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# Social Innovation and Digital/Societal Transformation

Conference, Dortmund, 28-29 October 2019



Session: the role of social innovation for  
sustainable development

Many 'wicked' problems

## Introduction, and re-examining the poverty of our imagination

Jeremy Millard





# The three pillars of Sustainable Development

The United Nations defines **sustainable development** as “the guiding principle for balanced long-term global development consisting of the three pillars of **economic** development, **social** development and **environmental** protection, so that if any one pillar is weak then the system as a whole is unsustainable”





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# Global / United Nations

## *Sustainable Developments Goals: 2015-2030*



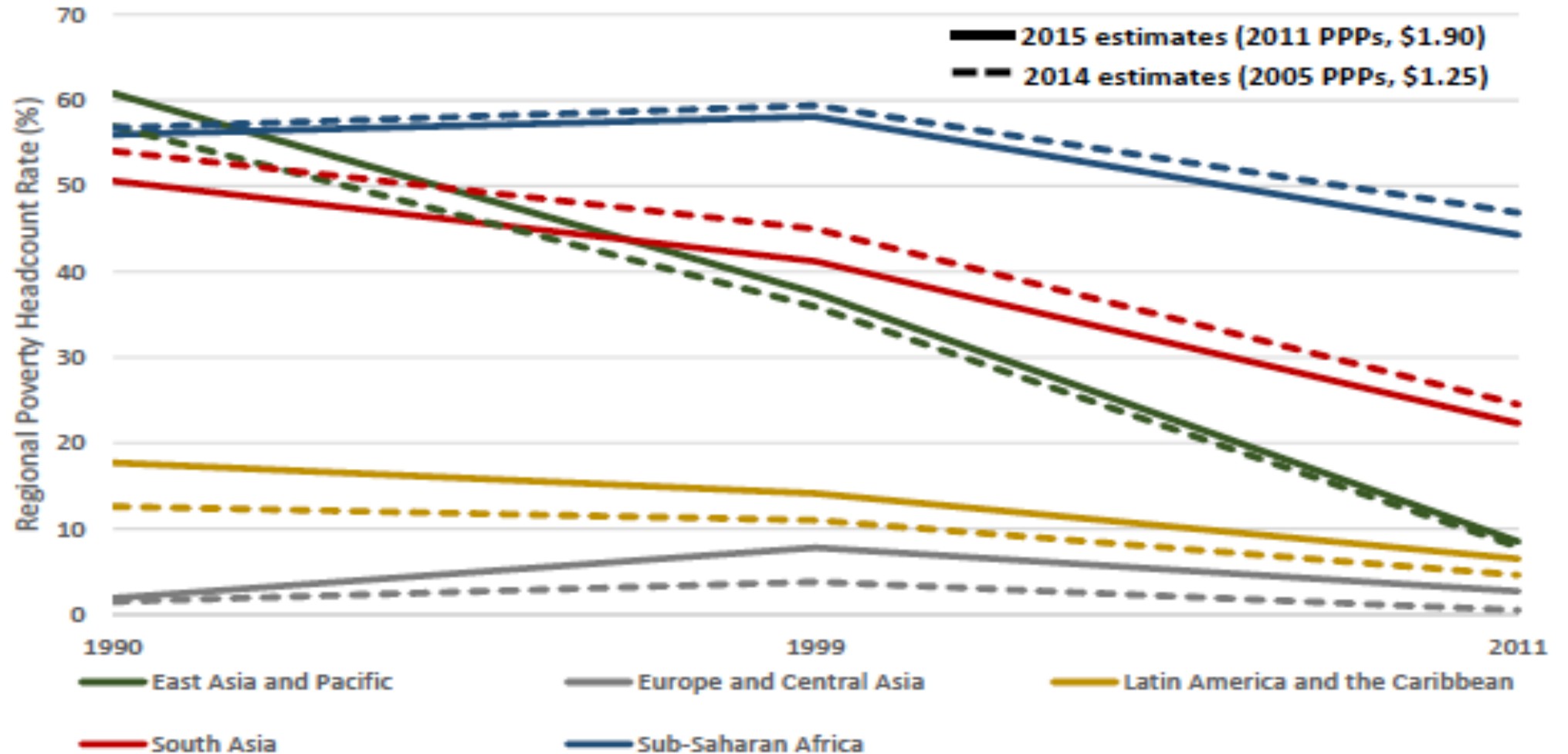
***SDGs: apply globally, i.e. we all have these challenges and need to work together***



