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***Association internationale des Conseils économiques et sociaux***

***et Institutions similaires***

**(AICESIS)**

***GENERAL ASSEMBLY***

***Moscow, 31 October – 1 November* 2023**

**PRESIDENCY ROADMAP**

**By presenting a well-reasoned argument that highlights the alignment between the theme of "Broad and Inclusive Growth" and the Sustainable Development Goals, along with emphasizing the relevance to Curaçao's and the worlds context and potential impact, the Economic and Social Council of Curaçao can effectively define why they have chosen this theme for their two-year term as AICESIS President.**

**Introduction:**

In 2015, when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) were adopted, most countries, members of the UN, have committed themselves to achieving the SDG’s by 2030.[[1]](#footnote-2) However, given the extra challenges COVID-19 has imposed on most countries, reaching the SDG’s in 2030 (only 7 years from now) looks extremely difficult.[[2]](#footnote-3) But fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals is crucial for addressing global challenges, promoting well-being, protecting the environment, reducing inequality, and creating a more sustainable and inclusive world for current and future generations.

Institutionalized social dialogue, the core business of all Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions, plays a crucial role in reducing inequality and creating a more sustainable inclusive world. Through Social Dialogue inclusive growth and development to reduce inequality might be possible. It involves the interaction between workers, employers, and governments to achieve social and economic progress. The success of social dialogue depends on the involvement of all stakeholders in a participatory process that ensures a fair distribution of benefits and a reduction in inequalities. Adopting "Broad and Inclusive Growth" as guiding principle is essential for effectively achieving the SDGs as it encompasses economic growth that benefits all segments of society, promotes social inclusion, reduces inequalities, and ensures that no one is left behind. On the other hand, the SDG’s can serve as a guideline or a set of indicators for monitoring the “Broad and Inclusive Growth”.

“Broad and Inclusive Growth” could be used as the conceptual framework for the approach of the socio-economic development from a multidimensional perspective; as an assessment framework for prioritization and decision-making, in general and more specifically for measures included in the Implementation Agenda of the Country Package of Curacao[[3]](#footnote-4).

As a small island development state, Curacao has committed itself to focus on 6 SDG’s[[4]](#footnote-5), this based on the concept of “Broad and Inclusive Growth” and considering the challenges the country faces: diversification of economic sectors in favor of economic growth and employment creation, aging of the population and sustainability of the social security, brain drain, high import dependency, poverty and income inequality, sustainable waste management and energy production, to name a few, challenges that are not alien to the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC-region).

The concept of "Broad and Inclusive Growth" extends beyond mere financial and economic dimensions to encompass socio-cultural and spatial-ecological factors. It takes into account the equitable distribution of well-being, its long-term sustainability for future generations, as well as its implications for international well-being. In doing so, "Broad and Inclusive Growth" lays the groundwork for a society that is not only prosperous but also inclusive and sustainable.

Given that each region faces distinct challenges, targeted interventions are requisite for achieving such comprehensive growth. This paper aims to spotlight key issues meriting particular attention from the Vice Secretaries-General (VSGs) of AICESIS in the four global regions: Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East. These VSGs are urged to initiate region-specific dialogues to identify the focal areas necessary for cultivating prosperous, inclusive societies within their jurisdictions.

**To guide these dialogues, the Economic and Social Council of Curaçao (SER) has conducted preliminary research and formulated a series of recommendations aligned with AICESIS's overarching theme for the upcoming biennium. It remains, however, at the discretion of each VSG and their respective regions to determine the extent to which these suggestions resonate with their regional objectives and conditions.**

**Europe:  In general:**

To promote inclusive growth for sustainable development in Europe, several factors are indicated in various resources as essential. Here are some key elements:

