Working Group on the Nexus of Economic Policies, Gender and Extremism

Concept Note

10 March 2017
UNDP Headquarters, New York
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

On 10 March, 2017 the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), on behalf of the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will convene a working group meeting on the Nexus of Economic Policies, Gender and Extremism at UNDP Headquarters, 304 East 45th St, FF10, New York, NY 10017. The GSX is a new mechanism for structured and systematic engagement of civil society with governments and multilateral organizations, on critical topics related to the prevention of extremism and promotion of rights, peace and pluralism. We are grateful for the support of the governments of the UK and Norway for the GSX and the thematic working groups.

The March 10th gathering is the 2nd in a series of thematic working groups of the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) with a focus on economic policy bringing together economists, development and human rights specialists and country based practitioners and experts to examine the relevance and linkages between macroeconomic policies, particularly neoliberalism, and the rise of extremism through a gendered lens.

During this one-day event we aim to share a preliminary discussion paper for your consideration. Our hypothesis shared in this forthcoming paper and based on empirical (but perhaps anecdotal) evidence is that neoliberal economic policies have created a context of ‘extreme capitalism’ which in turn has contributed to conditions in which extremist movements cloaked in religious or ethno-nationalist identity have been able to flourish. There are other contributing factors but the overarching macroeconomic policies are important to assess. In this context the gendered impacts for women and men (especially young) are also evident empirically.

To redress this situation, a fundamental reform of macroeconomic policy is needed. As Professor Radhika Balakrishan suggests, the solution could be to develop a human rights approach to
macroeconomic policymaking. In other words, economic policies should be designed to ensure that the social and economic rights of every human being as enshrined in the UN’s Conventions on Economic and Social Rights, as well as the UDHR, are realized. Thus macroeconomic policies pertaining to taxation, fiscal and monetary controls, trade and public expenditure that govern our lives, must be designed and monitored to enable and ensure education, healthcare, safe communities, employment and other fundamental human rights. This approach considers policy as a social and political process. It incorporates an understanding of the paradoxical character of the state. Thus it recognizes that states can both enable and deny social justice, and that individuals need protection against misuse of state power and require the power of the state to be harnessed to realize their rights. It highlights an additional set of processes through which unjust policy can be contested and evaluated.

We would like to frame the discussions with you around the following issues:

1. Is the hypothesis of linking neoliberalism with conditions that give rise to extremism fair? Is it flawed? How do we refine it? What research is needed to verify our thinking? What evidence is needed to verify the linkages between the impact of neoliberalism and rising extremism?

2. Can alternative macroeconomic policy approaches alleviate these problems? Is there existing evidence and/or can the theories or new approaches be tested modeled? Can we undertake aspirational surveys or other forms of qualitative and quantitative research to determine public attitudes and views on the goal of economic policies and/or their priorities? What are the gendered differences in the impact of alternative policy models?

3. Can we map the stakeholders and key actors (state, multilateral, private etc.) involved in policy development and reform? Who are the key influencers? What are the challenges and opportunities they pose in enabling changes at global, regional and national levels?

4. What should be the next steps for taking this discussion further with governmental actors and multilaterals? What are the entry points we envision?

The scope of issues being addressed is vast, but we hope that they are of interest to you. We anticipate that the discussions will help focus our approach to and analysis of these issues, and together we can determine the next steps for cross-sectoral engagement and prioritization of necessary research, policy advocacy, and practice.