# Great news: global poverty falls to below 10%

World Bank, 2012 Poverty = “extreme poverty at \$1.95 / day” (i.e. simple survival)

Figure 8: Regional and global trajectories 1990-2011



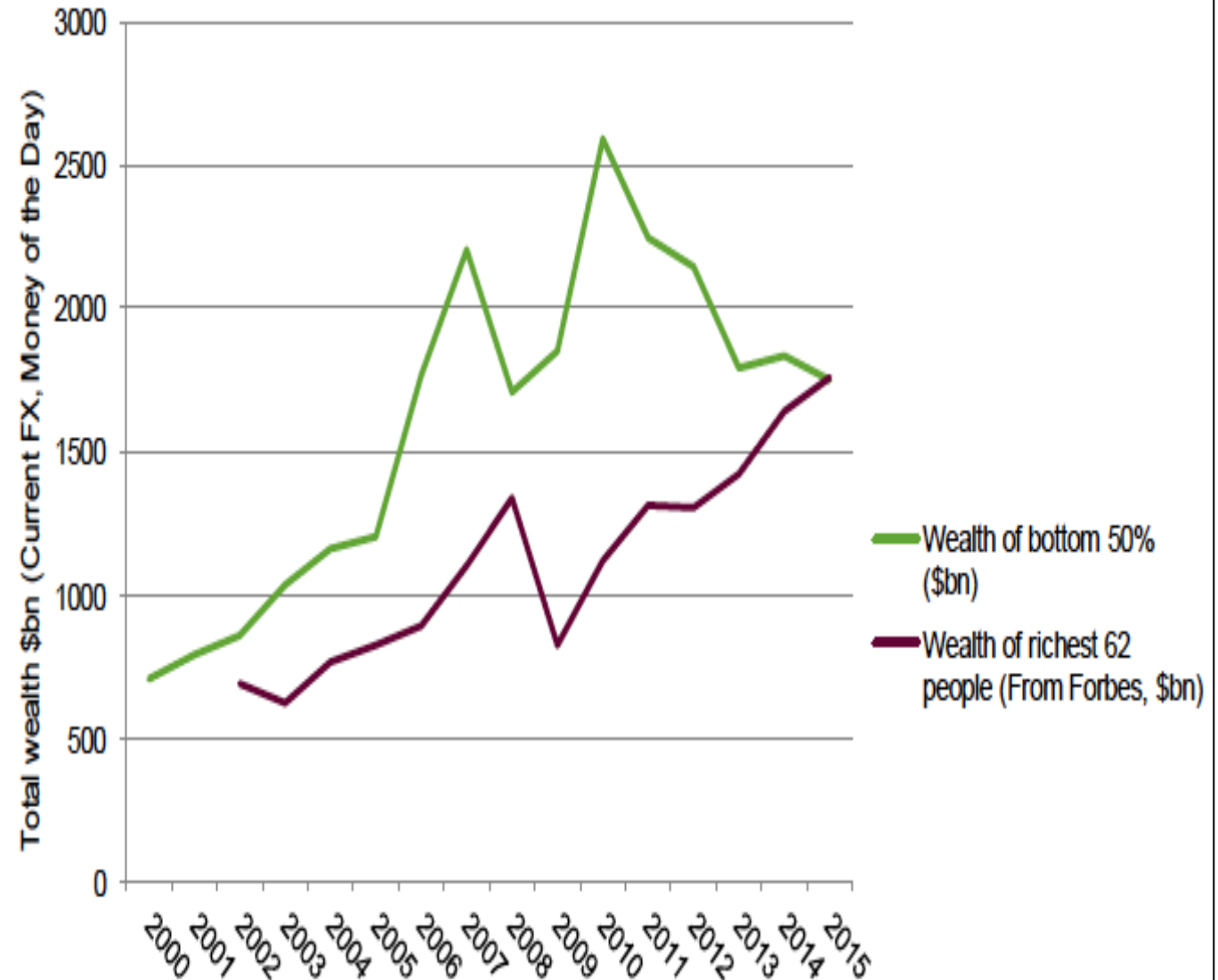
**..but many more relatively poor people in less absolutely poor world**