1. The policy Framework: Implementing a comprehensive policy framework is crucial. Governments should adopt policies that prioritize inclusive growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability. This framework should include measures to reduce income inequality, enhance social protection, support job creation, and promote sustainable practices in various sectors.
2. Importance of education and Skills Development: Educational attainment is becoming an increasingly important factor for the labour market. Education is valued by employers when hiring employees and it is expected that there will be an increased demand for highly skilled people the coming years, with the relevant education to manage jobs that are more flexible and complex. More generally, having at least an upper secondary education is often considered as the minimum level that helps individuals to be equipped for a full participation in society and to live a fulfilling life[[5]](#footnote-6). Considering that the EU economy is constantly evolving, the demand for relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes is subjected to rapid changes over time. Therefore, people need to be equipped with a set of key competences, including literacy, numeracy and digital competence, critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to work as part of a team. Education and training play a crucial role in enabling particularly young people to develop these competences and, thereby, provide the conditions for the best possible start in life. To better identify and manage the acquisition of required knowledge, skills and attitudes, and prevent the emergence of skills gaps and mismatches, effective communication of the needs of the EU economy to the education and training sector is essential[[6]](#footnote-7). Investing in education and skills development is, hence, vital for inclusive growth. Governments should ensure access to quality education for all, including marginalized groups, and focus on equipping individuals with the skills needed for the future job market.
3. Poverty, Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities: In 2022, 22% of the population in the EU (95.3 million people) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, i.e., lived in households experiencing at least one of the three poverty and social exclusion risks (risk of poverty, severe material and social deprivation, and/or living in a household with very low work intensity). The shares of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion varied across the EU countries though: the highest values were reported in Romania (34%), Bulgaria (32%), Greece and Spain (both 26%). On the other hand, the lowest shares were recorded in Czechia (12%), Slovenia (13%) and Poland (16%)[[7]](#footnote-8). Women are at a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU compared to men (22.7 % compared with 20.4 %) and over one-fifth (22.4 %) of the EU population living in households with dependent children was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022[[8]](#footnote-9). Efforts should be made to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities for all members of society. This involves addressing discrimination, promoting gender equality, and ensuring that vulnerable groups, such as people in poverty, with disabilities, migrants, and minorities, have equal access to essential services, employment opportunities, and social protection.
4. Innovation and Technology: Embracing innovation and technology can drive inclusive growth and sustainable development. To give an example, according to William Desmonts[[9]](#footnote-10), the EU has been able to maintain some influence amidst the rise of electric vehicles, even though Germany lags behind both American and Chinese manufacturers, thanks to the region’s ability to define standards that are binding on industry because of the size of the domestic market. But this effect is steadily diminishing as emerging markets expand and, in the long term, it is impossible to remain a standard-setter without mastering the technologies concerned. Considerable investment efforts are needed to catch up technologically and industrially and accelerate its ecological transition. Governments should support research and development, foster entrepreneurship, and facilitate the adoption of technological advancements across various sectors. This can lead to increased productivity, job creation, and the development of sustainable solutions.
