



Chairperson's summary of the High-Level Panel discussion on the priority theme "Social integration"

4 February 2010

The Commission held a High-Level Panel discussion on Social integration under the sub-item 3 (a) on the priority theme, and heard a keynote speech by Dr. Beatriz Merino, President of the Iberoamerican Federation of Ombudsmen, the National Ombudsman of Peru, and the former Prime Minister of Peru. There were also presentations from the following panelists: H.E. Mr. J. Piet Hein Donner, the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment of the Netherlands, Dr. Servacius B. Likwelile, the Chief Executive Director of the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) in the Office of the President of the United Republic of Tanzania and Professor Vojtech Tkáč, the Adviser to the Minister, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovakia. The presentations were followed by an interactive dialogue.

Social integration and development

Fifteen years ago, world leaders reached a consensus that poverty reduction, employment creation, and social integration were key goals to advance social development, highlighting the inter-linkages among these goals. Social integration was recognized as a key factor for enabling social development, accompanied by economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Since then, it had become increasingly evident that it was not possible for the State to sustain socio-economic development when many of its citizens remain excluded from access to basic services and participation. It was not possible to promote the well-being of its citizens, when there was a significant deficit in trust towards public institutions. It was noted that although economic growth was necessary for development, it must also be inclusive, and socially and environmentally sustainable.

It was also emphasized that social integration that fostered the active involvement of individuals and social groups in the economic, social and cultural life of society was essential for the development and well-being of people as well as internal strength and stability of societies. As the challenges and opportunities varied from country to country, and each social group had special needs and concerns, each country had to devise its own social integration policies and strategies.

Challenges to social integration

In many developing countries, entrenched poverty, wide-spread deprivation and exclusion, and the denial of basic rights constituted the main obstacles to social integration. The very large number of people living in poverty illustrated the extent of

social exclusion. In the European Union, basic challenges to social integration related to demographic changes, combined with immigration issues and gender inequality.

Persistent discrimination in societies continued to be one of the major barriers to social integration and poverty reduction. The equality of every person and the respect of their dignity are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Many societies endorsed the basic value of equality of all people regardless of their difference in gender, age, race, ethnicity, culture, language, religious belief and physical ability. However, in reality, discriminatory values and stereotyping often existed in social norms and mindsets.

A society must be equipped with mechanisms to accommodate differences and diversity, respect the principle of equality, allow participation and provide opportunities for all people regardless of their backgrounds. Anti-discrimination policies and legal and human rights frameworks to eliminate all forms of discrimination were the fundamental steps towards social integration. Further steps should be taken to remove, legal, social, economic, cultural and political barriers for the excluded and vulnerable.

Interrelationship between social integration, poverty reduction, and full employment and decent work

It was recognized that poverty reduction was essential for advancing social integration and preventing exclusion. In turn, employment creation contributed to poverty reduction and social integration. Poverty encompassed the lack of adequate income as well as opportunities, empowerment, capabilities and security. This concept of poverty called for a new policy mix to include interventions through social integration measures.

It was also noted that employment and decent work were key to social integration and protecting the vulnerable and marginalized. Decent work was not only a source of income, but also the basis for active social interaction as well as personal and skills development. When individuals lost their jobs they often faced long-term unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

Poverty reduction and social integration required investing in human capital development, especially education and health. Enhancing the quality of education, and not just focus on increasing the enrolment rate was underscored. Citizenship education played an important role in promoting social integration through learning to respect individuals and social rights as well as promoting responsible citizenship. Education through the family was also important.

Human rights framework

It was noted that development was a progressive realization of people's social, civil, political and economic rights, so that they could fully participate in society and influence decisions that affect their lives. In general, people should be able to demand their rights through legal frameworks and their effective implementation. Human development was defined as expanding people's choices, freedoms and capabilities. It was key to realize

the rights to participation and consultation. Social integration was seen to be at the core of human development.

Investment in social services, including social protection

Social protection was regarded as crucial in advancing social integration. In developing countries, social protection should be seen as part of a broader development agenda. Efforts should include empowering communities and local governance structures, improving accountability and building capacity. Innovative social protection interventions should meet basic needs, facilitate productive engagement in economic activities, and expand livelihood opportunities for the marginalized, excluded and the extreme poor.

Attention should be paid to avoid dependency as well as reduce leakages, through involving communities in the design and management of the programmes. Monetary transfer should be seen as a part of social protection system.

Social Protection Floor

The United Nations system Chief Executive Board for Coordination in its Communique of 2009 urged Governments to effectively confront the crisis and build a fair and inclusive system of globalization. Two of the nine joint initiatives endorsed were Global Jobs Pact and the Social Protection Floor.

The initiative to develop a social protection floor, led by the International Labour Organization and World Health Organization, was welcomed as an attempt to create global social standards for fair globalization. Such global social standards were considered essential, not only to combat poverty and foster societal stability, but also to promote fair global competition and level playing field. Social protection floor should recognize the differences in economic development and the corresponding levels of protection and strive for an upward-moving social floor in accordance with economic development.

Participation, transparency and accountability

Participation and the need to promote bottom-up processes that allowed people living in poverty and the marginalized to participate in decision-making which affected their lives were important for promoting social integration. That, in turn, enhanced accountability and transparency in developing and implementing social integration policies and strategies. Participatory approach was advocated for public services delivery which, preferably, could be decentralized and designed at the local level. Policies should center on the family as a basic fabric of the society, taking into consideration the right of individuals.

Institutional capacity and partnerships

Sustained political will and commitments for inclusive decision-making, as well as a concerted effort to develop institutional capacity were required to advance social integration.

Regarding the use of the official development assistance (ODA) to finance social security systems in developing countries, ODA should be holistic and support all measures including developing capacities and mechanisms. Any external assistance, however, should first seek national ideas and identify common denominators, so that the best modality could be identified to fit into the existing system and avoid creating a parallel structure. In that context, a mechanism for social protection created at the national level could be a good entry point.