

Agenda item 3 (a), priority theme: “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all”

Chair’s Summary

In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/18, the Chairperson of Commission for Social Development presents his summary of the Commission’s deliberations on the priority theme in this review session of its two-year cycle.

The Council, in its resolution 2016/6, also affirmed that the Commission would contribute to the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within its existing mandate, by supporting the thematic reviews of the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development on progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the resolution, the Council further decided that the Commission would report on social aspects related to the agreed main theme of the Council in order to contribute to its work. This Summary serves as the basis of such contributions of the Commission.

In addition to general discussions among Member States, the Commission held a high-level panel discussion on the priority theme. Prof. Martin Ravallion, Edmond D. Villani Professor of Economics, Georgetown University, was the keynote speaker of the panel. The Commission heard presentations from the following panellists: Her Excellency, Mrs. Ana Helena Chacón, Vice-President of Costa Rica; Honourable Mrs. Aisha Jumai Alhassan, Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development of Nigeria; Her Excellency, Mrs. Michelle Muschett, Vice Minister of Social Development of Panama; Mr. Michel Servoz, Director-General of the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission; Dr. Ifeyinwa Ofong, Development consultant and National Coordinator of Women in Development and Environment in Nigeria; and, as a discussant, His Excellency Mr. Alberto Beltrame, Vice-Minister for Social and Rural Development of Brazil. The panel was moderated by Ms. H. Elizabeth Thompson, Executive Director of the Center for Leadership & Sustainable Development, UWI-SUNY, and Former Executive Coordinator (Developing Countries), UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

This Summary includes general discussions as well as the high-level panel discussion under agenda item 3 (a) on the priority theme: “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all”, focusing on the substantive highlights.

2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals

The Commission, as a global multi-stakeholder forum for action-oriented substantive discussions to promote social development, has been a platform for sharing good practices and lessons learned in areas such as eradication of poverty, people-centred development, inclusive economic growth, the promotion of decent work and social protection. The Commission could serve as an effective coordinator within the United Nations system on a wide range of social development issues to make substantial contributions to

the effective implementation of the social dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, by providing integrated and coherent policy guidance to advance the overarching objective of “leaving no one behind”. Building on the Commission’s experience in promoting a people-centred approach to development, it places human dignity at the center of all efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

The priority theme of the 55th session of the Commission was highly relevant and timely, especially in the context of the preparation for the upcoming 2017 High-level Political Forum with the theme “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”. The Commission for Social Development, under the current theme, established an important linkage between its work and Member States’ efforts to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda, with its Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

Poverty and inequality

Eradicating poverty, including extreme poverty, remains the greatest global challenge of our time and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Experience has shown that eradicating poverty is a prerequisite to building cohesive, peaceful and sustainable societies. While there has been significant progress over recent decades in reducing extreme poverty, 767 million people, or 10.7 percent of the global population still live in extreme poverty (below \$1.90 per person per day in 2013, the most recent year for which data are available). In some regions, impressive growth rates and overall improvements in healthcare, education and other basic services have not yet been translated into significant reduction of poverty.

At the same time, income and non-income inequalities have increased in many countries across regions, with middle income countries experiencing the widest inequality. High and widening inequality threatens to undermine prospects for future growth and weakens the impact of growth on poverty eradication. Countries with higher inequality tend to reduce poverty more slowly, as a smaller share of the benefits of growth trickles down to the poorest. Without a rise in overall inequality, maintaining current growth momentum could potentially lift 1 billion people out of extreme poverty by 2030¹. Rising inequality within countries could hinder further progress in poverty reduction, or worse, might set back the hard-won gains so far made in social and economic development. Poverty and high level of socio-economic inequalities, combined with social exclusion, are often sources of social instability and conflict, which can lead to unmanaged migrations, displacement, and an influx of refugees. They also create a fertile ground for violent extremism and terrorism. Therefore, strategies for eradicating poverty need to tackle inequality in its all dimensions.

The current rate and the pattern of growth do not ensure prosperity for all. While unprecedented scientific and technological advances have accelerated socio-economic progress, not all people have benefitted from them. To reduce poverty and inequalities, growth needs to be inclusive and more equitable, so that its gains reach all segments of the population. It has been recognized that reaching people who are left behind is necessary but a difficult task, as they are often invisible, marginalized, and live in fragile socio-economic contexts or remote areas. They lack access to quality education, basic healthcare, affordable energy and food, safe drinking water and sanitation, and other essential services. Further, for those who have been able to move out of poverty, progress is often temporary. More needs to be done to ensure that no one is left behind to end poverty as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda sets the bar higher, with its universal and indivisible set of Goals that aim to leave no one behind. Realizing this vision requires more coherent, comprehensive and inclusive social and economic policy frameworks and poverty eradication strategies. Such policy frameworks and strategies should reach the furthest behind, in particular women, children, persons with disabilities, youth, older

¹ Presentation of Prof. Martin Ravallion

persons, indigenous peoples, and people living in poverty and in rural and remote places; address people's vulnerabilities to potential shocks, such as economic and social instability, natural disasters, food insecurity, or climate change; aim to equip vulnerable social groups and communities with tools that build resilience and self-sufficiency to break the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. Decent work and social protection policies and measures are proven tools that can help graduate people out of poverty to sustainable livelihoods.

