



## **Expert Group Meeting**

“Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World:  
Progress in Advancing Social Development and Lessons Learned”

17-18 July 2014, UNHQ-New York

### **I. Purpose of the meeting**

In its resolution E/RES/2014/3, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations decided that the priority theme for the 2015-2016 review and policy cycle of the Commission for Social Development would be “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”. The expert group meeting is convened in the context of this resolution and in preparation for the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission which will take place in February 2015.

The outcomes of the meeting will provide inputs to the Report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme by providing elements for an assessment of progress in social development with particular emphasis on the post-Copenhagen period (1995-2015). The outcome will supplement the political perspective brought by other stakeholders as input to the Report and the work of the Commission, and will provide a foundation for broader consultative processes planned by the Division.

### **II. Background**

Reviewing progress so far made in social development and rethinking ways of strengthening it is a timely endeavour. The agenda-setting phase for the post-2015 global development agenda is underway. Intergovernmental negotiations will most likely be launched in January 2015 and should conclude in September 2015. In addition, 2015 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. At the Summit, Governments agreed to give social development goals the highest priority and launched a global drive for social progress embodied in ten commitments, in particular, commitments to eradicate poverty, support full employment and promote social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights.

Twenty years after the Summit, these goals remain relevant. There has been progress in reducing poverty, especially extreme poverty, however, the international community remains far from eradicating it. Unemployment is as high today as it was in 1995 and many workers struggle to earn sufficient income in the informal sector, where social protection is largely absent. In every country, certain groups confront barriers that prevent them from participating in social, economic or political life. While international instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Convention on

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have helped promote equal rights and protections of these vulnerable groups, much remains to be done to ensure their full inclusion and participation.

At the same time, rapid economic, social, political and environmental transformations have created new opportunities for social progress, exacerbated some of the long-standing social problems and changed their nature, while presenting new challenges. Given such transformations, and the ongoing process of defining a new global development agenda, it is a high time for the international community to consider rethinking social development and its role in the global development agenda.

### **III. Summary of discussions**

#### **Opening session**

In her opening remarks, Ms. Daniela Bas, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development, welcomed the participants and set out the objectives, background and expected outcomes of the meeting. She stated that the major goals of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) – eradication of poverty, promotion of full and productive employment and social integration – remain relevant today, and emphasized the importance of rethinking and strengthening social development and its role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context. Today, we are facing various new challenges that have become increasingly complex and inter-related, and they require coherent framework that integrates social, economic and environmental policies.

Precisely for this reason, it is a timely endeavor for the Commission to take stock of what have been achieved in social development since Copenhagen, and explore ways to strengthen its role in promoting inclusive and sustainable development for all. It is also 2015 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development. While there has been a steady progress in reducing poverty, more efforts need to be made to achieve the major goals, in particular in promoting full and productive employment and social integration. Ms. Bas ended her statement by raising key questions:

- (i) How can we, and the Commission for Social Development, best help Member States to implement policies and strategies to advance social development under the post-2015 sustainable development framework?
- (ii) Where has the progress been most significant, and why?
- (iii) How will the issue of financing affect the goals and vision for social development under the post-2015 development agenda?

#### **Session I: Social development at the United Nations – past and present**

##### **Summary of discussions**

The major goals of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) remain relevant today, if not more so in the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis. In rethinking social development, there has been remarkable consistency over time in the goals and objectives that the international system has pursued. The case in point is that most of the **1969 Declaration on Social Progress and**

**Development**<sup>1</sup> remains valid to this day. The outcome document of the Social Summit, **Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action**<sup>2</sup>, has provided a strong foundation for examining the major issues in social development. However, while many of the elements addressed at the Summit are still relevant, the contexts and priorities for social development are shifting. Widening inequality, global economic and financial integration and growing economic uncertainty, climate change and its intensifying negative impacts, volatile energy and food prices, food and water security, the spread of communicable diseases, environmental degradation, technological innovation, in particular ICTs, rapid urbanization, increased incidents internal conflict, the changing nature of work, growing migration are among those shifting contexts, which need to be taken into account in rethinking social development.

While the United Nations has been consistently advocating the necessity for pursuing social and economic development simultaneously, the recent global financial and economic crisis and its negative impacts made it even clearer: merely focusing on economic growth is neither sufficient, nor sustainable, but economic growth must be accompanied by social progress and improved well-being of all people. We have witnessed that the trickle down effects of economic growth in eradicating poverty did not materialize, in the absence of adequate and effective social policies. The high incidence of extreme poverty in middle-income countries and rising inequality and social tensions within countries are current testaments to demonstrate this.

Addressing inequality – in all its forms – has thus become as relevant to sustainable development as to eradication of poverty. The effects of inequality, however, are also dependent on the political framework of an economy as well as the ability of the wealthy and powerful to influence national policies in their favour, to the detriment of the less well-off. The interaction between economic growth, widening inequality, the well-being of people, employment, and social integration should be further examined. Addressing this important socio-economic linkage will help better understand and analyse poverty and sustainable development.

Some also pointed out that the interaction between economic growths and widening inequality is rather complex and needs to be further examined. For example, economic growth is necessary to lift people out of poverty, however, in a globalized economy, growth, if not closely monitored, often widens the gap between have and have-nots. As long as the whole pie is growing, the majority of the population feel they are doing better even where inequality is in fact widening. However, when the rate of economic growth slows down, inequality becomes a major detriment. Social integration is an important concept for addressing these issues, as it places attention on the relationship between inequality of opportunity as well as inequality of outcome.

Historically, social development has been pursued both as an end and as a means. Social development as a means, or a process, will be increasingly important to achieve sustainable development goals over the coming decades. To effectively integrate the social dimension of sustainable development in national and international policies and development agendas, there is a need to shift our approach to social development, going beyond pursuing it merely as a goal - something that can be “achieved”, to seeing it as an ongoing process of structural transformation that can be “facilitated”, “supported” or “enabled.” The

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<sup>1</sup> GA Resolution 2542 adopted by the General Assembly on 11 December 1969. Available from: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/256/76/IMG/NR025676.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://undesadspd.org/Home/WorldSummitforSocialDevelopment1995.aspx>

United Nations and the international community should give greater attention to assessing how social development processes contribute to achieving sustainable development.

## **Session II: Productive employment and decent work for all**

The Social Summit took a comprehensive approach to employment. It addressed important inter-linkages, including between employment and poverty, labour standards and employment quality, and employment and social protection. After the Summit, decent work for all agenda<sup>3</sup> was added to further expand the definition of work. All are still valid.

In looking at labour market trends, there have been some broad changes in the way work is performed and distributed across countries. Globalization - including financial globalization, rapid technological change, and a global shift towards market liberalization are among the key factors influencing how work takes place. Among new concerns and challenges in employment: the prospect of slower growth in both industrialized and developing countries; “jobless growth” and the “end of work”; the continuing rise of income inequality, labour market polarization and employment insecurity; weakening of unions; and environment degradation, climate change, and the transition to green jobs. The discussion also touched upon: the African context and the need for more productive use of natural resources; the role of cooperatives; slowed growth in developing countries; and specialization.

At the same time, the shift in employability of people - the competencies needed to be employed - (though it was noted that there is some disagreement around the term) must be addressed. For example, the context of green jobs<sup>4</sup> calls for an entirely different type of employability. There is a need to connect economic growth, the well-being of people, employment, and environmental concerns in order to enable the transition to green jobs. This is a complex task, as several sectoral policies have to be looked at simultaneously. To achieve sustainable patterns of consumption and production, a transformative agenda – transforming the structure of employment- is necessary. In this regard, social protection and how it helps to make this transition needs to be further examined.

Enhancing policy coherence, both at the national and international level, is critical to promote employment growth in changing labour markets which are influenced by key factors, such as increased globalization and rapid technical advances. The role of the state in promoting productive investment and structural transformation, from low-productivity jobs to high-productivity jobs, was highlighted. While this is complicated and produces social difficulties and tensions, it is the main path to achieve social and economic progress. In many countries, policy innovation is taking place, which suggests the possibility for creating virtuous circles through social protection, raising wages, formalizing jobs, etc., which needs

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<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--de/index.htm>