**Relative poverty** = defines poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society: people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context (in Europe normally below 40%-60% of median income)

As absolute poverty has fallen since 2000, relative poverty has become more important and has risen in nearly all countries. **Relative poverty is less responsive to economic growth – and more responsive to inequality**

*(World Bank, 2012)*

Figure: The wealth of the richest 62 individuals continues to grow, while that of the poorest half of the world stagnates<sup>4</sup>







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# Poverty in low & middle income countries: both absolute and relative

- Absolute poverty line (\$1.95 per day) – now below 10% globally
- The UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and SDGs has “No Poverty” as first goal

## Globally:

- Absolute poverty falling, but relative poverty rising steeply leading to marginalisation, exclusion and vulnerability
- **Inequality is arguably now the biggest challenge**





# Poverty in Europe: mainly relative

- Relative poverty – unable to participate adequately in mainstream society, thus excluded from many areas of everyday life
- Measured e.g. as below 60% of median income (EU)
- Relative poverty in some European countries has increased threefold over 15 years (the ‘working poor’), and inequality much more

## **PRECARIOUS WORK**

- Relative poverty not only about insufficient money to live..
- Europe 2020 Strategy has poverty and inequality reduction as one of five main objectives



**THE GIG  
ECONOMY**

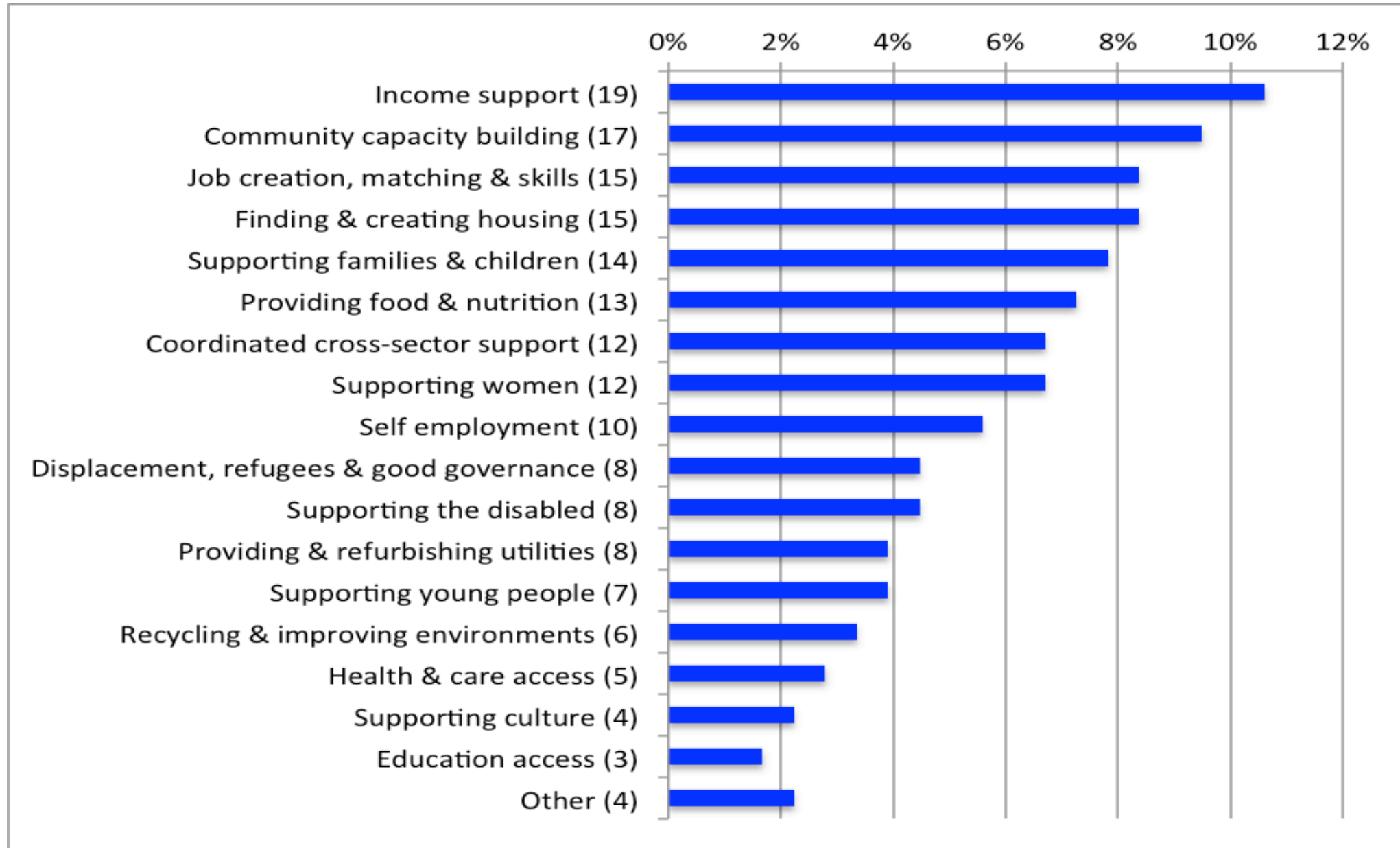
**NO  
TO  
ZERO  
HOUR  
CONTRACTS**



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# Multiple deprivation & disadvantage (1)

SI-DRIVE project:  
multiple case  
types focused on  
poverty reduction  
& sustainable  
development  
(PRSD)  
covering the three  
main dimensions  
of sustainable  
development





