RESPONSE TO OUR COMMENTATORS ON THE REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL PANEL ON SOCIAL PROGRESS 2018

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The contributors to this symposium have brought up many important points in their discussions of five chapters of the Report, and we are very grateful to them. Since the authors of the chapters would be better able to respond to many of the specific comments, we will confine ourselves here to a brief discussion of a few major issues highlighted by the contributors. We are in particular inspired by the following comments: Alina Rocha Menocal's point about the role of the state and committed elites; James Deane's description of the deep transformation of the media scene by new forms of communication; Uma Rani's emphasis on the importance of structural transformation and social care policies; and Diana Alarcon's call for paying greater attention to different levels of development and to macroeconomic policy.

1. 'THE NATION-STATE IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE NATION-STATE'

This expression was used by Ravi Kanbur in one meeting of the Panel. Though the various chapters of the report have been written without a strict coordination of the message across author teams, the following picture emerges, in particular from the chapters discussed in this symposium as well as the chapters on global governance and socio-economic transformations.

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The report does not support a leap to a cosmopolitan form of governance, even though many global problems are urgent and even though its authors express no sympathy for nationalist values. Rather, the report claims that 'cosmopolitanism, for the sake of abstract universal rights, jeopardizes the protection of human rights via the rule of law and the fundamental role of the demos' (Vol. 2, Ch. 14, p. 587). While it is true that the nation-state has been losing power and effectiveness under the pressure of globalized actors and markets, simultaneously, the nation-state remains the only widely recognized source of legitimate power. Moreover, international cooperation is often sluggish and ineffective because it faces strong headwinds. In particular, it lacks a strong constituency in civil society, while international organizations in their current form fail to be either responsive to local needs or effective. There is simply no prospect for a breakthrough in global governance.

At the same time, the great variety of national situations shows that globalization has not brought gloomy uniformity to policies and institutions, in spite of all alarm bells about a race to the bottom. For instance, as shown in Chapter 3, inequality within countries has followed a diverse set of trends in almost every region of the world, associated with a diversity of policies and institutional reforms. There is no general trend back to a 19th century society. Government choices remain critical in determining the fate of their populations.

The paradox is that while national policy should remain a central focus of attention for the pursuit of social and economic aims, global challenges (in particular climate change and more generally the protection of the global commons, the fight against tax evasion, monitoring financial instability and handling mass migration) call for a surge in international action, either through inter-governmental coordination or through the impulse of other actors (international organizations or international civil society).

This situation, therefore, calls for policymakers to stop blaming global pressures for their lack of effectiveness, to re-engage with ambitious national policies, but also to support greater international cooperation and the formation of an international community of citizens and stakeholders, as well as a stronger, more accountable network of global agencies. This calls for citizens to engage both with national politics and with international initiatives.

2. VULNERABLE DEMOCRACIES

The chapters on democracy emphasize the dangers of growing inequality in wealth and power and worsening social fragmentation, while the chapters on global governance describe the challenges brought by

international agencies (in particular in developing countries), trade and investment treaties, and transnational corporations. The inclusion of a full chapter on the media in the design of the report's contents foretold the media's crucial role in subsequent political developments. The role of information and identity formation through new forms of communication has been brought out by recent events, showing that manipulation and propaganda are not specific to authoritarian regimes.

The chapter on media examines how the emergence of communications as a new focal point of policy broadens the scope of media issues, to include net neutrality, control of contents, access, governance of infrastructure, management of data flows, transparency and accountability. Two examples illustrate different ways of handling the development of communications, one in India and the other in Brazil. The launch of the Facebook Free Basics platform in 2015 (a public-private partnership platform giving free access to selected services and sites for smartphone users) triggered a vigorous reaction by civil society and ultimately ended up with the reaffirmation of net neutrality by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. As the report states: 'this episode … illustrates both the potential for cozy, mutually beneficial relationships between global platform companies and nation-state governments and the ability of civil society to challenge such relationships' (Vol. 2, Ch. 13, p. 548). In contrast, the Marco Civil da Internet in Brazil, inspired by the Snowden revelations of wide surveillance, combines government and civil society efforts toward 'protection of freedom and privacy, open governance, universal inclusion, cultural diversity, and network neutrality' (Vol. 2, Ch. 13, p. 549) and is praised by the report as a prototype for global internet regulation.

Reading the chapters on democracy and the media jointly is instructive: similar issues arise for political infrastructure (parties and electoral processes) and media and communication infrastructure when both are viewed as public goods that should be protected from government authoritarian control as well as from capture by private interests. Both are central for a vibrant democracy. Looking at the key role of civil society in the Indian and Brazilian case studies, one may venture that a combination of independent public and civil society watchdogs and likewise a combination of transparent public and crowdsourcing funding is the way forward for both public goods. Montesquieu's separation of powers, which is not even cited in the report, is now grossly insufficient, even if it may remain necessary.

3. STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE SCOPE OF POLICY

The report looks at the deep drivers of change (technological change, globalization, demographics, cultural shifts …) and takes a medium to

long-term view. It is absolutely true, as Uma Rani stresses, that these deep drivers can be affected by policy. Technological innovation and diffusion is driven by incentives, governance and education systems (Chs 4, 6, 8, 19), globalization is shaped by governmental and intergovernmental choices (Chs 11 and 12), and even demographic and cultural trends are influenced by health care (Ch. 18), education (Ch. 19), media (Ch. 13), and economic conditions (Chs 3 and 18). Sectoral changes, in particular deindustrialization in the North (Ch. 1) and in some developing countries after trade liberalization (Chs 3 and 4) also determine socio-economic transformations while being partly caused by deliberate policies.

It is difficult to identify factors of change for the better when causal links are multifarious and intricate, as they are in complex economic, social and political systems. Calling for better policies, for instance, presupposes that governments are somehow more causally active than passive, which is perhaps true in the short term and for some policy instruments but probably less plausible in the long run and for larger institutions and social conventions. Macroeconomic policy, in the report, is invoked more in relation to inequality impacts (in particular for austerity measures, see Chs 3 and 9) than unemployment impacts, though the two are related.

In determining whether the report itself can be a vector of change, a key question is the role of ideas. What forces determine the succession of ideological waves and the rise and fall of consensus ideas in worldwide policy debates? Chapter 22 discusses ideas in economics, development, education, environmental policy, health policy and science and technology. This chapter concludes that 'in working to craft better policies, social scientists should also pay closer attention to the design of democratic institutions themselves. Explaining the workings of democracy, providing advice about how to craft participatory institutions, and taking part in public debate should be – even more than in the past – tasks that social scientists undertake' (Vol. 3, Ch. 22, p. 849).

4. HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS AND CARE POLICIES

Contrary to Uma Rani's suggestion that they are neglected in the report, household inequalities (especially between genders) and social care policies are a key focus of the report, being extensively discussed in Chs 3, 5, 17, 18 and 21. Broader gender issues (e.g. in urbanism, labour markets, environmental policies, religions, reproductive rights, education) are pervasive in the report (see in particular Chs 4, 5, 7, 15, 16, 18, 19).

Perhaps one key message of the report is that a crucial institution that must be acted upon to pursue social progress is the family, to which a full chapter (Ch. 17) is devoted. That chapter not only scrutinizes how relations within family members have been evolving, and how forms of

families have diversified, but also emphasizes how the family is not a private sphere immune to policy intervention. On the contrary, laws about divorce and inheritance, access to earning opportunities and to child and elderly care services can profoundly affect the possibilities of flourishing for women. Likewise, access to education and reproductive services has transformational potential. Even pension regimes indirectly transform the demographic composition of households and contribute to freeing women from elderly care. Some positive changes can also be implemented by various actors but may easily be overlooked, such as increasing fairness in divorce judgements in Muslim countries, which improves the lot of women even without any conspicuous legal reform (Ch. 15).

The complexity of issues must not be hidden, of course. Institutionalizing elderly care may have problematic consequences in terms of generational segregation and painful end of life (Chs 17 and 18). Access to divorce increases the proportion of impoverished single households where mothers struggle to combine work and child-rearing (Ch. 3). It is therefore important to keep a comprehensive picture of the social trends and the opportunities and burdens that fall on different population categories in order to design policy packages and legal reforms that prevent negative consequences.

5. DEVELOPMENT LEVELS AND REGIONAL PATTERNS

Diana Alarcon provides good examples of policies that must be adapted to the development level of the country. The report does discuss development policy and anti-poverty policy (Chs 3, 8 and 22) and in particular argues that developing countries should not remain passive in the face of the Kuznets curve (inequalities growing and then falling with economic growth, as successive groups emerge from poverty) and should bet on policies promoting equality and affordable services as a development strategy. The rationale is that investing in human capital is as urgent as investing in physical capital and infrastructure. It is true, however, that the report does not provide detailed analysis of development strategies for different regions of the world.

Whether it should have such an analysis depends on the following issue. For a report devoted to long-term social progress, the question of development is both central and peripheral. It is central because making sure that no one is left behind in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is crucial to the progress of the global state of the population. But it is peripheral in the sense that most development issues have to do with catching up with more advanced countries. The idea that development might be oriented toward radically different forms of society is not considered seriously within the standard development discourse. Although there are many puzzles and debates about how to trigger and

accelerate development and how to fight extreme poverty, the objective is not questioned.

In contrast, the question of long-term social progress does require debating the goal of development; it also requires considering the need for transformations of advanced societies. While such transformations may have little impact on social indicators in the coming decades – as compared to speeding up the catch-up transition – they may hold the key to the farther future. For instance, the fact that the report highlights participatory mechanisms, and that such innovative formulas come from countries at very unequal levels of development, is interesting. Taking equality in power and in resources as a development strategy can, perhaps, not only enable developing countries to bypass traditional unequal stages of development, but make all types of countries contribute to novel forms of social, political and economic justice.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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