

Forum: Forum on Inequalities

Thematic: How to reduce inequalities on different scales?

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Marital status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Married/in a relationship<input checked="" type="radio"/> Single<input type="radio"/> With children, if so, how many	Level of education <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Primary<input type="radio"/> Secondary<input checked="" type="radio"/> University
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1. How does the theme of inequalities concern you?

I am currently a 23 years-old student pursuing a master in commerce at the University of Mumbai. I grew up in Mumbai, my father owning a shop in the city. This allows us to have an income of money sufficient to fulfil our needs, but not much more, making us a part of the Indian Middle-class. Having the opportunity to complete further education, I have decided to pursue a master in commerce in the public University of Mumbai, to be able to expand the business. I come from a Hindu background and am part of the Vaishya caste. This means that I see how often, and especially in my education, quotas block people from my caste from accessing university or some jobs because of favor for the other castes, even though most Vaishya castes suffer economically too. I see how leaders keep wanting to reduce inequality by reducing poverty, letting the wealthier prosper and leaving the middle-class to fend for themselves. This leads to global poverty reducing, but to inequalities rising.

I live and study in a city where migration due to inequalities between rural and urban areas leads to fights over housing, which the middle-class loses to the wealthiest. I can see how the middle-class struggles to live comfortably facing prices, while India's billionaire count rose by 12% in the past year alone. I am aware of how my entire country is a victim of inequality between the developed richer countries and the previously colonized ones.

2. What do you suggest at your level?

I do not believe that inequality can be totally eradicated. However, it is obvious that working towards more equality is not only manageable, but also necessary.

This work must be accomplished at an international level as a priority. Previously colonized countries suffered from the theft of their resources which have never been repaid. The international community must acknowledge these injustices to start reducing inequalities. The world's governance structure altogether must be reformed. International organizations' structure is further enhancing inequalities by providing some countries with an unfair advantage in decision-making. This allows those countries to make decisions, social or economic, which will favor them before the others. As a student in commerce, I am aware, for instance, of the way the WTO makes it harder for India to focus on its small and micro-enterprises.

Countries must also act as a nation to reduce inequality inside their own populations. Taxes must be adapted to stop favorizing the wealthy elites and help the middle and lower classes. Six to seven trillion dollars' worth of black wealth lies hidden in tax havens across the world. Measures should be taken to avoid that bigger corporates use tax havens thanks to money-shifting. This would allow smaller enterprises to try to keep up with the bigger ones. Taxes on wealth and inheritance should also be put in place to both gain money for government and reduce inequalities between the richest and the middle-class. In my country India, while the revenue potential of inheritance tax and wealth tax is 0.8 percent of the GDP, the wealth tax only comprised of 0.08 per cent of GDP in 2015-16.

The difference of opportunities for populations living in urban or rural settings is also a key factor in regional inequalities. The lack of investment towards rural integration leads to significant migrations towards the bigger cities. This creates new challenges. The influx of people makes the price of living higher, public services like healthcare or education become overstretched, and while the wealthy people have no difficulties coping with this, the middle-class inhabitants face difficulties. They face both competition for housing and jobs with newcomers and the soaring prices which they cannot pay for. Investing in rural integration and in reducing the effect of that migration for urban populations is crucial.

Finally, while increased attention is rightly given to structural inequalities, such as caste or gender inequality in my country, this must be better balanced with addressing direct economic inequality. As said, I see the public debate forgetting those who struggle only economically to the profit of those who struggle socially. When economic difficulties are indeed considered, the middle class is always forgotten between the wealthiest and the poorest. Local measures to fight this phenomenon must also be put in place. Providing access to better quality healthcare and education even in public facilities, to be able to compete with the private facilities without needing to ruin ourselves is just one example of measures to be taken.