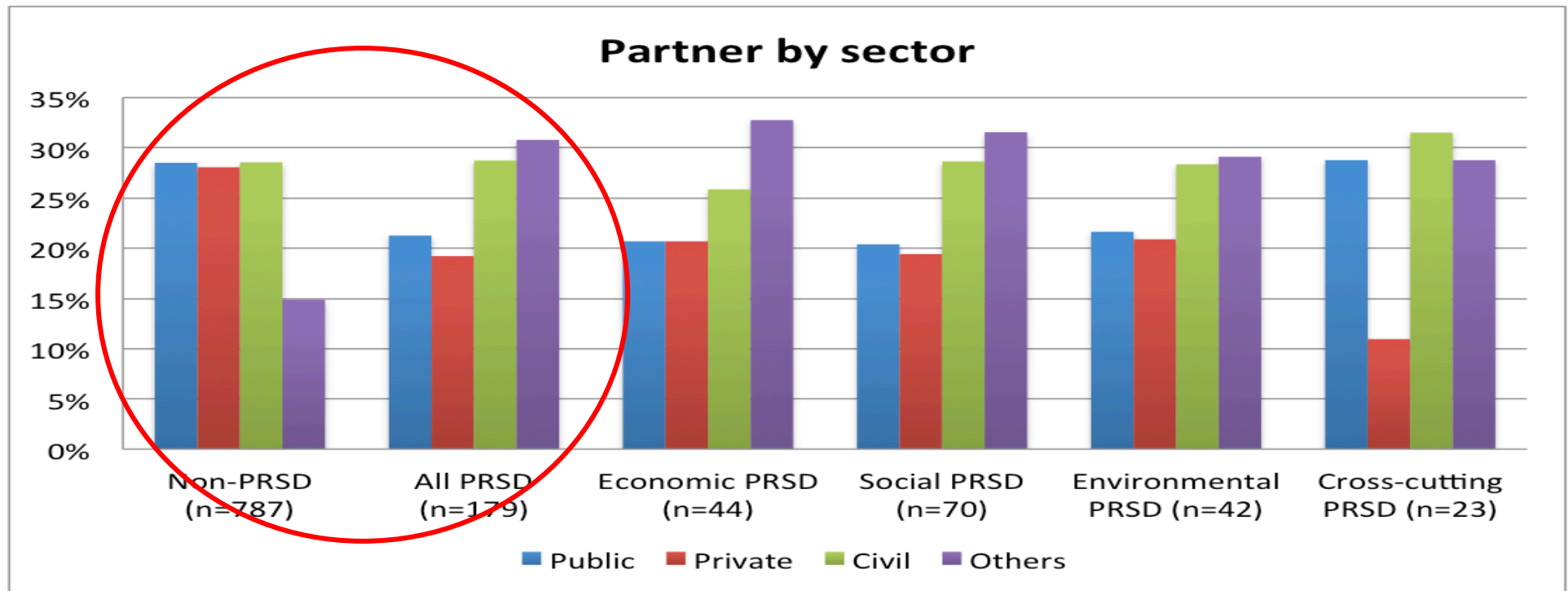


## Multiple deprivation & disadvantage (2)

**Poverty is highly complex and context dependent, need joined-up approach:**

- multiple, joined up solutions
- multiple actor types
- multiple sectors
- multiple disciplines
- all-round, nexus approach
