

**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Division for Social Policy and Development  
Social Perspective on Development Branch**

**Expert Group Meeting on Policies and Strategies to Promote the Empowerment of  
People in Achieving Poverty Eradication, Social Integration and Productive and Decent  
Work for All**

**Convened in preparation for the 52nd session of the Commission for  
Social Development**

**United Nations Headquarters, New York, 10-11 September 2013**

**Concept Note**

**Purpose of the meeting**

In its resolution 2012/7, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations decided that the priority theme for the 2013-2014 review and policy cycle of the Commission for Social Development would be “Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”. The expert group meeting is convened in the context of this resolution and in preparation for the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission, which will take place in February 2014 and which should agree on a policy outcome (i.e. a resolution) on this priority theme.

The outcomes of the expert group meeting will constitute an important input for the work of the Commission, particularly by providing concrete, evidence-based suggestions for the formulation of strategies that have been shown to advance the empowerment of people. The expert group meeting will also be of use to suggest topics that the Commission, within its mandate, should take up in the years ahead. Taking into account that the international community is in the process of defining its future development agenda, the outcomes of the meeting should inform such process of the implications of empowerment for the design of the agenda.<sup>1</sup>

**Background**

The empowerment of people is a key objective of a people-centred social development process and its main engine. Actions that seek to give people power and the means to strengthen their own capacities -namely through education and health care, access to justice, land and property rights, information and communication technologies or financial services, among others- foster opportunities and improve quality of life, thereby contributing to breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion. Institutions and norms that promote open and inclusive processes as well as accountable and responsive Governments that encourage the participation of individuals and communities in social, economic and political life are also crucial to people’s empowerment and socially sustainable development. Without meaningful participation, the changes in behaviour, social relations and institutions that are necessary for socially sustainable development will not be realized.

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<sup>1</sup> A separate expert group meeting is being organized in Geneva to discuss the impact of e-participation and ICTs on people’s empowerment, and how such ICTs can be used as a means to implement the future sustainable development goals.

The importance of empowering people, both as a means to achieve the internationally-agreed development goals and as an end in itself, has been highlighted in recent inter-governmental processes. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012, for instance, Governments reaffirmed the importance of “supporting developing countries in their efforts to eradicate poverty and promote empowerment of the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including removing barriers to opportunity, enhancing productive capacity, developing sustainable agriculture and promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all, complemented by effective social policies, including social protection floors”.<sup>2</sup> At its 66<sup>th</sup> session, also in 2012, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on people’s empowerment and development in which it expressed concern about the crippling effects of poverty, inequality and disparity all over the globe and recognized that people should be the focus of all plans, policies and programmes at all levels.<sup>3</sup>

A review of strategies and programmes that have demonstrated effectiveness in promoting the empowerment of people and social groups as a means to achieve poverty eradication, social integration and productive and decent work for all, as well as the formulation of concrete recommendations to promote empowerment, will inform national and international debates, including the ongoing debates on the post-2015 international development agenda and the future sustainable development goals.

It is critical to bring evidence to illustrate the gains - both at the national and international levels - of giving voice and agency to all individuals and social groups in order to strengthen the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In this regard, there is a need to more constructively illustrate what has and has not worked to promote empowerment, and to elucidate why. It is also important to clarify the linkages between empowerment and participation and to elicit guidance on practical (“how to”) approaches to foster an enabling policy environment for people’s empowerment.

During the expert group meeting on “Promoting People’s Empowerment in Achieving Poverty Eradication, Social Integration and Productive and Decent Work for All” that the Division for Social Policy and Development organized from 10 to 11 September 2012, experts recommended a review of lessons learned from the efforts of specific social groups to inform new empowerment policies. The recommendations that will emerge from the 2013 expert group meeting will be based on a review of concrete strategies to empower specific social groups, examined through the perspectives of members of such groups when possible. Experts at the 2012 meeting also highlighted the need to define universally-applicable empowerment indicators, and agreed that empowerment is a cross-cutting issue whose measurement should be built into all policies. The 2013 expert group should expand on this recommendation, namely by suggesting how monitoring frameworks and social impact assessments should be incorporated into relevant policies, and by using existing monitoring frameworks to measure the impact of policies in advancing participation and empowerment.