<sup>4</sup> According to ILO, Green jobs are positions in any economic sector (e.g. agriculture, industry, services administration) which contribute to preserving, restoring and enhancing economic quality. Green jobs reduce the environmental impact of enterprises and economic sectors by cutting the consumption on energy, raw materials and water, de-carbonizing the economy and bringing down emissions of greenhouse gases, minimizing or avoiding all forms of waste and pollution and protecting or restoring ecosystems and biodiversity. For the ILO, the concept of green jobs summarizes the transformation of economies, workplaces, enterprises and labour markets into a low-carbon, sustainable economy that provides decent employment opportunities for all. ([http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/WCMS\\_214247\\_EN/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/WCMS_214247_EN/lang--en/index.htm))

to be further explored. Latin America is experimenting in these areas and may provide useful lessons, including in addressing employment challenges comprehensively.

During the discussion, some identified risks, such as rising inequality in both the functional and size-distribution of income, volatility in the global economy and the risks of future financial crises, which should be countered by better policy coherence and institutional reforms. Concerns were expressed for the fact that the growing scope of markets has so far met with little resistance from current political processes and institutions that are originally designed to ensure social justice and maintain social solidarity.

Regarding the role of States in job creation, how can new employment commitments be more binding than in the past? If commitments were specific as opposed to elastic, perhaps Governments would be more active to achieve them. At the same time, how can Governments commit to full employment, when – by and large – they don't create employment? Governments can take some enabling measures, while the job creation is made mainly by the private sector. If the Government is not responsible for creating jobs, then what is its role? Governments need to: (i) make firm political commitment to achieve full employment, ii) realise this commitment, and (iii) build institutional framework to achieve this goal. To generate more and better jobs, we need the involvement of employers and workers. There is too little engagement of employer and employee associations. There must be complementarity between top-down and bottom-up approaches. It is not a question of either/or.

On the subject of labour market institutions and regulation, disconnects were noted between existing (and often dated) laws and the evolving context of the world of work. A question was posed if there are new examples of addressing the current reality.

### **Session III: Poverty eradication - what's new?**

Since the latter part of 1990s, poverty reduction has taken place in every region of the world. However, vulnerability (measured using \$2.00/day) has not declined. Asia has experienced much reduction in extreme poverty. India and China experienced the fastest reduction in poverty, with China seeing the most rapid decline. Despite the economic crisis, India has seen sharp declines in the numbers of people in poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa, poverty increased in the 1990s. This increase in the number of people in living in poverty is partly attributed to the high population growth rate in Africa and the economic crisis. However, the poverty headcount ratio has been declining in Africa in the recent past. Across the developing world, reducing rural poverty has been much a more difficult task than reducing urban poverty. Rural poverty is more entrenched with the continued degradation of natural resources.

The session pointed to a number of factors that are responsible for the poverty reduction in the developing world, including increased GDP growth rates and higher rates of agricultural productivity that lowered food prices. Rates of poverty reduction have been much faster in countries with large population sizes such as China and India. Countries with sharp declines in poverty have also seen sharp increases in employment outside agriculture, particularly in construction, services and manufacturing. To further reduce poverty, it is important for countries to sustain non-agricultural employment growth. The backlog of unemployment and under employment will only get worse without growth in non-agriculture employment.

The results of the Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA) indicate that the voice of the poor is an important instrument in policy-making process. The poor should be organized to represent their interests. It was also important to remove barriers affecting disadvantaged social groups.

The experts re-emphasized that poverty is directly linked to sustainable development. The degradation of the ecosystem is a serious threat to achieving poverty reduction. Desertification has deprived millions of people of their sources of livelihood. Ecosystems assist men and women in their agriculture, this means when the ecosystem is damaged, those who depend on agriculture for living feel the brunt of it, which prevents them from escaping poverty.

There are policies that will help in reducing poverty such as investment in agriculture; trade openness with a focus on poverty reduction; rethinking of industrial policy that gives dominance to market forces; employment intensive growth; policies that promote gender equality and education, and contribute to reducing fertility rates; micro finance programmes; addressing poverty over the life cycle; reducing vulnerability; and expanding social transfers. Countries also need to promote public employment programmes such as India's rural employment guarantee scheme. The discussion led to the importance of addressing poverty in its multiple dimensions, and not just economic dimension. More investments are needed in human and social development.

