

Summary Report

Expert Group Meeting

Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World

19 - 20 May 2015, UNHQ, New York

Division for Social Policy and Development, UNDESA

I. Purpose of the meeting

In its resolution 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 54th session of the Commission, which will take place in February 2016 and which should agree on a policy outcome on this priority theme.

The outcomes of the meeting will contribute to the work of the Commission by providing concrete, evidence-based policy recommendations to promote and therefore strengthen social development. In particular, the outcomes of the meeting will provide guidance and input for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme.

II. Background

The year 2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. In its report on this priority theme to the 53rd session of the Commission for Social Development, in February 2015, the Secretary-General noted that the commitments made at the Summit twenty years ago remain acutely relevant and are largely unfulfilled. The world has made great strides in reducing poverty but is far from eradicating it. A growing number of workers and families cannot rely on stable decent jobs as means to cope with risks and therefore remain vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. Accordingly, strengthening social development –or the social dimension of sustainable development- is not only a matter of making progress towards poverty or employment targets within a short time horizon, but also requires securing such progress and ensuring that it will be sustainable in the long term.

The imminent adoption of the post-2015 agenda opens an opportunity to consider ways to strengthen social development and, more importantly, to bring concrete proposals into effect. It calls for addressing broad questions, including ways to generate commitment to strengthen the social pillar and the challenges social policy faces in the contemporary world. It also calls for tackling concrete questions, reviewing how different countries have addressed vulnerability, created resilience and secured progress in social development, as well as making specific recommendations on how the international community and, in particular, the Commission for Social Development, can best contribute to achieving these objectives, including through the implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

Prior to the expert group meeting, the Division held an E-dialogue, from 6 – 24 April 2015, to consult with a broad network of experts, policy-makers and civil society actors from all regions. The summary of the E-dialogue (attached as annex) will also serve to assist formulating relevant policy recommendations to be contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme.

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 year, 2015 is a critical year mainly for two reasons. First, the post-2015 development agenda is expected to be adopted at the United Nations Summit in September 2015, which is expected to be a universal, transformative and integrated agenda, with social, economic and environmental dimensions. Second, it also marks the 20th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen. During the 53rd session of the Commission in February this year, Member States acknowledged that the vision, principles and goals adopted at the Summit remain as relevant today as twenty years ago. With this in mind, she highlighted the need for rethinking and strengthening social development in a way to best promote and achieve social progress within the new global sustainable development framework, building upon the progress made since the Social Summit and lessons learned from the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action,

In this context, the role of the Commission needs to be strengthened to guide social development within the context of the post-2015 development agenda. As the only United Nations body that has a sole mandate on social policy and social development, the Commission has a pivotal role in strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development. Ms. Bas ended her statement by raising key questions:

- How can we, and the Commission for Social Development, best help Member States to strengthen the social pillar as well as social dimensions of sustainable development in the context of the post-2015 development agenda? On what concrete issues, strategies and policies should the Commission focus its attention?
- Is there a need for a new, broader social development framework? If so, what would be its key elements?
- What will be the most effective mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the social pillars (social goals) of sustainable development? What is the best way to monitor the social dimensions of economic and environmental goals?

Session I: Strengthening social development: what will it take?

Strengthening the social dimension

The challenge of translating the notion of sustainable development into practice and the need for understanding the numerous interactions among its three dimensions was highlighted. So far, integrating the three dimensions, which would create an incredible opportunity to tackle the increasingly complex

global challenges, remains rhetoric and true integration has not taken place in practice. There has been no broad understanding on the new unified, transformative and integrated agenda, among multiple stakeholders, especially at the national and local levels. In order to seize this tremendous opportunity to redirect the current approach to development onto a more sustainable path, it is necessary to mobilize broader engagement.

Once the post-2015 development agenda is adopted, the sustainable development goals need to be pursued through an integrated approach, that is, integrating their economic, social and environmental dimensions in a balanced manner. However, at this moment, the concept of the social dimension of sustainable development has not been well established nor commonly understood, although it is emerging. The absence of an integrated approach (to simultaneously address social, economic and environmental objectives) would have negative effects on social development, as there is a risk that social issues might be treated merely as a consequence or symptom of economic or environmental policies. Therefore, there is a need to bring various policies and strategies together to create an overarching framework for social development. However, it was acknowledged that building a strong constituency for such a broader social development framework, as opposed to sectoral-based (education, health, etc.) or social group based policies, would be a challenge.