- whole human being & dignity approach
- **DIVERSITY**
- *CSOs & 'others' are most common partners for PRSD*
- *Joining up often done by these as 'trusted third parties' bridging between more mainstream actors*

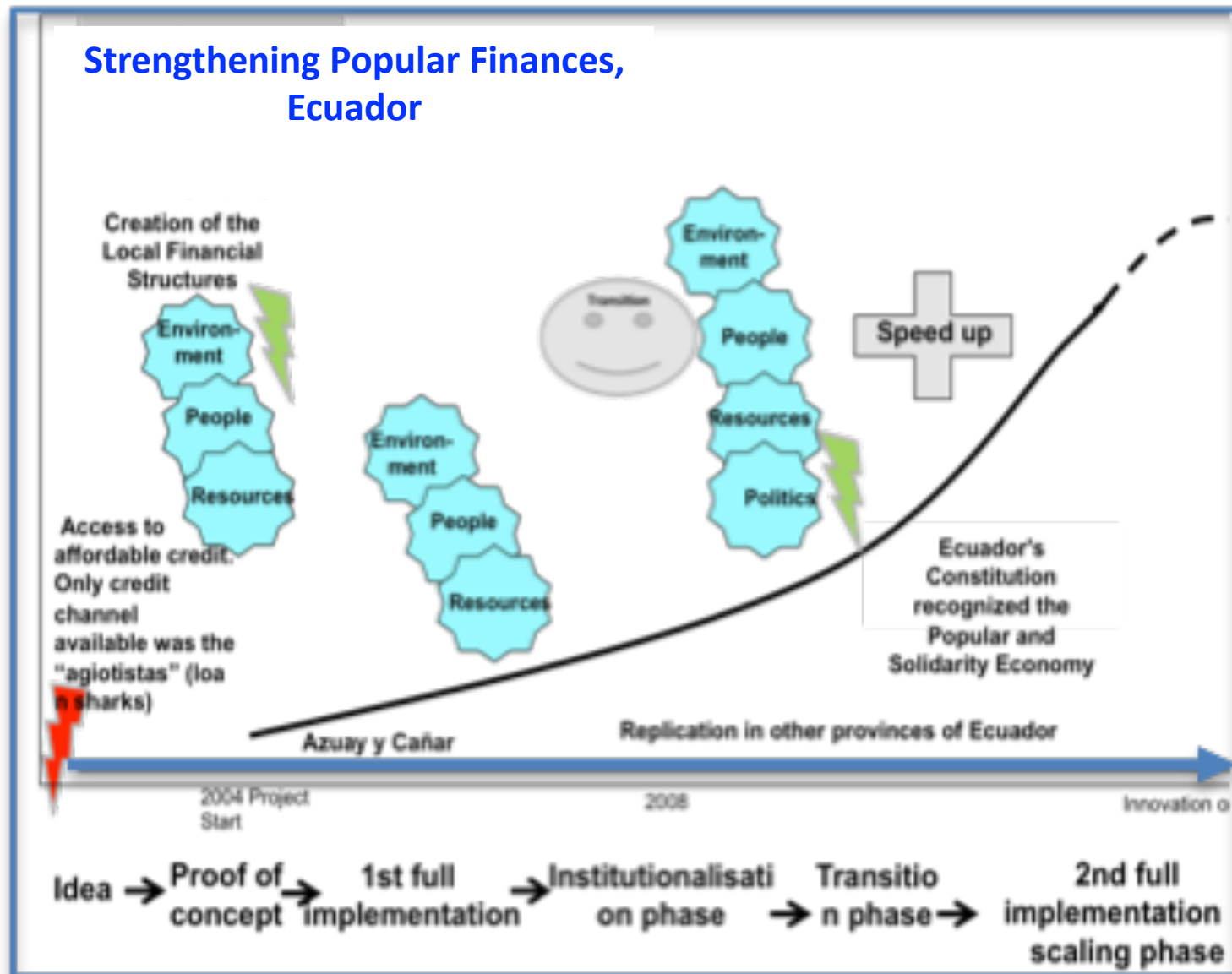
PRSD = Poverty  
Reduction &  
Sustainable  
Development  
cases