The experts also discussed poverty in the context of the MDGs Acceleration Framework (MAF) and its implications for the post-2015 development agenda. The MAF is a planning tool that brings together the support of the UN and partners for nationally- and locally-owned actions. It enhances policy and implementation synergies. The MAF calls for an Action Plan that contributes to spurring progress in MDG target areas that have been lagging. It was pointed out that the discussions on sustainable development goals marked an important evolution in global policy thinking – in particular with regard to a more integrated and coherent approach to development and to increasing attention to equality and inclusiveness.

The discussions have underscored the need to eradicate poverty by 2030. Understanding of the linkages between poverty and other goals has grown. The discussions also emphasized the need to think about poverty in a more comprehensive way, for example, the fact that people fall in and out of poverty requires addressing poverty from a life cycle perspective as well as from an intergenerational perspective. Investment in human capital and ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources were considered essential. It was also pointed out that, despite high rates of economic growth, often the benefits of the growth have not been equitably shared.

The importance of investing in data collection and developing good indicators was highlighted in order to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of development goals. Policies to address poverty also need to take into account the new geography of poverty. Despite the recognition that many people living in poverty also reside in middle income countries, participants underscored the need for international assistance to continue to focus on African and fragile States. It was also emphasized that countries need to adopt a human rights approach, making public goods and services universal. Other areas that countries need to pay attention to include the importance of policy coherence at the global level, the need for transfer of technology, and developing non-metric measures of poverty.

## **Session IV: Social integration and social inclusion**

The concept of social integration, as defined at Copenhagen, focused on respect for diversity and social justice<sup>5</sup> and the provision of policies that develop institutions that promote social cohesion. Social integration<sup>6</sup> aims at creating a society for all, where all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, and social groups have a rights and responsibilities, actively participate in all aspects of life, and enjoy equality of opportunities be it economic, social, educational, cultural or political. The realization of human rights is also significant in the progress and perception of social integration. Disregard for social integration may lead to social tensions, polarization, conflict and violence, and perpetuate inequality and exclusion. Without social integration, individuals are hampered from reaching their full potential and contributing actively to society. As such, social integration and cohesion are inextricably linked and are affected by the level of social trust, i.e., trust in institutions and trust in fellow citizens.

In the years since Copenhagen, review of the attention to social integration across countries has highlighted differences in the understanding of social integration across countries and regions. While some have focused exclusively on policies targeting traditionally excluded groups, others have focused on general inequality and others on promoting democratic governance and/or avoiding/overcoming societal fracture. There has; however, been a general loss of attention to the element of respect for diversity underlined at Copenhagen.

In promoting social integration, there is a need to harmonize the current group-specific, targeted approach with the broader universal approach towards a society for all. One way of doing so is to ensure that the enhancement of social cohesion is built into other policies. The EU experience in promoting policies aimed at social inclusion has highlighted the primacy of social investment as an effective strategy. The EU focuses primarily on employment as a channel for social inclusion, but the policies also address other issues under the employment framework, such as minimum wage, a youth guarantee scheme (professional training for young people), early childhood education, and the gender gap in wages. Lessons from work with women's and youth entrepreneurship also show that addressing social inclusion requires recognising cross-cutting issues and working at the intersections. These experiences have shown the value of evaluating the quantitative and qualitative impact of policies and programmes.

The Commission for Social Development has taken social integration as its priority theme since WSSD (1999, 2009 and 2010) and adopted the first UN resolution on "Promoting social integration" in 2010 (E/2010/12). However, concrete guidelines on its implementation has not been outlined (except for the actions to be taken outlined in the Copenhagen Programme of Action), and key groups, such as migrants or ethnic/religious/linguistic minorities, and key issues, such as education, have been, for the most part, excluded from the discussion. The ambiguous nature of the broader concept of social integration could be a factor in weakening the attention to the issue in the development agenda. After the global financial and economic crisis, state-led/ state-guided efforts at social integration and empowerment have regained favour in the international community; however, Governments alone cannot implement all the practical measures needed for making social integration a reality. As such, greater effort must be made to include

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<sup>5</sup> Social justice as understood in the WSSD context equated to equality of opportunity and equality before the law.

