

# DELIVERING ON THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE

## FORGING A NEW ECO-SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

A Call for Action submitted by the Global Research and Action Network for a New Eco-Social Contract (GRAN-ESC)

Briefing produced in consultation with UNRISD, GEC partners and GRAN-ESC working groups & network

### INTRODUCTION

The polycrisis is escalating and governments and civil society must step up to this moment. There is a need for renegotiated social contracts that clearly express people's priorities for change, centered in human rights and delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and incorporating a contract for nature, hence an "eco-social contract". This proposal is inspired by the [UN Summit of the Future \(SoF\)](#) that will take place on 22–23 September 2024 in New York—and offers ideas for the Pact for the Future, its implementation and delivery.

The [Global Research and Action Network for a New Eco-Social Contract \(GRAN-ESC\)](#) calls upon political actors, civil society and the United Nations to scale up ambition and action for realizing inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies for future generations. We need to address polarization, conflict, environmental destruction, poverty and inequality by changing harmful narratives, policies and practices that have divided the world, undermined trust and driven us deep into crisis. Only new deliberative and inclusive processes that engage deeply with the social contracts at the heart of our societies—including the unstated, unstable, unavoidable contract with nature—will do.

Eco-social contract is a constitutive expression of [mechanisms for a global pact and national action](#) to implement the structural and architectural changes envisioned in the Pact for the Future to be adopted at the SoF. Transformation cannot be imposed; it needs to be negotiated. While governments may meet for the future and leaders may negotiate for the future, they need to deliver a better present—so the time for implementing change is now.

## THE ROADMAP TOWARDS THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE (AND BEYOND)

The SoF was proposed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his ‘[Our Common Agenda](#)’ report to address the issues of peace and security. The SoF aims to enhance cooperation and address gaps in global governance, reaffirm existing commitments—including to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Charter—and move towards a reinvigorated multilateral system that can effectively tackle the challenges of today and tomorrow. An action-oriented outcome document, the ‘[pact for the future](#)’, has been negotiated by Member States and will require a clear delivery agenda.<sup>1</sup> The Pact for the Future includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations as annexes. On May 10–11 the 2024 [UN Civil Society Conference](#) provided preliminary discussions and data ahead of the SoF.<sup>2</sup> The Conference aimed to boost awareness and accountability, form multi-stakeholder coalitions (so called [ImPACT Coalitions](#)) to support reforms from the *Pact for the Future*, and innovate stakeholder engagement with intergovernmental processes. The *ImPACT for the Future Outcome Package* constitutes a Co-Chairs’ Summary capturing the recommendations across workshops, plenaries, and the discussions in interactive dialogues, as well as work plans, leveraging the recommendations, innovation and expertise of civil society to support the SoF and outcomes.

We note with enthusiasm that Our Common Agenda contains recommendations for a new social contract anchored in human rights, better management of critical global commons and global public goods that deliver equitably and sustainably for all. Unfortunately, there is no mention of a new social contract in the framing of SoF or Pact. However, we maintain that seeing the process of joining forces for a better future through the lens of renegotiating our broken social contracts is a precondition for achieving our global eco-social pact—the SDGs.

We urge Member States and decision makers to take up this opportunity to reconsider Our Common Agenda’s social contract framing (that centers social rights and responsibilities, citizen participation, accountability, trust, and shared values) in the Pact for the Future, and in creation of processes of Pact implementation that can ensure a inclusive, democratic and sustainable future. This will be fundamental to secure ambitious outcomes on all aspects of social development at the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025 (Action 6, Pact of the Future).

### TRANSFORMATION CANNOT BE IMPOSED; IT NEEDS TO BE NEGOTIATED

Social contracts define the basic rules and values that guide our societies. They define rights, responsibilities and duties of each member of society, including elites and state actors. They act as societal engagement mechanisms that support public debate, that build consensus and solidarity for action, that define priorities, accountability and pathways, and deliver an irrefutable mandate for transformative change. Top-down approaches risk being exclusionary, undemocratic and unsustainable. New eco-social contracts need to be built from the bottom-up (see [citizen activism in Nepal](#)). New democratic tools—such as citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, and citizen dialogues—can give progressive governments the mandate to transform economies and societies. Power asymmetries, often reflecting entrenched economic and social inequalities and historical injustices, need to be reduced. People must be heard, they must be partners, [owners and the beneficiaries of this transformation](#). Individuals and communities subjected to social, political and economic exclusions, women, people living with disabilities, indigenous peoples and other oppressed groups, need organized and transparent representation and resources to enable their active participation.