5. Sustainable Infrastructure: Investing in sustainable infrastructure is crucial for long-term inclusive growth. This includes developing renewable energy sources, improving public transportation, promoting energy-efficient buildings, and expanding access to clean water and sanitation. The European Commission adopted a Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2013 to promote the deployment of green infrastructure in the EU in urban and rural areasin support of biodiversity conservation goals against the background of rapid urbanization and landscape fragmentation. It is argued that the design of Green Infrastructure determines the scope of benefits it can provide, such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, habitat connectivity for biodiversity, water and air quality regulation, improved human health and well-being[[10]](#footnote-11). Hence, integration of green infrastructure into spatial planning can create jobs, reduce environmental impact, and enhance quality of life.
6. Collaboration and Partnerships are important: Collaboration among governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders is essential. Building partnerships can leverage expertise, resources, and knowledge sharing to develop innovative solutions and promote inclusive growth. Multi-stakeholder dialogues and platforms for cooperation can foster sustainable development practices across Europe.
7. Green Transition: Prioritizing the green transition is crucial for sustainable development. Accelerating the green transition is crucial to bolster Europe's energy security and economic well-being in the medium term. Nevertheless, approximately one-third of countries are lagging behind their plans, with about half of them facing notable delays either in their overall progress (e.g., Hungary, Poland) or in implementing specific significant reforms (e.g., Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania)[[11]](#footnote-12). Moreover, while many EU citizens perceive the green transition as an opportunity, it is important to recognize that for others it presents a challenge that could potentially jeopardize their economic well-being and future prospects. This includes individuals working in industries such as mining, companies in the steel sector, and countries heavily reliant on fossil fuels for their energy needs. To these groups, the green transition does not always appear as a necessary step towards a modern and sustainable EU; instead, it may seem like a threat to their socio-economic stability. Furthermore, the potential benefits of a green transition are not distributed evenly among member states. This is particularly true for Eastern European countries, which have made significant economic progress but often relied on emissions-intensive growth models. In essence, their socio-economic development has been closely tied to unsustainable activities. Many people in these nations are concerned that once these activities are phased out, they will face socio-economic consequences and once again lag behind wealthier member states in terms of prosperity[[12]](#footnote-13). This requires the EU, in its efforts to accelerate efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, transition to renewable energy sources, promote circular economy practices, and adopt sustainable consumption and production patterns, to develop a new narrative of socio-economic convergence and an economic policy agenda that supports the countries in transitioning to a green economy. This will not only mitigate climate change but also create new job opportunities and stimulate economic growth in the entire region.
8. Access to Finance: According to the results from 27th round of the Survey on the Access to Finance of Enterprises (SAFE) in the euro area[[13]](#footnote-14), concerns about access to finance remained unchanged at a low level (6%) in the euro area. Although the supply of finance has been improving due to improved capital and liquidity positions of European banks, there are concerns that overly burdensome financial regulation is likely to be an obstacle to the supply of finance[[14]](#footnote-15). Ensuring access to finance, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and marginalized groups, is important for inclusive growth, as investments are necessary to drive growth and maintain competitiveness. Governments and financial institutions should promote inclusive and sustainable financing mechanisms, such as microfinance, impact investing, and green bonds, to support sustainable development initiatives.
9. Importance of data and Evidence-Based Decision Making[[15]](#footnote-16): Collecting and analyzing data is crucial for evidence-based decision making. Governments should invest in data collection systems and research to monitor progress, identify gaps, and develop targeted policies. Data-driven approaches can help policymakers understand the specific needs and challenges of different regions and demographics, enabling them to design inclusive and sustainable strategies.
10. Need for long-Term Vision and Commitment[[16]](#footnote-17): Achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development requires long-term vision and commitment from governments, institutions, and individuals. Political stability, long-term policy continuity, and public engagement are crucial for sustaining efforts and overcoming challenges on the path to inclusive and sustainable development.