Today, there is a greater recognition of the multiple causes of poverty and disparities within societies, which enable more effective approaches and tools to eradicate poverty. To eradicate multidimensional poverty requires efforts from all parts of government to construct a broad set of mutually reinforcing social and economic policies and strategies, and leverage the synergies between them. More coherent and integrated approaches should be taken across sectors, focusing on promoting agriculture and rural economic activities, creating decent employment, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, providing social protection, as well as prioritizing and committing sufficient resources to enhancing human capacity by investing in education, healthcare, and other social services.

Further, political will, strong institutional and governmental capabilities are also critical. Effective and inclusive public institutions are important to promote the participation of people in policy-making processes that affect their lives. National capacities to collect disaggregated data and national reporting mechanisms also need to be enhanced to ensure inclusive and focused measures for poverty eradication.

While the 2030 Agenda will guide the efforts to eradicate poverty, a one-size-fits-all approach should not be applied in its implementation. Instead, strategies tailored to meet the unique needs, priorities and particular social, economic and cultural backgrounds of each region and country are needed. In this regard, more effective and innovative national development strategies need to be devised and implemented with participation of all stakeholders and partners. These strategies would be constantly improved through effective monitoring, evaluation and an exchange of good practices and lessons learned.

National efforts to eradicate poverty must be complemented by a favourable international environment, with support measures established at the international level, including the United Nations. In particular, international assistance should recognize the specific needs and challenges facing LDCs, LLDCs and countries emerging from conflicts and disasters to provide enhanced, predictable and sustained financial and technical support. International cooperation and assistance are deemed essential to mobilizing the means of implementation required to achieve the SDGs. To achieve the objective of "leaving no one behind", inequality must be addressed by broadening the scope of the global partnership for development and ensuring that the international trade agenda supports measures towards equalizing opportunities for participation in global markets. Access to global markets is particularly important for LDCs, who should be provided duty free, quota free market access, as agreed at the WTO.

Integrated policy for inclusive and pro-poor growth

The 2030 Agenda underscores the need for a coherent and coordinated approach to policy-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation across all sectors. This will require policies for poverty eradication that identify and streamline competing priorities, create synergies among social, economic and environmental dimensions, and focus on strengthening people's resilience to potential setbacks. As risks affect people across the life cycle, combating poverty requires implementing universal pro-poor and inclusive policies that address the specific needs of the people living in extreme poverty.

Member States shared their experiences in promoting integrated policies for inclusive and pro-poor growth and poverty eradication.

Poverty eradication and pro-poor principles were identified by countries as one of the main goals of their national agendas or long-term national strategies. Some countries integrated a multi-dimensional approach to poverty eradication in their national development plans, while others established the social pillar of the 2030 development blueprint, aimed at investing in people and building cohesive societies and equitable social development. Many countries have been implementing a comprehensive and integrated social protection strategy with the view to establishing nationally appropriate social protection systems to mitigate risks and enhance people's resilience. Others established a holistic governance mechanism to coordinate and/or create synergies among line-ministries, with some pursuing strategies that consolidate all of their poverty eradication programmes into one ministry

Investing in people and promoting empowerment to reduce poverty

A comprehensive strategy to invest in human capacities is critical to reducing poverty and inequalities. The gains from economic growth should be invested in expanding access to universal primary education, basic healthcare, social protection, and other essential services. In particular, education is considered as a critical pathway to move out of poverty and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, as it serves as a catalyst to making positive changes in other areas, such as health, women's empowerment, job creation, etc. It provides skills that are necessary for green innovation and for boosting agricultural productivity. Quality education combined with skills development, through the provision of technical, vocational and entrepreneurship training, is key to addressing mismatches between educational backgrounds and the labor market demands, and enabling young people to find decent jobs. Equal education opportunities, life-long learning and non-formal education schemes should also be provided to young people outside of formal education systems.

Some countries expressed their commitments to achieving universal access to primary education. Many countries implemented programmes to expand access to education and training. These include promoting vocational education and literacy programmes, particularly for under-privileged children and youth; increasing student funding and fellowships to low income families; prioritizing technology education and reducing the gender gap in STEM education or during the transition from primary to secondary schools; focusing on the inclusion of children with special needs and severe disabilities.

Investing in health also has a great impact on poverty reduction through short- and long-term economic gains from improved health at the household level. In addition, around 100 million people are pushed into poverty every year, and 150 million people suffer financial catastrophe, owing to out-of-pocket payments for health services.² Many more people are too poor to see doctors. Universal health coverage is necessary to ensure that all people everywhere can access quality health services without being forced into poverty. Inadequate water supply or sanitation remains a leading cause of poor health and death, poor learning outcomes and low productivity. Improving access to safe water and sanitation to reduce child mortality and chronic malnutrition, improve health and education outcomes should be seen as a part of poverty eradication strategies.