<sup>1</sup> The scope of the *Pact for the Future* aims to address policy gaps and builds on five key areas (chapters): sustainable development and financing for development (FfD); international peace and security; science, technology, and innovation and digital cooperation; youth and future generations; and transforming global governance.

<sup>2</sup> Civil society provided recommendations on the five chapters of the Pact for the Future, on the Declaration on Future Generations, and on the Global Digital Compact—the three expected outcomes of the SoF.

## SOCIAL CONTRACTS: NOT ONE BUT MANY

Every society needs a social contract, but the type of implicit and explicit arrangements, the policies, institutions and value systems social contracts are built upon, differ according to time and space. The GRAN-ESC urges all actors to increase efforts to decolonize and decentre our knowledge and value systems and to learn from communitarian visions and experiences in the global South when rethinking and designing our social and economic models. As we consider the challenge posed by genuine sustainable development, much can be learned from Indigenous People’s knowledge/way of life and communitarian visions such as Ubuntu, Buen Vivir or Eco-Swaraj, where humans and nature are deeply connected, and social relations grounded in reciprocity and respect.<sup>3</sup> Reformulating the human-nature relationship around reciprocity, partnership and connectedness lays the foundation for a new eco-social contract where people and nature thrive together. It would require the implementation of more innovative and integrated eco-social policies and budgets, that will also avoid and minimize any negative impact of environmental policies on citizens.

## PRINCIPLES GUIDING NEW ECO-SOCIAL CONTRACTS

The new eco-social contract we propose combines a reformed social contract for inclusion and justice with a contract for nature and future generations (UNRISD 2022). It is centered on principles of human rights, gender justice, peace and solidarity and promotes transformation of economies and societies toward greater sustainability and inclusion. It calls to address historical injustices associated with colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy and climate change and to mobilize resources needed to deliver on eco-social contracts through equitable fiscal policies and international finance. Policies, tools and financing mechanisms need to be re-designed to enhance overall societal welfare, promote equitable distribution of wealth and income, access to basic services and ensure sustainable use of natural resources. This may involve investing in education, healthcare, social protection, environmental conservation, and community development—and include rethinking the way we measure progress, going beyond GDP and simple metrics to the holistic approach envisioned by the SDGs.

## OUR VISION FOR DELIVERING THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE

Civil society participation has been essential to bring the *Pact for the Future* to life, but also help embolden an inclusive and re-invigorated United Nations system. We welcome the developments the Pact has undergone with this input and recognition of civil society’s role to ‘deliver on existing commitments and address new and emerging challenges’ in Action 57—but civil society can play a role in implementation as well. Once adopted, the Pact for the Future needs concrete actions, institutions and processes to bring its vision into reality. Engagement of stakeholders who are shaping new eco-social contracts in the communities where they live can be key to this—and help authentically center the values of the 2030 Agenda in delivery of its ambition. These include, deeper respect for human rights and social, economic, climate, gender and environmental justice—enshrining social inclusion, intersectionality, decent work and valorization of the care economy, intergenerational justice, the rights of nature and a contract for nature, and biological and cultural diversity.

One of the key contributions of our unique network is to create future-oriented knowledge through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches and contribute to a research-policy nexus, valuing diverse views and co-creating knowledge, including on the SDGs, SoF and Pact of the Future themes and chapters. GRAN-ESC

<sup>3</sup> See UNRISD Issue Briefs on [Eco-social contract and the 2030 Agenda](#) and on [Communitarian imaginaries and inspirations](#).

will continue to work to strengthen connections between research results and policy recommendations to provide support to successful and ambitious implementation of the Pact—including via the ImPACT for the Future Outcome Package. The different GRAN-ESC working groups (below) are creating knowledge and action on different areas of relevance for the Pact, and processes beyond. Our work within the GRAN-ESC working groups will also connect in particular to the Finance for Development (FfD) Conference and the Second World Summit for Social Development, both in 2025.

## WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are a set of concise recommendations connected to the Pact and its implementation from GRAN-ESC thematic working groups. Some points may relate to non-final drafts of the Pact or aspects intended to be annexed to the [Declaration on Future Generations](#)—but retain significance for guiding the upcoming implementation processes.

### GENDER JUSTICE

- Welcome gender emphasis in the pact: Given that women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals of all identities are disproportionately affected by the polycrisis and delivery of the SDGs, the substantive attention given to gender in the Pact under Actions 4, 6, 8, 18, 19, and 34 is welcomed (along with passing mention within actions 14, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 41 and 46). We strongly encourage retention of these points and emphasis on them in delivery of the Pact.
- Gender-specific responses: Given the reality and prevalence of gender-specific vulnerabilities, poverty, violence, and exclusion across all Member States, we encourage clear and consistent integration of gender perspectives into all policies and means of implementation associated with the Pact. Inclusive platforms for dialogue and decision-making are needed to ensure diverse gender perspectives shape the policies and practices that will define our collective future.
- Recognizing and amplifying leadership: Recognition of the importance of leadership opportunities for women and girls under Actions 29 and 34 will need to be expanded beyond a focus on science and youth—including gender-diverse individuals. This should include climate action, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.
- Achieving gender justice: Achieving gender justice and no-one left behind requires that the Pact expand Action 6 to encourage investment in social infrastructure—including healthcare, education, the care economy and social protection systems that support women and
- gender-diverse individuals. This includes recognition of the importance of fair wages and employment opportunities, the value of reproductive labor, and addressing gender-based violence through robust legal frameworks and support services.
- Gender-responsive budgeting: The Pact fails to mention or encourage gender-responsive budgeting and policymaking processes, missing the opportunity to ensure that resources are allocated in ways that address gender disparities and promote equality. This should be addressed in SDG-aligned implementation processes.

### TRANSFORMING ECONOMIES AND SOCIETIES

- Alternative economics: Bold, ambitious, accelerated, just and transformative action embodied in the Pact must extend to incubating new economic thinking and alternative development approaches during delivery. (e.g. social and solidarity, wellbeing, care, green, and circular economies; and ambitious green deals).
- Fair fiscal contracts: The new international financial architecture (IFA) considered in Action 48 should embed fair fiscal contracts at national and global levels, through promoting progressive tax systems, combating Illicit financial flows and tax evasion, and strengthening the role of the UN in tax matters. Solutions for fixing the global debt crisis, and mobilizing financial resources to support just

transitions in the Majority World, are paramount and require urgent attention once the Pact is adopted.

- Progressive fossil fuel subsidy removal: Address omission of fossil fuel subsidy removal as an important tool to deliver the SDGs, and take the opportunity to outline SDG-aligned progressive principles for integrating climate action with livelihood and social protection goals.
- IFA reform: Reform of existing IFA is encouraging but the legitimacy of international financial institutions in the Majority World, and removal of blockages to investment in delivery of SDGs, can be made more central. Processes such as the FfD conference will be key.
- Integrate human rights into value chains: More can be done to introduce mechanisms regulating global value chains' respect of human rights, labor standards, gender justice in all its diversity, and climate and environmental commitments. Including building on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to support binding national, regional and multilateral due diligence legislation/treaties on business and human rights.

#### EMPOWERING YOUTH<sup>4</sup>

- Enhance education curricula: Reform of education curricula to embed relevant concepts and methods must be given more attention than shown in Action 37, DFG Commitment 33 and elsewhere. For instance, experiential and creating-by-learning approaches can empower youth to be creative problem solvers, while introduction of SDG-aligned concepts, rights of the child, and the social contract will empower young people to fulfill their full potential and become engaged citizens.
- Ratify the inclusion of youth voices in each UN Agency. Re-interpret Action 40 to include all UN agencies, ensuring youth input in strategic planning and in policy-making explorations with Member States, to ensure intergenerational collaboration—including on implementing eco-social contracts. The commitment to appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations under DFG Action 43 is welcomed.
- Direct youth funding for meaningful participation: Commitments to youth participation, consultative and intergenerational bodies under Actions 34 and 35 are very welcome. Direct funding from multiple sources to youth-led work is essential—and would ensure commitments to meaningful participation can be realized.
- National and regional participation via youth assemblies: Action 34 is crucial and welcome for ensuring youth participation at national level—and in shaping eco-social contracts. We strongly encourage expansion of the proposal on national youth consultative bodies during implementation, extending to support for youth-as-citizen assemblies.
- Empower key stakeholders supporting youth: Build on Action 37 with support for training of key stakeholders supporting youth (educators, librarians, social workers, families) ensuring that they serve as multipliers for youth as leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs and catalysts of change. This could be incorporated into the DFG.