<sup>6</sup> Since social integration is the agreed language of the Copenhagen, it was agreed to use social integration in the discussion, except for EU's presentation, as EU has explicit policies on social inclusion.

other stakeholders in the conversation so that their roles and their terms can be adequately accommodated in policies and programmes.

As with any other issue, for social integration to be pushed on the international agenda in the spirit intended at Copenhagen, it will need strong advocates from Member States and/or civil society, but the fractured understanding of the concept makes it difficult to champion. Without Member States champions and well organized and sophisticated civil society constituencies, at this moment, there is little scope for advancing the issue within the framework of the UN intergovernmental machinery, while the concept of social integration/inclusion/cohesion and its elements have been, in a sense, mainstreamed.

### **Session V: The vision and principles of social development and their potential role into the post-2015 development agenda**

Progress in realizing social development has been slow, especially with regard to addressing its inter-linkages with economic and environmental dimensions. Is this because the social platform provided by the World Summit for Social Development has been squandered? Or the slow progress is attributed to the lack of attention to political strategies, advocacy and linkages – rather than policies? Or could it be because an approach to social development issues in policy discourse has been too narrow (i.e. social issues have often been treated as the problematic consequences of economic choices)? In working with all relevant actors, the evidence needs to be more effectively used and put social development into agendas – to frame the narrative. A Commission for Social Development (CSocD) with a renewed mandate has to have social policy at its heart, but in a more interlinked way. Social policy should be seen as having broader functions that can contribute not only to protecting vulnerable groups of the population but also to reducing poverty and inequalities, improving economic productivity and creating socially cohesive societies. Focus should be sharpened on how social values are being addressed at the normative level, and how they are implemented in practice.

It is clear that a mixture of universalism and targeting is needed to achieve development goals. Universal policies and programmes can encompass selectivity, for example using tax structures. How do we use the human rights frameworks - the instruments through which people can realize their rights? How do we respond when other actors - such as corporations - prevent people from enjoying their rights? However, in considering how we aim to "brand" social development, we should think about where explicit links to human rights may or may not be beneficial.

The geo-political and social landscape has changed since 1995. There has been rapid growth of some large emerging countries; three-quarters of people living in poverty now live in middle-income countries, and one-quarter are in fragile and conflict countries; and, in developed countries, since the recent global financial and economic crisis, more households are getting poor and social conditions have deteriorated.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the Open Working Groups of the General Assembly have much more balance between social goals and economic and other goals. In particular, employment is featured prominently. However, some noted that inequality is not aggressively addressed, and that a global social floor is absent, global governance remains weak, and the modalities for national implementation are not always spelled out.

The SDGs provide a good basis for a global framework for social development, and could lead to a Global Social Contract - which could be elaborated by the CSocD. Key elements of the Global Social Contract could be: a global social floor, global governance and national socio-economic policies, and measurement of social progress and the social dimension of sustainable development. As there are potential synergies and trade-offs between social, economic and environmental goals (how they are going to interact), efforts should be made to integrate them.

Other priorities for a post-2015 agenda include: greater political will and accountability for global implementation and review; emphasis on free, informed and meaningful participation of all persons in decision-making processes, including those living in poverty; identification of alternative and innovate funding sources and mechanisms; careful attention to language, which forms thinking (e.g. reference to "the poor", which stigmatizes, rather than to "people living in poverty"); attention to equity in addition to equality; and attention to measurement of social and sustainable development - including with regard to poverty and vulnerability.

Employment is an important channel for inclusion and empowerment, and there is a need to look at the terms of being in the labour market. While girls and young women are increasingly joining the labour force as a result of improved gender equality in education, they often end up with working in home. Attentions should be paid to secure the avenues open up for girls in modern sector jobs. At the same time, women's empowerment and gender equality cannot be achieved through employment or entrepreneurship alone; their participation in political, economic and social decision-making and the issue of social reproduction and the care work must be addressed.