At the regional level, the current shift of Europe's identity away from the European social model, which created a thick layer of the middle class and successfully reduced inequality, poses tremendous risks for social development worldwide, as the historical experience of Europe – evolution of social welfare states – provides unique opportunity for the rest of the world to analyze and determine in which direction their societies are heading.

Inter-regional cooperation and dynamics would play a critical role in the implementation of the sustainable development goals, in view of the changing development landscape, with the enhanced role of emerging economies in global economy and development. For example, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) adopted Agenda 2063 in January 2015, which is both a vision and an action plan and calls for all segments of African society to work together to build a prosperous and united Africa based on shared values and a common destiny. It was observed that countries are demonstrating a growing autonomy. During the recent global economic and financial crises, countries decided to tackle the problems on their own to the extent possible.

It was pointed out that the challenge in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda would be to address sustainable development in an integrated manner, not only across its three dimensions, but also across institutional boundaries - among various ministries, institutions, and UN entities. There is an opportunity for the United Nations to take a lead in promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development. The role of the UN would be to provide policy advice for Member States, in particular LDCs, to set norms and share good practices. The UN needs to act together and ensure coherence among UN Secretariat, Regional Commissions, Special Agencies, and Funds and Programmes. In this regard, the role of the ECOSOC system, particularly that of the functional commissions and regional commissions, should be further strengthened. It was also suggested that the ECOSOC functional commissions could explore how to take a more integrated approach, for example through reviewing one “integrated” report on one common theme from their respective perspectives.

DESA, for example, could demonstrate an integrated approach to analysis, impact assessment, policy formulation, as well as identifying and promoting successful practices in this area at the national and regional levels. In this context, it was suggested that DESA launch a three- to five-year programme on integrated analysis in collaboration with the Regional Commissions to address interlinkages among the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The role of social development in achieving environmental goals

In order to promote environmental stewardship and integrating environmental objectives into social and economic dimensions, there is a need to see the natural world as an asset that produces value. To date, however, such value is not well defined. While some natural assets (i.e. oil, minerals, timber) are considered as part of the economic value chain, others (i.e., air, water and the oceans) are not valued in the same way, as they are considered “public goods” with no exclusionary ownership. Similarly, the costs of negative changes in the quality of certain natural assets (i.e., soil degradation or air pollution) have not been assessed in economic and social terms. This situation needs to be rectified by fully reflecting its relative abundance/availability, its quality, as well as the full and true cost of replacing it.

It was proposed to assign a societal value or price (economic value) to natural assets, through a societal agreement (and not determined by the market), as social context determined how much societies are willing to pay for the intrinsic value of natural capital, of ecosystems in particular, and the concrete value of the services they provide. These values can also be influenced by policy and social norms. Governments have a key role in creating a social consensus on value. It was pointed out however, the fact that a natural asset has a value should not imply that it can be used without limit, as natural capital has geophysical limits.

Assigning value to natural assets/capital also enables the linking of environmental goals with the social development agenda. While people living in poverty are disproportionately dependent on natural assets that they do not own or control for their livelihoods (e.g. in agriculture, forestry, fisheries), they bear the burden of the costs of environmental degradation or interruptions of ecosystem services. Sustainable management of natural capital is thus a key element to achieving poverty reduction. This helps to explain why prosperity and poverty reduction depend on maintaining the flow of benefits from ecosystems; and why successful environmental protection needs to be grounded in sound economics and explicit recognition of the social benefits of the efficient and fair distribution of the costs and benefits of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

This process will require devising a system to measure human well-being and prosperity that goes beyond the economic variables used in GDP. Putting value on natural capital would not only protect the environment but would also promote employment and decent work by valuing activities that provide services related to natural assets, and curb excessive consumption by assigning different social values, for example, consumer’s shifting towards more environmental friendly-products or companies that support, preserve and manage the ecosystems. In addition, public education aimed at raising awareness of the imperatives of ecological preservation and environmental stewardship for the achievement of core social objectives is central to achieving the full integration of all three dimensions of sustainable development.

Towards a more coherent social policy framework: bringing together social development concerns, notions and discourses

Greater clarity in defining what social development and social policy mean needs to be reached in the current economic and social context, where inequalities between and within countries are widening. It was argued that the current form of economy (“capitalism”) places the primacy of profits over ecological sustainability and social equity. Inequality in incomes and wealth has reached unprecedented heights since World War II. The highest income quintile in the income-richest country (Luxemburg) has 100,000 times the income of the lowest income quintile in the world’s income-poorest country (DRC)¹. While certain degrees of inequality inevitably exist under the market-oriented economy, extreme inequalities will negatively affect the sustainability of economic growth and social cohesion.