By implementing these elements and fostering a comprehensive approach, Europe can promote inclusive growth for sustainable development, ensuring a prosperous and equitable future for all its citizens.

**State of play and suggested possible next steps:**

Europe faces a unique challenge in achieving inclusive growth and development due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the European Union has proposed a recovery fund to help member states recover from the economic shock. However, this fund must be used wisely to promote social dialogue, inclusion, and sustainability. **The SMART event that requires special attention from the AICESIS vice-secretary general for Europe is the allocation and distribution of the EU recovery fund.** The allocation should prioritize sectors that have been hit hardest by the pandemic and invest in measures that create decent jobs, promote social inclusion, and reduce inequalities. The distribution of the fund should be transparent, accountable, and participatory, involving all stakeholders in the process.

**Africa: In general:**

Africa is a continent of remarkable diversity, encompassing a vast array of cultures, languages, landscapes, and ecosystems. While its richness in natural resources and cultural heritage is undeniable, Africa also faces a complex and multifaceted set of development challenges. These challenges span from economic disparities and political instability to healthcare access and education disparities, reflecting the continent's opportunities and challenges. In this context sources indicate that, the need to promote inclusive growth for sustainable development in Africa is crucial.

In addition,

1. Importance of Economic diversification: Diversification is important for resilience, but the continent is home to eight of the world’s fifteen least economically diversified countries. This weakens the foundation of their economic transformation, slows their pace of progress, and makes them vulnerable to sudden external shocks[[17]](#footnote-18). Thus, diversification of the economy is key and especially encouraging economic diversification beyond traditional sectors like agriculture and natural resources is crucial to ensure inclusive growth for sustainable development in the continent. Promoting industries such as manufacturing, technology, and services can create job opportunities and drive sustainable economic growth.
2. Quality Education is crucial: Ensuring access to quality education is vital for human capital development. Despite the successes in primary school enrolment (current primary school enrolment rate is above 80% on average, with the continent recording some of the biggest increases in elementary school enrolment globally in the last few decades), inequalities and inefficiencies remain in this critical sector. There seem to be huge disparities and system dysfunctionalities and inefficiencies in education subsectors such as preprimary, technical, vocational, and informal education, which are severely underdeveloped. Furthermore, there seems to be exclusion at all levels[[18]](#footnote-19). Emphasizing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and vocational training can equip individuals with the skills needed for the modern job market and foster innovation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the growth of the labor force is in Africa as population is aging in other parts of the world. Today’s children in Africa will be the talent tomorrow’s global companies will be recruiting. Efforts to address exclusion in education in the African region should include policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, improving infrastructure, providing scholarships and subsidies for disadvantaged students, and implementing inclusive education practices. Additionally, international organizations and NGOs should work alongside governments to support inclusive and equitable education systems in Africa, recognizing that education is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting development and social progress.
3. Access to Finance is important: The unavailability of finance to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Africa has been identified as the most severe obstacle for SMEs’ business to thrive. Because of the lack of access to financial resources, many SMEs in Africa do not contribute adequately to economic prosperity and job creation to their full potential. The high cost and limited supply of credit, the complicated application procedures, the collateral requirements, and corruption are among the reasons [[19]](#footnote-20). Expanding access to financial services, including banking, microfinance, and credit facilities, is crucial. This enables SMEs and individuals to access capital, invest in their businesses, and participate in economic activities.
4. Attention to agriculture and rural Development is necessary[[20]](#footnote-21). As agriculture is the source of livelihood for 70% of the African population, agriculture and the rural economy play a fundamental role in securing a peaceful, prosperous, and integrated future for Africa[[21]](#footnote-22). Furthermore, most of the continent’s population living in the rural areas also lives in extreme poverty. The enhancement of sustainable agricultural and rural development is therefore fundamental to the attainment of the [Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)](https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/topics/millennium-development-goals-mdgs/) in Africa, particularly the eradication of hunger and poverty[[22]](#footnote-23). Enhancing agricultural productivity and supporting rural development can uplift vulnerable communities. The continent needs to invest in modern agriculture for increased productivity and production. Providing farmers with improved access to inputs, technology, and markets, as well as investing in rural infrastructure and services, can alleviate poverty and enhance food security.
5. Good Governance and Institutions are essential, as promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability is vital for sustainable development. Good governance is among the key aspirations listed in the Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want (the African Union’s shared 50-year development and transformation program for realizing the full potential of the continent). Many African countries have undertaken institutional reforms that have significantly changed their governance architectures and put in place a new set of leaders, but also many countries have not yet achieved the type of reforms that can prevent dictatorship, corruption, and economic decline. The absence of good governance in many African countries has been extremely damaging to the government’s corrective intervention role, particularly in the maintenance of peace and security, as well as the promotion of economic growth and the creation of the wealth needed to confront poverty and improve human development[[23]](#footnote-24). Strengthening institutions, combating corruption, and ensuring the rule of law create an enabling environment for investment, economic growth, and inclusive development.
6. Sustainable Natural Resource Management[[24]](#footnote-25): Africa faces the detrimental effects of climate change, growing water scarcity, loss of biodiversity and ecosystems, desertification and is vulnerable to natural disasters. The continent heavily relies on its natural resources for growth and development. However, the achievement of these objectives may be impeded by the impact of climate change.[[25]](#footnote-26) According to the IMF, climate shocks not only intensify existing vulnerabilities like conflict and food insecurity but also compound their impact on both the economy and the overall well-being of individuals. In addition, climate change inflicts more lasting macroeconomic costs for fragile countries in Africa. Stating that three years after extreme weather events the gross domestic product reaches about a 4 percent loss. Droughts are expected to impact the per capita GDP by 0.2 percent[[26]](#footnote-27). Adopting sustainable practices in managing natural resources is essential for long-term development. Balancing economic growth with environmental conservation and addressing climate change challenges can promote sustainable livelihoods and protect Africa's rich biodiversity.
7. Regional Integration and Trade: [[27]](#footnote-28)Promoting regional integration and intra-African trade can unlock economic potential and foster inclusive growth. Facilitating trade agreements, reducing trade barriers, and improving transportation and logistics infrastructure can enhance market access and stimulate economic activity.
8. Collaboration and Partnerships[[28]](#footnote-29): Collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and international partners is vital. Building effective partnerships can leverage resources, expertise, and knowledge to implement sustainable development initiatives and achieve collective goals.