The definition of poverty, currently based on the World Bank's poverty line (\$1.25), has a significant policy implication, as the post-2015 development agenda will focus not only on extreme poverty but also poverty in all its dimensions (according to national definitions). Also, a question was raised as to how the parallel World Bank development goals may interact with the post-2015 development agenda, given the Bank's strong influence. The merits and drawbacks of focusing on the bottom 40% (in the Bank's development goals) were addressed. Other issues raised during the discussion include: potential implications of the new BRICS Bank; how civil society may play a stronger role in the Commission, noting that civil society has been included in the OWG to an unprecedented degree.

#### **Session VI: The way forward: Proposed key messages for the Report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme**

In transition from MDGs to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it was reminded that, while the MDGs did shift some attention of development efforts toward human development, they were never intended to be a comprehensive "development agenda". On the other hand, the post-2015 development agenda and the incorporated SDGs are intended to be a guiding development framework. The post-2015 development agenda based on the SDGs, with 17 Goals, accompanied with more than 100 targets<sup>7</sup>, will be an ambitious, transformative, universal and comprehensive global agenda towards achieving socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development, taking into account their inter-linkages. This

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<sup>7</sup> The agreed proposal of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals submitted to the General Assembly in July 2014 contains 17 Goals and 169 targets.

is a transition from a “silo” approach focusing on targeted outcomes to a more systemic, integrated and coherent approach across policy domains at national, regional and international levels.

Implementation of the post-2015 global agenda will require a strategic, holistic approach that looks at the inter-relations between the various dimensions of development and focuses on the root causes of problems as well identify enablers that drive transformative changes. It also brings: new mechanisms of accountability; higher complexity; and results-based policy-making, which has implications for development cooperation. The post-2015 development agenda, as a universal agenda, indicates a conceptual shift in the global partnership for development to policy coherence for sustainable development with a strengthened global partnership, including in such domains as trade, migration, climate change, technology and financial stability and transparency of financial transactions.

The question was raised as to what “**social sustainability**” means in real terms. Compared with economic and environmental sustainability that can be clearly defined, social sustainability is still an ambiguous notion, which needs to be clarified. To date, the concept has been understood only in negative terms that focus on impact, i.e., we know when a situation is socially unsustainable, but social sustainability has not been clearly defined. The proposed SDGs include clear social goals (i.e. end hunger; attain healthy lives; education for all; gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; reduce inequality; achieve peaceful societies), in addition, there are social dimensions in each goals falling under economic and environmental pillars (with “inclusive”, or “for all”). Both social goals and social dimensions of economic and environmental goals need to be addressed to strengthen social development and its linkages with other two dimensions. Focusing on channels for inclusion may help in pursuing this. Also, the inter-linkage between social and environmental dimensions has not been so far explored, thus need to be strengthened.

Sustainable development can be looked at/tackled through three angles: investment; integration; and inter-linkages. Sustainable development requires investment in capital, including human capital. Investing capital in many forms (i.e., social, human, natural, physical and financial) strengthens human resources/human capabilities, promotes cohesive society, and reduces environmental footprints. Investment in each form of capital can leverage other forms of capital. For example, investing in physical capital, or infrastructure, in urban environments can improve accessibility for all people, regardless of disability or age, and therefore affect social and human capital positively. Among all forms of capital, natural capital<sup>8</sup> has been largely undervalued to date and has not received significant investment. Yet people living in poverty derive much of their income from natural capital, while having little control of natural assets. Because there are positive and negative spill-overs among various forms of capitals, policies and strategies for investing capitals must be coherent and interlinked.

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<sup>8</sup> There are various definitions for natural capital. Natural capital is fundamental to human wellbeing, underpinning global economy. According to Natural Capital Declaration, natural capital comprises Earth’s natural assets (soil, air, water, flora and fauna), and the ecosystem services resulting from them, which make human life possible. ([http://www.unepfi.org/fileadmin/documents/ncd\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.unepfi.org/fileadmin/documents/ncd_booklet.pdf)). According to UNEP, natural capital comprises both ecosystem assets (such as fresh water) and natural resources (such as fossil fuel deposits). “Towards a global map of natural capital: key ecosystem assets [http://www.unep-wcmc.org/system/dataset\\_file\\_fields/files/000/000/232/original/NCR-LR\\_Mixed.pdf](http://www.unep-wcmc.org/system/dataset_file_fields/files/000/000/232/original/NCR-LR_Mixed.pdf). A UNEP definition (2012) emphasizes specific components: “Natural capital includes land, minerals and fossil fuels, solar energy, water, living organisms, and the services provided by the interactions of all these elements in ecological systems”.

