

COPENHAGEN +15: ACHIEVING A SOCIETY FOR ALL

A Society for All

Fifteen years ago the world's leaders signed the Copenhagen Declaration committing themselves “*to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights ... and participation of all people*” and to “*ensure the protection and full integration into the economy and society of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons*”.¹

Since the time of the Declaration, we have become increasingly aware of our interdependence and our need for one another. Decisions and inaction in any part of our global community have an impact on the whole. At present, more and more problems and issues have become global, that is, beyond the reach of national governments. This obliges us all to acknowledge our responsibility for each other and to collaboratively seek inclusive solutions.

A Shared Vision of a Shared Future

We are committed to working for an equitable and shared society, as the Club de Madrid, an organization of former heads of states, has defined it: “A *shared society* is a socially inclusive² and cohesive society. It is stable and safe. It is where all those living there feel at home. It respects everyone's dignity and human rights while providing every individual with equal opportunity. It is tolerant. It respects diversity.” Such a society encourages the participation of all, including disadvantaged and marginalized groups and persons. The measure of progress is how a society treats its most vulnerable.

Our vision of the future is a society that is socially just, sustainable, humane, and respectful of every human person and the environment. Such a society is committed to the common good, respects cultural values and social institutions, and promotes a solidarity that leads to social inclusion.

The members of an inclusive society engage in a “... process of promoting values, relations, and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic, and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity, and dignity.”³ It is in the family that socialization for inclusive societies begins.

A Global Society in Crisis

The consequences of social exclusion often dramatically show themselves when a community faces a crisis. We have seen that the global climate and economic and financial crises have both revealed the

¹ World Summit for Social Development Copenhagen, 1995; Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development; Part C: Commitments

² We prefer the use of the term social inclusion to social integration

³ Helsinki Expert Group Meeting, 2008

impact of exclusive policies and have had a rapid, extensive, and often devastating negative influence on the ability of societies to be inclusive.

Today the world is confronted with the worst financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1920s-30s. The evolving crisis began within the world's major financial centres and has spread throughout the global economy causing severe social, political, economic, and psychological effects. While all countries are negatively impacted by the crisis, the more vulnerable developing countries are most severely affected. This crisis highlights long standing systemic fragilities and imbalances.

There are signs of increased social tensions, crime, and violent outbreaks in communities worldwide. Economic, social, and political inequality is growing and the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is expanding. This is evident at the local, national, and international level.

Although globalization has opened up opportunities for economic growth and development, it has also triggered new risks and given rise to new inequalities. The further marginalization of social groups, indigenous peoples, and whole countries has resulted in an overall increase in global poverty. Taken as a whole, macroeconomic policies⁴ have maintained gender inequalities, impeded the economic empowerment of many, and worsened the plight of people living in poverty. We need an 'economics of solidarity' where economic development is environmentally sustainable and the complementary relationship between social policy and economic prosperity is nurtured.

Climate change is the most significant challenge the world faces today. The climate crisis and its multiple manifestations exacerbate social inequalities, contribute to the maintenance of social exclusion, and serve as obstacles to achieving socially inclusive and cohesive societies.

Poor health, lack of water and sanitation, lack of secure and decent livelihood, and political instability arise from the inequities that undercut development and the capacity to make societies more equitable and inclusive. Climate change adds to these stresses on development as it also impedes its pace and quality. Forced migration and general insecurity among people who lack options as they struggle for basic subsistence are among the effects of climate change.

These two crises have had multiple negative impacts on the ability of communities and countries to establish truly socially inclusive societies. When decision-making is dominated by a few issues or a few groups, the results are often inequitable and inadequate. As a result, some people are excluded from choice, but not from consequences. An equitable global recovery, a sustainable future, and real social development require the full participation of all in shaping appropriate responses to the crises of these times.

Achieving a Society for All

As members of direct service-providing NGOs, the extensive and long standing experience of our members working with *people on the ground* has shown that no solution will work without equity at its core. Equity is primarily a matter of justice and human rights. Given the unequal material, social, and

⁴ 2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, p12

economic situations of the members of different societies, all need to accept their common but differentiated responsibility to respond at the local, national, and regional level.

The empowerment of people through full and effective participation in the social, economic, and political decisions which affect their communities is integral to the promotion of social inclusion. Civil society organizations and governments at the local, national, regional, and international levels should avail themselves of every opportunity to engage their constituents fully in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programmes which affect their lives. Each individual has the potential to contribute to the building of their society and to be protagonists of their own development.