Several countries shared their strategies towards achieving universal health coverage, funded by revenues generated from taxation of tobacco and alcohol. Some countries implemented national health plans aimed at achieving universal access to a package of essential health services. Others extended free healthcare to children, the elderly and people with disabilities, while subsidizing its cost to the rest of the population. There are also countries that provided mobile clinics to nomadic populations and those in remote areas.

² P4H Network: <http://p4h-network.net/> (also in the Secretary-General's report on the priority theme)

Decent employment for poverty eradication

Decent work serves as a key pathway to reduce poverty, and an effective measure to promote social inclusion. Creating job opportunities with decent income and working conditions for those living in poverty is the way to make growth inclusive and pro-poor. According to the ILO, the number of jobless people is expected to exceed 201 million in 2017, and another 2.7 million could be added to the unemployment rolls by 2018. Together with new entrants to the labour markets every year, this poses challenges to creating a sufficient number of jobs. Further, merely having a job does not necessarily guarantee an escape from poverty. ILO estimates that 327 million employed people were living in extreme poverty (below \$1.90 a day) and 967 million in moderate or near poverty in 2015.

For countries where a majority of the rural population depends on agriculture for their livelihoods, investments in the agricultural sector are critical. Re-engaging youth in agriculture can be a double-win, for improving food security and reducing youth unemployment and poverty in rural areas, and for curbing rural-urban migration. Coherent policies and their implementation to address youth unemployment and rejuvenate the agricultural sector could be central to poverty eradication and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Some countries revised the national agricultural policy to align it to the SDGs and other international instruments to develop the agriculture sector towards profitable commercial farming, through specialization of small-holder farm production, output diversification, and value addition in the downstream value chains. Others introduced subsidized programmes to promote small stock and poultry production among the resource poor, and help them graduate from poverty, promote food security and eliminate hunger at the household level. Countries invested in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, education and health, financial inclusion, as well as public work schemes that provide guaranteed employment to poor or agricultural labourers; invested in digital technology to provide e-governance services such as direct benefit transfers; implemented youth employment schemes targeting rural youth, including through specific youth agricultural schemes.

Investing in young people is an effective way to eradicate poverty and improve their well-being. Entrepreneurship programmes can assist disadvantaged youth to move out of poverty, while public works schemes provide short-term income generating opportunities. Many countries adopted comprehensive and multi-dimensional strategies to address youth un- and under-employment. They focused on liberalization of labor relations, elaboration of a new labor code, modernization of the social benefits system, such as targeted employment programmes, inclusion of entrepreneurs in the informal sector, promotion of apprenticeship/internship and alternative education, or introduction of minimum income in the social protection system. Some countries introduced youth guarantee schemes to reduce the number of youth not in employment, education and training; introduced a new skills agenda to improve the quality of skills relevant to the labor market; promoted youth industries and cooperatives; and/or launched a national strategy for social and productive inclusion to develop human capacities and promote people's engagement in work and income generating activities.

Social Protection and poverty eradication

Social protection is an essential policy instrument to eradicate poverty that also invests in human capacities. However, 73% of the world's population still does not have access to adequate social protection coverage. With the intention of progressively extending social protection coverage, many countries have been implementing social protection programmes/measures to eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion, in particular for the most vulnerable social groups, including senior citizens, widows, deprived ethnic and indigenous groups, persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children, war veterans, home-based care patients, and those living in remote areas. These measures

include old-age allowances, widow allowances, disabled allowances and disabled stipends, and child support grant schemes. Other countries provided support, including accommodation, food, transportation and basic services, for families with children; implemented social support programmes for ultra-poor households with several components, including public works, social cash transfers, school meals, micro credit and village lending and saving schemes.

It was noted, however, that social transfer measures, such as cash transfers, while important, are not sufficient to break the vicious cycle of inter-generational transmission of poverty. Policies to promote productive inclusion of the vulnerable population are necessary to promote self-employment activities or wage employment that will support them to become productive citizens. In this context, EU member countries are redesigning their social protection systems to improve the promotion of labour market participation and provide adequate employment security and income replacement. Others have implemented social protection policy frameworks to harmonize the various social assistance and poverty eradication programmes that include establishing a comprehensive social protection system and basic social services within their national development plans to accelerate the pace of poverty reduction; reviewing and revising existing laws and enacting new laws on the rights of older persons, persons with disabilities, children, or workers; implementing a number of social protection programmes to benefit workers under the social security law; planning to implement national minimum wage as a part of a comprehensive strategy towards building a social protection floor to ensure minimum living standards for all citizens; planning to strengthen and support the safety net for poor children, orphans and those living in child headed households; implementing social housing to homeless people and low-income families to ensure decent life.