# Three main development trajectories

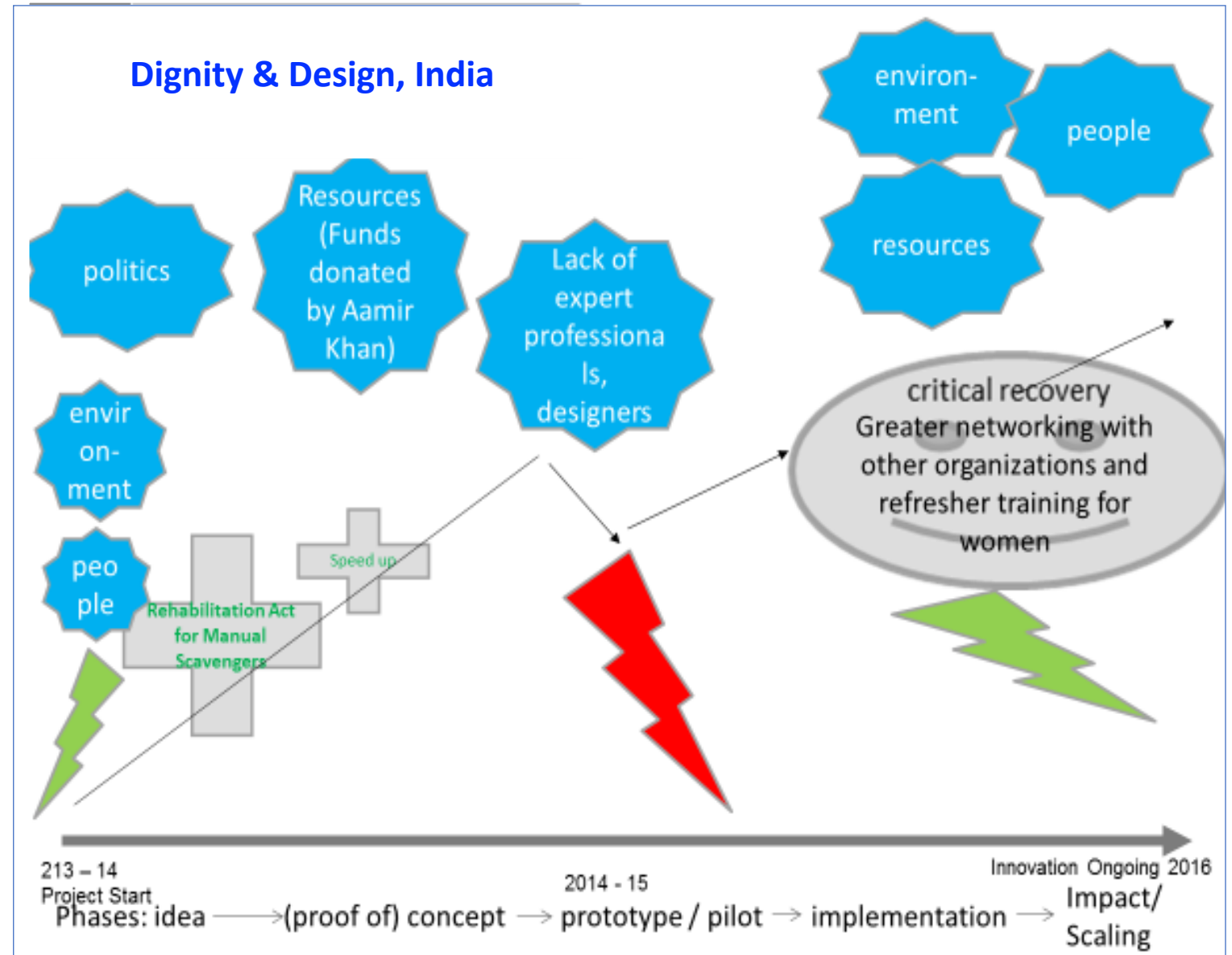
- 1) **Continuous growth:** typically supported by large, stable public/private funding; e.g. *Strengthening Popular Finances* (Ecuador)