Finally, the 2012 experts recommended that the Commission consider the implications of empowerment for consultations on and the design of the post-2015 goals towards ensuring that people can better contribute to decision-making. The overarching intent of the 2013 expert group meeting is indeed such consideration of the implications of empowering

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<sup>2</sup> A/RES/66/288.

<sup>3</sup> A/RES/66/224.

individuals and social groups, not only for the design of the post-2015 agenda, but also for the achievement of all internationally-agreed development goals, including poverty eradication, social integration and decent work for all.

## **Objectives**

The expert group meeting aims to facilitate the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development on a policy outcome on the promotion of the empowerment of people by undertaking a comprehensive review of policies and strategies that create an enabling environment for the empowerment of individuals and social groups and that enhance their capacity to effectively participate in all spheres of life, including in decision-making. It will highlight challenges, good practices and lessons learned. It should further put forth concrete, evidence-based recommendations for the formulation of policies at the national, regional and international levels.

The presentations and discussion to take place during the meeting as well as its conclusions and recommendations will directly contribute to the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General that will be submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its 52<sup>nd</sup> session in February 2014 on the priority theme of people's empowerment. This report will strive to provide the basis for the Commission's resolution.

The outcomes of the meeting will also be used to suggest topics that the Commission, within its mandate, may wish to address in the years ahead. In addition, they will inform the multi-stakeholder discussions ongoing at all levels on how to shape the international development agenda after 2015. In doing so, they will highlight the importance of empowerment in ensuring a people-centred approach to development and in strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development.

The meeting will bring together experts from academia, national Governments, civil society organizations and international development agencies and from all regions of the world. Presentations will focus on answering the following questions:

1. How can policy induce the types of participation that empower individuals and social groups to overcome poverty, promote social cohesion and find and create employment and decent work?
2. What are examples of strategies, programmes and institutions that have created an enabling environment for the empowerment of people and social groups? How are these designed and implemented, and how might they be replicated, to promote empowerment?
3. How do strategies and programmes aimed at strengthening people's skills and competencies as well as access to knowledge and information contribute to their empowerment?
4. What types of policies and institutions are needed to effectively address discrimination and improve access to resources and services?

Participants should prepare concrete examples of strategies and programmes that have empowered specific social groups, namely indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, youth and older persons. Participants should also identify strategies that have not worked to distil lessons from both types of examples.

The expert group should conclude the meeting by reaching consensus on the main conclusions and recommendations that are relevant to the current and future work of the Commission for Social Development, to be reflected in meeting outputs as well as in the report of the Secretary-General on promoting empowerment.

## **Outputs**

The expert group meeting will result in the following outputs:

- Substantive papers produced by expert participants on the core themes of the meeting.
- Key conclusions and action-oriented recommendations, including new initiatives.
- A report summarizing the expert deliberations and presenting the meeting outcomes.

## **Organizational aspects**

### *Date and venue of the meeting*

The expert group meeting is scheduled to take place from 10 to 11 September 2013 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The meeting will be organized by the Social Perspective on Development Branch, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat.

### *Organizational set-up of the meeting*

Approximately 10 to 15 experts, identified and invited by the Division for Social Policy and Development, are expected to attend the meeting. Representatives from international organizations, United Nations Regional Commissions and other parts of the United Nations system are also invited. The Secretariat will provide a preliminary list of substantive issues to be explored in an annotated agenda of the expert group meeting. Prior to the meeting, experts are required to submit short written papers (8-10 pages), in English, to the United Nations Secretariat by 27 August. Experts are expected to take part in all meeting sessions. The participants will meet in six working sessions.

- Each session will include expert presentations (maximum 10 minutes each) that introduce the topic and provide context for the ensuing discussion.
- A rapporteur for each session will lead the group discussions and be responsible for writing the summary of proceedings.
- Brainstorming will be the preferred method of work and no formal conference-style presentations are envisioned.
- The working language of the meeting will be English. There will be no interpretation provided.