It is important to note that the specific strategies and approaches may vary based on each African country's unique context and challenges, consider too the huge differences between African countries above and beneath the Saharan dessert.

**State of play and suggested possible next steps:**

As stated earlier, Africa is a continent with immense potential for inclusive growth and development, but it faces numerous challenges such as poverty, unemployment, coups, and inequality. **The SMART event that in our view requires special attention in Africa is the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**. The AfCFTA aims to create a single market for goods and services in Africa and promote intra-African trade. To achieve this, adequate investment in infrastructure, human capital development, and institutional reforms is necessary. If the AICESIS vice-secretary general in Africa and the region embraces this way forward it must ensure that the implementation of the AfCFTA promotes social dialogue, inclusion, and sustainability, and addresses the needs of vulnerable groups in society, including women, youth, and informal workers.

**Latin America and the Caribbean: In general:**

There are several key themes in Latin America and the Caribbean, which are mentioned in different resources, which might require special attention from governments, social partners, civil society, and the scientific community to promote inclusive growth for sustainable development.

1. Poverty Reduction: Despite progress in reducing poverty over the years, a sizable portion of the population still lives in poverty. The poverty rate in the region was estimated at 33% in 2022, with an extreme poverty rate of 14.5%[[29]](#footnote-30). Addressing this issue requires comprehensive strategies that tackle the root causes of poverty, such as improving education, healthcare, infrastructure, and access to financial services for vulnerable communities.
2. Economic Inequality: Latin America and the Caribbean continue to face high levels of income inequality, which hinders inclusive growth. An unstable global geopolitical and economic landscape, compounded by a series of successive crises including the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, has resulted in a deceleration of economic growth. This slowdown has been particularly evident in the creation of high-quality employment opportunities, further exacerbated by significant inflationary pressures that have driven up the costs of essential goods like food and energy. This inflation has had a disproportionately severe impact on the lowest income quintiles, while also affecting the vulnerable middle-income groups[[30]](#footnote-31). Governments and stakeholders should focus on implementing policies and initiatives that promote wealth distribution, access to quality education, job creation, and social protection programs.
3. Low Productivity: The region faces challenges in generating formal employment within the private sector, resulting in a substantial informal sector, high unemployment rates, increased inequality, and, consequently, higher poverty levels. Additionally, the economies of the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region are characterized by a significant presence of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) with limited productivity levels. MSMEs make up over 99% of the formal economy but often exhibit inefficiencies and lower profitability compared to larger enterprises. This poses a hindrance to the region's ability to create high-quality jobs, foster economic activities, and drive productivity growth[[31]](#footnote-32). Continued efforts by governments, international organizations, and development agencies are a prerequisite to address these challenges and support the growth and productivity of MSMEs in the LAC region. This includes initiatives aimed at providing access to financing, improving education and skills development, promoting innovation, and reducing the barriers to formalization. Enhancing the productivity of MSMEs is seen as a crucial step toward achieving sustainable economic growth and development in the region.
4. Social Inclusion: Discrimination and marginalization affect various groups within the region, including Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and persons with disabilities. Moreover, precarious living conditions, coupled with the underlying deficiencies in the health and social protection systems, underscore the heightened importance of accessing essential public services such as healthcare and education[[32]](#footnote-33). Governments and stakeholders need to work towards inclusive policies and programs that ensure equal rights, opportunities, and representation for all members of society.
5. Sustainability[[33]](#footnote-34): Latin America and the Caribbean face environmental challenges, including deforestation, pollution, climate change, and unsustainable natural resource management. Governments, civil society, and the scientific community should prioritize sustainable practices, conservation efforts, and the promotion of renewable energy sources to achieve environmentally sustainable development.
6. Governance and Corruption[[34]](#footnote-35): Strengthening governance, transparency, and accountability are crucial for sustainable development. Combating corruption, promoting the rule of law, and ensuring efficient public administration are essential to build trust, attract investment, and foster an enabling environment for inclusive growth.
7. Education and Innovation: ECLAC estimations reveal that in 2022, 45.4% of individuals under 18 years old in Latin America were residing in poverty, a figure that surpasses the overall population’s average by 13.3 percentage points. Among this group, approximately 18.5% are believed to be enduring extreme poverty. It is imperative for the region to promptly address its commitment to this demographic group by ensuring universal social protection and creating an environment conducive to their holistic development. Failing to do so could result in prolonged well-being setbacks with enduring consequences[[35]](#footnote-36). Hence, investing in education and promoting research and development are fundamental for long-term economic growth and social progress. Governments should prioritize quality education at all levels, focusing on improving access, curriculum relevance, and skills development to foster innovation and entrepreneurship.
8. Digital Divide[[36]](#footnote-37): Access to technology and the internet remains unequal in many parts of the region, leading to a digital divide that limits opportunities for marginalized communities. Bridging this divide requires investment in infrastructure, digital literacy programs, and policies that promote digital inclusion, particularly in remote and underserved areas.
9. Migration and Forced Displacement: [[37]](#footnote-38)Latin America and the Caribbean have faced significant migration flows and forced displacement due to factors such as economic instability, violence, and natural disasters. Addressing the root causes of migration, protecting the rights of migrants and refugees, and promoting regional cooperation are important for achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development.

It is crucial for governments, social partners, civil society, and the scientific community to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and implement evidence-based policies to address these challenges effectively to enable a more inclusive sustainable economic growth in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**State of play and suggested possible next steps:**

Latin America and the Caribbean have made considerable progress in reducing poverty and inequality in recent decades, but they still face challenges such as informal employment, underemployment, and low productivity. **The SMART event that in our view requires special attention in Latin America and the Caribbean is the promotion of decent work in the informal sector.** The informal sector represents a significant share of the economy in the region and provides livelihoods for many vulnerable groups. The Vice-Secretary general for Latin America and the Caribbean should ensure in our view that social dialogue mechanisms that include informal workers are in place, that policies promote formalization, and that resources are directed towards the development of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that operate in the informal sector.

**Asia, Eurasia & the Middle East: In general:**

Our sources indicate that promoting inclusive growth for sustainable development in Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East requires an extensive approach that addresses various economic, social, and environmental aspects, there are several factors to take into account.

