Commission for Social Development
Fifty-second session

11 February 2014

High-level panel discussion on the priority theme

"Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and productive and decent work for all"

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

I.   BACKGROUND

In its resolution 2012/7, the Economic and Social Council decided that the priority theme for the 2013–2014 review and policy cycle shall be "Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all." It stressed "…the importance of identifying relevant sub-themes within the priority theme, in order to focus interventions and discussions, and of taking into account cross-cutting issues during subsequent sessions of the Commission."

In preparation for the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, the Secretary-General submitted a report on the priority theme (E/CN.5/2014/3). The report reviews policies, strategies and programmes that enable the empowerment of people and social groups as a means to achieve poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all. In its recommendations to the Commission, the report stresses the importance of developing open and inclusive institutions and of promoting participation by strengthening people's capacities to participate and by eliminating discrimination.

Empowerment is a key objective of people-centred development but it is also its engine. Actions that seek to give people power, the means to strengthen their own capacities and opportunities to use such capacities –namely through education and health care, political representation, access to justice, property rights, control over productive assets, information and communication technologies or access to financial services, among others– contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion. Institutions and norms that promote open and inclusive processes create the conditions needed for the reduction of poverty and inequality, as do accountable and responsive Governments that encourage and facilitate the participation of individuals and communities in social, economic and political life. Participatory processes also build trust and solidarity and therefore support the creation of inclusive, cohesive and stable societies.

There is growing recognition that action to promote people's empowerment must go beyond group-specific approaches. While breaking the cycle of inequality and powerlessness requires targeted or special measures to facilitate the participation of those individuals and social groups that face the greatest challenges in overcoming poverty and exclusion, it also calls for a comprehensive and universal policy

framework that addresses the underlying economic, social and other structural causes of poverty, inequality and disempowerment and helps level the playing field.

While there is no single blueprint for promoting empowerment and concrete policies and strategies are context-specific, certain elements are often present when countries are successful in creating the enabling conditions for empowerment. Specifically, Governments that have adopted an empowering approach to policy-making have taken action to ensure that social, economic, political and legal institutions are open and inclusive; promoted strategies to build people's skills and their capacity to participate; and addressed discrimination.

II.   OBJECTIVES

The high-level panel discussion aims at providing an opportunity for members of the Commission for Social Development and other key stakeholders, including civil society organizations, to engage in a substantive dialogue on policies and strategies that effectively promote empowerment and foster the virtuous cycle of empowerment and other social development goals. Such dialogue should inform national and international policy debates, including the ongoing debates on the post-2015 international development agenda and the future sustainable development goals. The sharing of concrete, evidence-based suggestions for the formulation of strategies that have been shown to advance the empowerment of people should also help members of the Commission in the preparation of a resolution on this priority theme.

The key objectives of the high-level panel discussion are, therefore, to identify, exchange and examine good practices and lessons learned in policies and strategies to promote the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all. In particular, the high-level panel aims to explore effective approaches to: (1) ensure that social, economic, political and legal institutions are open and inclusive; (2) build human and social capital to strengthen capacity for effective participation and give individuals and the groups to which they belong a voice; and (iii) actively promote participation by, inter alia, addressing discrimination.

III.   STRUCTURE

The panel discussion will be informed by the report of the Secretary-General on promoting the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all (E/CN.5/2014/3). The report took into account a set of recommendations formulated at the expert group meeting on the priority theme that was held in New York from 10 to 11 September 2013.

The panel discussion will be chaired by Ms. Sewa Lamsal Adhikari, who will make brief opening remarks. The panel will be comprised of five panellists and a moderator. Following the panellists' presentations, the moderator will open the floor for questions and interactive discussion.

Panelists are expected to structure their presentations around concrete policy examples of good practices and lessons learned in promoting empowerment, including in the following areas:

- Improving access to social protection schemes and ensuring universal access to social services, including quality education, training and health services;
- Ensuring inclusive access to productive resources, including land, natural resources and financial services;
- Expanding access to information and communication technologies (ICTs);
- Ensuring inclusive political representation and the effective participation of all in policymaking and governance processes;
- Strengthening the capacity of public administrations to be transparent, accountable and responsive to all members of society;
- Taking action to eliminate discrimination against all persons and excluded or marginalized social groups.

Panellists are also expected to discuss the role that empowerment should play in the global development agenda after 2015.

There will be no formal statements. Copies of prepared panelist presentations will be disseminated.

Speaker	Suggested speaking time
Chair: opening remarks	5 minutes
Moderator: context-setting	5 minutes
Panellists (5): Presentations	15-20 minutes per presentation
Moderated interactive discussion with participants from the floor	Interventions limited to no more than three minutes each, followed by responses from the panellists
	The total duration of the event is 3 hours

Panellists

The high-level panel will consist of six members (five panellists and a moderator) representing Member States, academia and civil society organizations, taking into consideration gender and geographical balance.

Venue, date and time

Conference Room 4, North Lawn building, United Nations Headquarters, New York
Tuesday, 11 February 2014, 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm