and semi nomadic communities, where, rather than thinking to send children to schools, we should plan to send the schools to the children. We should focus on strengthening distance learning approaches and training members of the communities.
- Quality education means also strengthening the link between the schools and the labor market, providing youth with skills and attitudes – including soft skills - that can help them to be placed in the labor market specific to their environment. I can here make a concrete example from a recent evaluation conducted in northern Albania, in the Scutari Region. We have there an economy that is growing, with a great potential for tourism and agro tourism in particular, but no professional institute(s) where youth can learn how to manage a micro or small business. Youth are therefore deprived of a concrete chance to play an active role within the existing social and economic development processes of their communities.
- Finally, I like to add that quality education means also, everywhere, to adapt the curricula to the reality of a globalized world, where youth move from one country to another and where, therefore, the knowledge of different cultures and their histories and their interdependences has to be strengthened. This is an issue in Europe as well. In line with this target, in some EU countries the European Commission is co-funding programs where NGOs, youth associations and national public bodies in charge for education work to integrate the reality of a changed world in to the curricula. These programs are also involving partners from Africa, Latin America, Asia and other regions of the world. This has two scopes: one is to learn from them and to consider their voices in the process of better tailoring the curricula to contemporary world dynamics; the other is to inspire similar programs and initiatives in their countries.

The second target of the SDG 8 states: "Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labor intensive sectors".

This target can and has been translated in "pro youth policies and programmes", to be identified with the youth. I limit myself to one example related to young migrants, and particularly young female migrants. They represent a real asset for their countries, as their remittances greatly contribute to the GDP and to the wellbeing of their families. At the same time, the cost of this positive impact is often entirely paid by the female migrants. This is the case, for instance, of the young Filipino women living in Rome. Many of them send almost all of their salary to their families. Therefore, they not only often live in a situation of poverty abroad, but they are also deprived of one of their main aspirations: going back home one day and doing something productive through their savings. In this way, the women feel in a cage and their country loses a

tremendous opportunity to capitalise their experiences and initiatives. Positive experiences show that good policies and programmes – focused on financial literacy while migrants are abroad and technical and financial assistance after repatriation – can greatly impact the life of the migrants and the economies of their countries. Concrete cases – for instance in Ecuador - show that if remittances are matched with ODA and national public funds, this can contribute to the start-up of micro and small enterprises and to the re-integration of migrants that have acquired skills and entrepreneurship culture abroad. Seen in this perspective, migration, rather than being a problem, becomes a real opportunity. The challenge is, thinking primarily to the youth, to maximise the gains of migration and to minimise its costs.

While I have considered only 3 out of the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda, many others can be translated into pro youth policies and programmes, assuming the fight against youth social exclusion as a unifying goal. Mechanisms to reinforce youth participation in the design of development plans have to be reinforced and public institutions – nationally and internationally – are requested to reinforce their accountability to the youth.