

PCC Vision on ‘Equity and Development’

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Prof Wil Hout (ISS, EUR)

Prof Peter Knorringa (ISS, EUR), Chair

Prof Joost de Laat (Utrecht University)

Prof Annelies Zoomers (Utrecht University)

His Royal Highness Prince Claus of the Netherlands was, and remains, an icon in the pursuit of a more just and sustainable world. The Prince Claus Chair in Development and Equity has been in existence since 2003. The propositions that Prince Claus formulated upon accepting an honorary doctorate from ISS in 1988, that formed the inspiration for the Chair, were very much related to the reality of North-South relations that characterized the era in which they were formulated. The relevance of the propositions in the current era of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains undisputed, although the elements of equity and justice need to be foregrounded in a different way than in the original formulation in order to sit well with the global challenges anno 2020. The new vision for the Chair is intended to take cognizance of the most pressing challenges in today’s world, whilst remaining true to the core values of the Prince Claus Chair. In this way, the Chair will be given a new elan that will ensure its long-term sustainability.

To renew and sharpen the profile of the PCC, we propose changing the name of the Chair from ‘Development and Equity’ to “Equity and Development’, to emphasize the importance of rising and partly new inequalities across a range of dimensions. These inequalities are further exacerbated by various ecological and technological pressures, and most recently also by the global health pressures following the Covid 19 pandemic. Development should be regarded as instrumental to equity as the chair goes forward.

Among the ecological and technological challenges, climate change and digitalization appear to demand the most urgent responses, certainly when seen from the perspective of the countries and populations in what is termed the “global South”. Digitalization as a new general-purpose technology is used here as a proxy for fundamental changes across a multitude of dimensions of development due to new opportunities and challenges arising with the deployment of for example, artificial intelligence, big data, the internet of things, the FinTech and 3D printing. While we are only at the beginning of understanding how these processes will impact on humanity, it is already becoming clear that digitalization will most likely affect poorer and more marginalized communities more than other communities, and it is also likely to create new inequalities. New technologies can, however, in some specific circumstances also open up opportunities for new forms of agency by poorer and marginalized communities and by activists.

Climate change is used here as a proxy for how mankind has impacted upon our planet, and how scholarship can no longer separate the ‘social’ from the ‘economic’ and the ‘environmental’. Moreover, the impacts of the changes in our physical environment are more likely to be felt more harshly and more directly by poorer and more marginalized communities and regions, leading to new and reinforced inequalities. For example, one

straightforward connection is the finding that more vulnerable regions that have historically contributed the least to carbon emissions, are hardest hit by climate change.

In order to update the identity of the Prince Claus Chair, we propose a continued and further sharpened focus on inequalities at the level of individuals, communities, gender, youth, social groups, regions, nations and continents. This focus allows for a broad range of multi-disciplinary and thematic entry points such as governance, justice, culture, socio-economic trends, to name but a few, with a focus on increasing and new inequalities. Such a clear identity will also facilitate the involvement of previous Chairs in an ongoing discussion with new and future Chairs given the proposal to introduce a common focal point in the respective research activities. Moreover, over the coming period, there should be less emphasis on the purely national dimensions of development. Rather, the global and local contexts of development, and the associated issues of inequality, unrest, contestation, and sustainability, should be foregrounded.