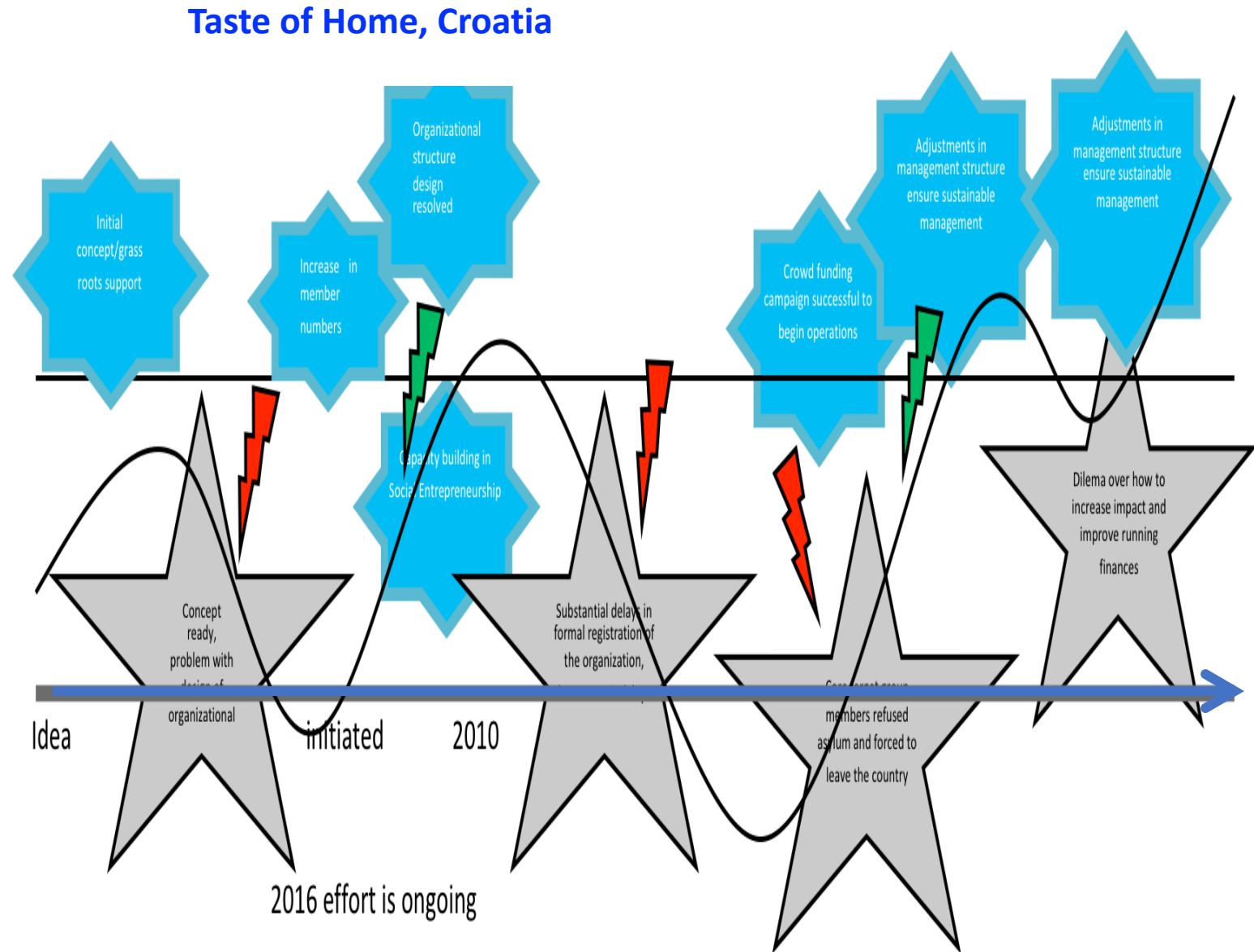
# Three main development trajectories

- 1) **Continuous growth:** typically supported by large, stable public/private funding; e.g. *Strengthening Popular Finances* (Ecuador)
- 2) **Two main growth stages, punctuated by a 'crisis':** typically first hands-off government, then crisis, e.g. due to acute lack of HR and other resources (*Dignity & Design, India*), finally stronger government/ institutional support



- 1) **Continuous growth:** typically supported by large, stable public/private funding; e.g. *Strengthening Popular Finances* (Ecuador)
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- 3) **Up and down, wavelike, alternating success & failure:** typically very bottom-up, driven by 'crises' and highly dynamic, unpredictable and changeable situation: e.g. *Refugee taste of home*, Croatia

## Three main development trajectories







## Respond to a problem or an opportunity?



### ‘Problem-push’ or ‘opportunity pull’:

- Most conceptual understandings of SI are that they respond to a **specific social need or problem**
- But, most who have this need (including the poor and marginalised) also -- and especially the communities in which they live -- possess huge potential, resilience and latent ability to be a big part of their own solution. They look (sometimes with help) for **opportunities arising from their own capabilities and situation**.
- In development circles this is done by, e.g., theory of change and appreciative enquiry approaches

### ‘Problem-solving’ or ‘opportunity harvesting’



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## Example: educational & employment opportunities: School for Life (Ghana)

- 1995: Ghanaian NGO partnered with Danish NGO to promote sustainable development in largely excluded north.
- Saw ‘**problem**’ of many unemployed local youth with some education, about to migrate to cities in south, and then saw them instead as a **local asset**.



- 20 years ago converted this asset to an **opportunity** by creating ‘barefoot’ teachers providing basic education in the villages.
- Developed ‘complementary basic education’ model for >200,000 children who otherwise wouldn’t go to school.
- 9 months education and then 86% continue in public school otherwise closed to them.
- 10 years ago became government policy.
- Scaling: elsewhere in Ghana with UK, USA and UNICEF funds → ‘accelerated education’ model in Liberia and Sierra Leone

**Innovation:** Local assets providing ‘functional literacy’ in mother tongue, locally relevant, local ‘teachers’, parental acceptance; North-South and South-South collaboration