Empowerment, particularly of those most marginalized and excluded, is essential to social integration and to building inclusive societies that are equitable, participative, and sustainable. Policies and programmes to promote social, economic, political, and legal empowerment have the potential not only to create more inclusive societies, but also to address some of society's most intractable problems including: poverty; discrimination based on gender, race, religion, age, disability, and class; family breakdown; the climate crisis; crime and violence; forced migration; and trafficking in human persons. Many of these are often by-products of inequities and deepening stress in social, economic, and political life. The important role of civil society organizations must be recognized in the process of creating these policies and programs.

Many people, especially those living in poverty, are excluded from society because they are unaware of their legal rights or lack legal identity. Some are unaware of the inequity of the hierarchical and patriarchal structures of their societies. Providing education for those living in poverty about their rights, the protection of law, and access to social safety nets can empower them to be fully participating members of society. Additionally, education provides them with the tools to become more aware of their social reality and able to effect change in discriminatory or harmful practices embedded in their culture. The role of voluntary organizations in advocacy work provides another important tool to support those living in poverty to achieve their rights.

The NGO Committee on Social Development conducted a survey on effective practices in social inclusion among their networks across the globe. The Committee received 193 responses from Civil Society Organizations from 62 countries. Below are three concrete examples of effective practices that build inclusive societies and provide promise of achieving the goals articulated so well in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme for Action. These examples and many others demonstrate that social integration/inclusion is an achievable and desirable goal which NGOs around the world are realizing on a daily basis.

- 1) In Thailand a Christian faith based NGO saw the children of Muslim families living on the Thai/Myanmar border collecting garbage and begging in the streets to support their families. Knowing that education is key to empowerment and social inclusion, they began instructing the children and then began assisting family members who were ill. As the members of the NGO became more and more a part of the community, the mothers of the families began organizing themselves and set up a space for classes for both the children and the adults, many of whom were illiterate. Academic course work, arts, health care, human rights learning, and training in

labour law helped the former outcasts forge bonds of solidarity with other marginalized groups and provided them with the tools to build a better society and future.

- 2) In the State of Kerala, India, Neighbourhood Community Networks were established in large numbers in the past three decades. Nearly 184,000 neighbourhood groups of women living in poverty have been in operation giving those living in poverty an effective and on-going voice in the structure of their local society. Deciding together and working together for poverty eradication helped the women to transcend mindsets of untouchability that casteism represented. With the success of the adult parliaments, children's parliaments have also begun to form in increasing numbers, pointing to a bright future for communities committed to enhancing the quality of life for all.
- 3) In Bolivia an NGO, whose members live with those living in extreme poverty, worked with the people to address access to water controlled by land owners. In their poverty, they were dependent on water to earn a livelihood by washing other people's clothes. Group meetings and home visitations enabled these people to express their hopes and needs and begin to bridge the gap that existed between them and the rest of the community. This project, that provided access to water, led to the establishment of a community centre that includes a laundry facility, toilets, and a community gathering space.

Many other stories of success in creating an enabling environment for building inclusive societies have been provided in the outcome document of this research. The programmes described above all contain five essential characteristics: they benefit the larger society as well as the direct recipients; they are community-based; they are sustainable; they are replicable; and those who benefit most directly are integrally involved in the design, administration, and evaluation of the programme. Inclusive societies are possible. When these characteristics are present, social integration/inclusion is facilitated.

Conclusion

We NGOs know that it is urgent to confirm the principles of a 'shared society for all' and to establish policies that promote the full participation of all. The two most pressing crises of today – the financial-economic crisis and the climate crisis – demonstrate the importance of engaging all people and peoples in creating more equitable societies and a sustainable development which respects our common humanity and our home Planet-Earth. Setting forth policies which promote social inclusion is essential for the realisation of the other two core values articulated at the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen (1995) that of the eradication of poverty and full employment and decent work for all. These three are what would make for people-centred development founded on equity and social justice.

To assist you in the important work of this 48th Session of the Commission for Social Development we are appending here: first, a suggestion of policies which for us would foster social inclusion; second, a brief resume of the results of the Survey we carried out in preparation for this gathering. The latter will indicate where a full copy of the findings can be accessed.

We count on you to respond to the moral imperative of this hour: Achieving a Society for All.

2 February 2010