



**SECOND
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INTRODUCTION: REFASHIONING TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL POLICY FOR AFRICA

The **Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy for Africa Project (GETSPA)** is a pan-African initiative focused on reshaping social policy to support structural transformation aligned with Africa's Agenda 2063 and the global Agenda 2030. GETSPA critiques the prevailing neoliberal and patriarchal policy frameworks that have marginalized transformative social policy, reduced it to poverty-targeted social protection, and ignored the interplay between economic and social policy.

International Development Economics Associates (IDEAs) is a global network of progressive economists dedicated to researching, teaching, and disseminating critical analyses of economic policy and development. IDEAs aims to strengthen and develop alternatives to the prevailing neoliberal economic paradigm.

As two networks that emphasize the importance of social policy in driving equitable economic development and structural transformation, drawing on evidence from Africa and the broader Global South, GETSPA and IDEAS view the second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD II) as a critical opportunity for African stakeholders—governments, academia, and civil society—to redefine continental social development agendas.

STRENGTHS OF THE WSSD II DECLARATION

We welcome the UN's decision to organize WSSD II and appreciates several key strengths in the draft political declaration:

1. Acknowledgment of Persistent Inequalities

The declaration candidly recognizes the slow and uneven progress since WSSD I, citing persistent poverty, informal employment, inequality, digital divides, and the impact of global crises. This honest assessment sets a clear baseline for future action.

2. Recognition of Interconnection of Core Themes

The declaration treats poverty eradication, employment, and social integration as interconnected and mutually reinforcing. It advocates for “whole-of-government, whole-of-society, people-centred, and integrated approaches,” which we see as essential for coherent policy design.

3. Focus on Marginalized Groups

There is consistent emphasis on addressing the needs of socially and economically marginalized populations—women, children, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, older persons, youth, and rural communities. The declaration commits to their inclusion and participation in social development.

4. Recognition of Overlooked Social Development Areas

The declaration highlights critical but often neglected areas such as quality education, lifelong learning, housing, urbanization, water and sanitation, electricity, digital infrastructure, and transport. It also addresses care burdens and the crisis of social reproduction.

5. Call for Strengthened Multilateralism

We support the declaration’s call for inclusive international cooperation and solidarity, especially in a time of growing threats to multilateralism and the UN’s legitimacy.

GAPS AND LIMITATIONS IN THE DECLARATION

Despite its strengths, we have identified several critical gaps in the draft declaration and action plan:

1. Lack of an Economic Reform Agenda to Address the Structural Drivers of Global Inequality

While the declaration mentions international tax cooperation, it fails to challenge entrenched global economic structures that perpetuate inequality. A key constraint to implementing expansive social policies across Africa is the debt crisis, a broken international financial architecture, and the continued imposition of narrow macroeconomic frameworks on African countries. These frameworks restrict fiscal space and prioritize debt repayment and the flow of resources from South to North, effectively engineering national economies to serve external interests rather than domestic development. The declaration has no commitment to reforming trade and finance governance or addressing Africa’s extractive economic model.

The declaration is silent on the issues of reparations and climate debt to compensate Global South countries for the long history of exploitation, extraction, and dispossession under colonial rule which continues to shape economic and ecological disparities today.

2. Overemphasis on Private Sector

We are concerned that the declaration’s multiple references to the private sector, which demonstrates the increasing over-reliance on private sector for financing of social

policy is undermining state responsibility, legitimacy and capacity. It has also enabled the financialization of social policy, which has turned social policy instruments into a profit-driven asset class that threatens access to public goods and services and social citizenship.

3. Superficial Gender Equity Provisions

While the declaration promotes fair wages, care work equity, and women's empowerment, it fails to address patriarchal institutional cultures, the crisis of social reproduction, and biased policy-making processes that sustain gender inequality.

4. Recommendation about Formalisation ignores the problematic record of formalisation

The declaration's push for formalization of informal economies disregards research showing that such approaches criminalize and marginalize informal workers and entail a narrow focus on registration and taxation of informal enterprises, rather than the formalization of labour regulations to protect workers.

5. Neglect of Humanities and Social Sciences

The focus on STEM education ignores the vital role of humanities and social sciences in shaping values, promoting social development, and informing transformative policy agendas.

6. Absence of Peacebuilding Measures

Although the declaration acknowledges the link between peace and social development, it lacks actionable strategies for conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. It also overlooks political crises and threats to democracy.

7. Insufficient Ethical Frameworks for Technology

The declaration's approach to digital technologies and AI is limited to minimizing risks, including risks of widening inequalities between and within countries. We call for robust ethical frameworks and regulatory mechanisms to prevent job displacement, labour insecurity, social divides, and human rights violations.

8. Lack of Measurable Commitments

Many commitments are vague ("we will adopt," "we commit to exploring") and lack time-bound, quantifiable targets. We call for stronger accountability mechanisms beyond periodic reviews. While the declaration supports measuring progress beyond GDP and bridging digital divides, it lacks structured pathways and aggressive strategies to implement these goals, especially in least developed and landlocked countries.

9. Failure to Address UN's Existential Crisis

The declaration envisions a central role for the UN but does not acknowledge the institution's current crisis or propose strategies for its survival and effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE DECLARATION

1. Structural Economic Reform

Adopt strategies to dismantle unequal global economic relations, shift Africa from extractive, low-value industries, and promote sustainable and equitable development.

2. Renewed Social Contract

Governments should forge a new social contract grounded in social and economic rights, with states leading social development and private actors serving as partners.

3. Tackling Patriarchal Institutions

Integrate gender equity by addressing structural biases, the undervaluation of care work, and the ongoing crisis of social reproduction.

4. Commitment to Climate Justice

Ensure explicit climate justice measures, including financing for loss and damage, and fair handling of critical mineral extraction to prevent inequality and environmental harm.

5. Prioritising Mental Health

Treat mental health as a cross-cutting issue through improved access to services, awareness efforts, and integration into education, employment, and social policies.

6. Curbing Illicit Financial Flows

Take firm action against tax evasion and illicit financial flows that undermine domestic revenue and Africa's economic independence.

7. Socially Responsible Debt Relief

Design debt relief mechanisms that include social impact clauses to protect community welfare during restructuring.

8. Recognition of Informal Economies

Acknowledge and support informal workers as key contributors to development, focusing on fair wages, labour rights, and social protections rather than punitive formalisation.

9. Ethical AI and Digital Governance

Promote principles ensuring transparency, fairness, accountability, and decent work standards in the use of AI and digital technologies.

10. Transparent Progress Monitoring

Establish measurable indicators, public progress dashboards, and regular independent reviews to ensure accountability.

11. Strengthening the UN's Role

Reinforce the UN's capacity and legitimacy in addressing global crises and advocating for vulnerable nations.

CONCLUSION: A CALL FOR BOLD TRANSFORMATION

In conclusion, while the WSSD II political declaration is a valuable reaffirmation of foundational principles, it must evolve into a bold, actionable roadmap. The urgency of today's global challenges demands systemic reforms, clearer accountability, and audacious commitments to dismantle structural barriers. Only then can we build a truly just, inclusive, and sustainable world.