#### DISABILITIES, INTERSECTIONALITIES AND ECO-SOCIAL CONTRACTS

- Recognize persons with disabilities (PwDs): Investment in persons with disabilities (PwDs) under Action 4 is welcome, but this should not be the only mention of PwDs in the Pact. Extending the same support for people with complex embodiments would be welcome and demonstrate a positive framing.
- From 'improvements' to equity: Across the Pact, the character of support for intersectionality marginalized groups can be pitched higher than 'improvements' in condition, and focus on delivering on 'no one left behind' via threshold standards such as parity of autonomy, access to decision making processes, and necessary life giving and life sustaining services. This is an essential point for delivering and exceeding the Pact's ambitions.
- From youth inclusion to no one left behind: Action 33's excellent recognition of the need to remove barriers for young persons with disabilities, and the rights of

<sup>4</sup> These recommendations also connect to the [Declaration on Future Generations](#), specified by a 'DFG' acronym.

those facing intersecting discrimination, is strongly welcomed. We see no reason why this language under subsections a. and c. need be limited exclusively to young people in the Pact—and should be generalized to Action 4 and central to a disability inclusive vision of Agenda 2030.

Co-production should be central: Delivering the actions in the Pact will require allowing for full, equal, and meaningful participation of PwDs and intersectional marginalized people in implementation and governance processes covered in Action 34 and 35. Co-production principles should be highlighted—emphasizing avoiding unintentional eco-exclusion and eco-ableism<sup>5</sup>, and accessibility guarantees for neurodiverse and speakers of minority, non-UN languages who retain language rights.

## HOW TO GET THERE

The timeline to deliver a better present, safeguard the future, and achieve the SDGs, is short. Civil society, including the research community, must have a strong role in the implementation and monitoring of the Pact for the Future, its annexes and in the ImPACT for the Future outcome package. We commit to work within our network and with our stakeholders to engage in the ImPACT for the Future Outcome Package and to promote the vision of SoF and the Pact, and steer its effective implementation. Concretely, in achieving the SDGs under Action 1, by supporting Action 10's vision to harmoniously conserve nature, on meaningful participation of stakeholders in multilateral reform under Action 41, and delivery of the Pact's ambition through partnership under Action 57. We see this work continuing toward and through the FfD 2025 and the Second World Summit for Social Development conferences—acting as an alliance builder to accelerate processes towards inclusive, ecological and fair societies.

A clear path must be charted to put the world back on track for achieving the SDGs—and the opportunity seeding substantive and inclusive processes that can align social contracts with nature and the economic and social transition must not be missed.

<sup>5</sup> Eco-exclusion and eco-ableism refer to inadvertent or intentional outcomes of environmental campaigning, discourse or policymaking that are exclusionary, discriminating or marginalizing—in the case of [eco-ableism](#), specifically for people with disabilities.



## Information on our global network

The Global Research and Action Network for a New Eco-Social Contract (GRAN-ESC)—convened by [UNRISD](#) and the [Green Economy Coalition](#)—brings together 350+ organizations and individuals in 73 countries from the research, practice, advocacy and policy decision-making communities working for social, climate and environmental justice in a progressive knowledge and action alliance.

## FURTHER READING

- Desai, Manisha. Going Beyond the Social: Communitarian Imaginaries as Inspirations for Rethinking the Eco-Social Contract? Issue Brief No. 12. Geneva: UNRISD.
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- ILO GBDN, Fundación ONCE. 2023. Making the Green Transition Inclusive for Persons with Disabilities. Disability Hub Europe.