It is important to mention that there is rapid growth in this region, specifically in relation to technology and globalization. Asia specifically continues to lead in terms of global economic growth. However, Asia’s current performance requires governments to remain cautious and keep into account the possible shocks in the near future. Additionally, there must be policies to combat long-term challenges that might require attention to build upon the new accomplishments. Due to an increase in economic growth there is an increase in inequality. The level of income disparity is expected to accelerate the inequality in opportunities for individuals to enhance their skills[[38]](#footnote-39).

Our resources indicate that to promote inclusive growth for sustainable development in this region attention to the following is crucial.

1. Skills Development: Investing in education and skills development programs that align with market demands is vital. Equipping individuals with relevant skills, particularly in emerging sectors, fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and employability, leading to inclusive growth and reducing unemployment. In relation to skills development, the Middle East stands out as the most digitally connected region globally. On average around 88 percent of the population is surfing the internet daily thus the digital consumption is notably high. For instance, Saudi Arabia ranks seventh worldwide in terms of social media engagement. However, despite the demand for online content and services, the creative digital sector remains in their early stages, leaving the region to not fully harness its entrepreneurial potential[[39]](#footnote-40). Specifically focusing on entrepreneurship in the region, a significant issue is the inability of many social entrepreneurs to sustain their startups, resulting in a higher-than-average rate of business failure at a young stage. This trend may restrict access to formal financial resources for these unsustainable youth social enterprises[[40]](#footnote-41). Moreover, youth who are employed tend to have extremely low incomes. South Asia hosts as many as 60.9 million youth working under extreme or moderate poverty. From a broader perspective, there are many young people who are neither in employment, nor in education or training[[41]](#footnote-42).
2. Social Protection: Developing robust social protection systems is essential to ensure equitable access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and social welfare. Expanding access to quality education and healthcare, particularly for marginalized communities, helps foster human capital development and reduce inequality. According to the UNDP[[42]](#footnote-43), social protection policies are closely related to inclusive growth. Social security is a human right. Every individual has the right to a life that upholds human dignity and includes a mechanism for social protection. Over the years, there has been insufficient progress in the implementation of social protection policies in the countries of this region. Social protection systems that are closely aligned with labor markets and employment strategies can effectively address disparities and promote a more inclusive form of economic growth. Robust social inclusion policies play a crucial role in ensuring that the principle of "no one left behind" is translated into action.
3. Sustainable Natural Resource Management[[43]](#footnote-44): Adopting sustainable practices in managing natural resources is essential for long-term development. Balancing economic growth with environmental conservation and addressing climate change challenges can promote sustainable livelihoods. A prominent consequence of this regions rapid economic expansion has been the substantial environmental harm it has caused. The heavy dependence on fossil fuels has resulted in the deterioration of air quality and ecosystems, a reduction in the availability of clean water, and the emergence of significant health risks. Therefore, environmental sustainability is of importance as it integrates policies into developments plans. Recent climate-related disasters in countries like China, the Philippines, and Thailand serve as a stark reminder that Asian policymakers must take immediate action to safeguard their citizens, as well as to combat and reverse the effects of climate change to ensure sustainable growth for the future. Consequently, by encouraging renewable energy investments, adopting green technologies and sustainable resource management to combat climate change. Furthermore, Asia has now become the world's primary contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, which are strongly associated with global warming and climate change. Its urban centers rank among the most polluted and are highly susceptible to extreme weather events.
4. Regional Cooperation: The region is extremely heterogeneous in terms of socio-economic progress and level of development and democracy[[44]](#footnote-45). Fostering regional cooperation and partnerships among countries is crucial for inclusive growth. Collaborative efforts in trade, investment, infrastructure development, and knowledge-sharing can create synergies, strengthen connectivity, and promote inclusive development across borders. It is important to note that each region and country within Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East has unique characteristics and challenges. Tailoring these factors to specific contexts while considering local priorities and needs is necessary for effective promotion of inclusive growth and sustainable development.