Social policy should not be seen as an after-thought but as an integral part of sustainable development strategies. Such strategies should integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions in a balanced manner. Policies can be more efficient and cost-effective when coherence across these dimensions is ensured at the formulation stage, thereby limiting the need to later mitigate negative spill-over effects. In particular, investment in the social sector, for example in education, employment, health or social protection, is necessary for the achievement of inclusive growth and development. While employment creation mainly occurs within the private sector, Governments have a key role in building and supporting an environment conducive to employment generation. Full, productive and decent employment is not only important for income-generation and economic growth, but also to strengthen human and social capital.

While the importance of social dimension of sustainable development is clear, it has been often neglected or marginalized or added as “after-thoughts”. There is an urgent need to think more and better about the role of social development in the sustainable development agenda. For example, poverty is measured only through economic terms (income) in MDGs, while it is a more complex and multidimensional phenomenon. There is a need to reposition the international community and the UN in efforts to eradicate poverty by advocating for a universal framework to policy (i.e. right to social security; no discrimination). In this regard it is important to look at the “Guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights<sup>9</sup>”.

Considering the current economic and political environment, it is time to rethink and strengthen social development. The Commission for Social Development, supported by the Division for Social Policy and Development, could take the lead in advocating for social causes by strengthening the Bureau of the CSocD. To have integrated outcomes we need integrated metrics for monitoring. There is a need to tap into existing research and to create new research that allows us to tackle social development issues in a multidimensional way. Addressing inter-linkages between social and economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, focusing on social drivers, versus putting primary emphasis on symptoms or consequences, may be one of the ways forward.

**Key points:**

- The major goals of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) remain relevant today. In rethinking social development, we need to build on the outcome of the Summit contained in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, which provides a strong foundation for achieving social development, and taking into consideration of the post-2015 sustainable development goals and its targets.
- In rethinking social development, the shifting contexts and priorities of social development should be captured, analysed and addressed. Some aspects of the shift are: widening inequality, global economic and financial integration and growing economic uncertainty, climate change and its intensifying negative impacts, volatile energy and food prices, food security, the spread of communicable diseases, environmental degradation, technological innovation, in particular ICTs, rapid urbanization, structural job insecurity (jobless growth), the changing nature of work and the shift in employability of people, growing migration and the increased role of remittances to

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<sup>9</sup> A/HRC/21/39 Final draft of the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, submitted by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona.

development, and increasing internal conflicts. These shifting contexts have an impact on social development.

- There has been growing recognition, particularly in the aftermath of the recent global financial and economic crisis, that a dominant focus on economic growth is neither sufficient nor sustainable. Economic development must be accompanied by social progress and well-being of all people, supported by effective social policies and environmental protection – more inclusive, equitable and sustainable development is called for.
- The complexity of the relationship between social and economic development needs to be recognized. In particular, the interaction between economic growth, widening inequality, the well-being of people, employment, and social integration should be further examined. Addressing this important socio-economic linkage will help better understand and analyse poverty and sustainable development.
- Another important linkage that needs to be strengthening is the one between social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, including the interaction between climate change, food, energy and water insecurity, shifting production and consumption patterns, the transition to green jobs, and their social impacts. This is a complex task, as several sectoral policies have to be looked at simultaneously.
- In promoting social integration, there is a need to harmonize the current group-specific, targeted approach with the broader universal approach towards a society for all. One way of doing so is to ensure that the enhancement of social cohesion is built into other policies objectives. Strong advocates from Member States and/or civil society are needed to push social integration on the international agenda. This could be done by promoting inclusive approach to development.
- To facilitate monitoring and evaluation of development goals, it is important to invest in data collection (to the extent possible, disaggregated data) and develop good indicators.
- In the post-2015 context, the Commission for Social Development could take a lead in strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development, by focusing their attention to clear social goals, as well as social dimensions of economic and environmental goals, with particular attention to their inter-relations and social drivers or social development means for achieving other goals. In doing so, there is a need to first clarify what “social sustainability” means.