**State of play and suggested possible next steps**

Asia, Eurasia & the Middle East are dynamic regions that have experienced significant economic growth over the past few decades. However, this growth has been accompanied by significant inequalities, informal employment, and a lack of social protection. **The SMART event that, in our view, requires special attention in this region is the promotion of social protection for informal workers.** Informal workers, including migrant workers, domestic workers, and those in the gig economy, lack social protection and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse[[45]](#footnote-46). The AICESIS Vice-Secretary General for Asia, Eurasia & the Middle East, if this possible next step is embraced, must ensure that social dialogue mechanisms that involve informal workers are in place, that policies promote formalization, that social protection schemes are developed, and that resources are directed towards capacity building for informal workers’ organizations[[46]](#footnote-47).

**Overall conclusion:**

In summary, achieving inclusive economic growth and sustainable development on a global scale calls for a nuanced approach that takes into account both regional idiosyncrasies and specific national challenges. These could range from infrastructure deficits to regulatory issues, and from socio-political dynamics to environmental constraints. Furthermore, exceptional circumstances—such as natural disasters, political instability, or economic crises—must also be carefully weighed in the strategic planning process.

In this context, the Vice Secretaries-General of AICESIS assigned to the four key geographical regions—namely, Asia/Eurasia and the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and Europe—should prioritize the orchestration of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) events. These events must aim to foster social dialogue that is not only inclusive of various stakeholder groups but also promotes sustainability and decent employment opportunities for all.

Most importantly, every initiative and program rolled out by the Economic and Social Councils or analogous institutions within these regions should be designed with a clear understanding of the institutions' capabilities and limitations. This means ensuring that tasks are delegated effectively, adequate resources are allocated, and that there is a framework in place for monitoring and evaluation to ensure the sustainability and impact of these initiatives.

Leveraging a SMART framework for the Vice Secretaries-General's events allows for a tailored approach to each region's unique circumstances. These may encompass, depending on regional discretion, the judicious allocation of the European Union's Recovery Fund in Europe, the tactical implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in Africa, advancing decent work in Latin America and the Caribbean's informal sector, and fortifying social protection measures for informal workers in Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle East. Prioritizing such SMART events augments the efficacy of social dialogue, thereby propelling inclusive growth and global development.

Utilizing a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) framework enhances the clarity and effectiveness of policy recommendations in the following ways:

1. **Specific**: Policy recommendations should be unambiguous, delineating the desired outcome clearly. For instance, rather than ambiguously stating, "Address climate change," a more focused recommendation would specify, "The government should enact a carbon tax aiming for a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030."
2. **Measurable**: A quantifiable metric should accompany each recommendation to facilitate progress tracking. E.g., "The government should create a community health fund designed to subsidize a minimum of 90% of healthcare costs for low-income populations by the year 2025."
3. **Achievable**: Each recommendation must be realistic, considering the financial, political, and logistical dimensions. For instance, "Legislation should be enacted to increment the minimum wage in the manufacturing sector by 10% over a two-year period," ensures feasibility by setting a moderate goal within a reasonable timeline.
4. **Relevant**: Recommendations must be aligned with the current societal, economic, and political contexts. For instance, "Design a loan program specifically for female entrepreneurs to enhance gender equity in business sectors by 2030," targets a pressing social issue and aligns with broader societal values.
5. **Time-bound**: Setting a specific timeframe ensures timely implementation. For example, "Form a national task force committed to reducing the poverty rate by 5% within five years via employment initiatives and social investments," provides clear timelines and milestones.

In essence, a SMART approach facilitates the formulation of policy recommendations that are incisive, quantifiable, attainable, pertinent, and bounded by time. Adherence to these criteria enables policymakers to craft recommendations that are not only lucid and concise but also practical and impactful, thereby driving inclusive and sustainable development.

1. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2015/09/509732>: UN adopts new Global Goals, charting sustainable development for people and planet by 2030 (accessed 17 July 2023) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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