The United Nations has placed great importance on social development from the outset. The Charter of the United Nations (1945) posited a goal of well-being, and committed to strive for “higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development” (article 55). Since then, each of the UN development decades, from the 1960s through the 1990s, has addressed economic and social development. Environmental considerations emerged from the 1970s onwards. The concept of *human* development arrived in 1990, with the first Human Development Report (HDR). At the World Summit for Social Development (1995) a comprehensive approach to social development was taken, encompassing social justice, the material and spiritual needs of individuals, families and communities, economic development, social development and environmental protection. It defined three central “social development goals”: eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment, and enhancing social integration. The Social Summit had profound influence on the MDGs.

How social development is defined has a profound impact on conceptualization, formulation and implementation of social policy, since it sets the boundaries of social policy, which in turn shapes policy objectives and their delivery. This is crucial at a juncture when a new global universal, unified, transformative and people-centered development agenda is being negotiated. Definitions of social development and actions of the content or scope of social policy will also help achieve better policy coherence among UN system entities.

Two fundamental questions were raised: 1) whether the SDGs with their 17 goal areas offer an entry point for holistic social development and social policy that would *address* social development in the broadly understood terms of social sustainability and sustainable human development; and 2) whether the implementation of the SDGs would usher in a *reversed* hierarchy of social equity norms.

Some potential areas/linkages where synergies could be created in such areas as: employment/decent work and sustainable development; employment/decent work and the care economy; employment/decent work and minimum income guarantees; sustainable consumption and production and social policy. The need to link the social protection floor and decent work (via minimum income, for example) was highlighted. The notion of “sharing economy” (e.g., sharing material goods - food, time, cars, homes, etc.) should also be given further consideration. In conclusion, the presenter highlighted the need for connecting social development discourses together to rethink social policy.

Session II – Rethinking social policy: new trends and challenges

¹ Source: http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Global_Inequality.pdf. Based on data for 135 countries as of 2007 using constant 2000 U.S. dollars.

New challenges and risks

Social policy has been considered as a key policy instrument to tackle social problems, while also serving as development strategies to reduce poverty and improve living conditions. However, facing new global socio-economic and political challenges, such as persistent and widening inequalities, growing job insecurity, financialization² of, and related to this, systemic fragilities of global economy, current social policies have revealed limited capacities in guaranteeing all citizens decent standards of living. Increased employment informality and overall labour market flexibility have been pushing people, especially women and youth, into precarious jobs, including part time or short-term work, in developed countries, while the majority of people in developing countries remain working in the informal sector, often with inadequate wages and working conditions, no access to social benefits, and fewer opportunities to formal education and training.

In addition, decent job opportunities, on which individuals and families livelihoods depend, have been threatened by technological progress and the intensification of cross-national competition. The advancement of technology in developed countries has reached a level where certain sectors would no longer depend on low-skilled labour (both blue and white-collar workers), as they would be replaced by robots and digital agents. This might displace a large number of workers, while new jobs and industries would be created in emerging sectors. Social policy will need to protect people to be affected temporarily during the transition.

Another challenge is divergence of productivity and wages in both developed and developing countries. While productivity has continued to grow in some sectors, wages have stagnated (the share of wages has been consistently reduced over the last 30 years). In addition, financialization, in its process, has posed two main challenges: 1) revenues and newly raised capital have not been invested into fixed capital formation (physical or human capitals) which would enhance the living standards of workers, but instead, they have been returned back to shareholders in the financial sector (to generate interest, financial fees, etc.)³; 2) investments in non-financial sectors (the real sector) that create or expand job opportunities have been declining, leading to fewer jobs and less secured employment (closures, restructuring and outsourcing, etc.).

Some other challenges were identified during the discussion, including: population ageing, climate change, changes of family structure, climate change, the intensification of natural disasters, environmental degradation and its negative effects on the well-beings of people, and recurrent and protracted crises resulting from armed conflicts. Participants agreed that such challenges were “here to stay” and continue to impose the enduring exclusion of parts of society from social or economic life.

New trends

² Financialization can be described as an economic system or process that attempts to reduce all value that is exchanged (whether tangible or intangible, future or present promises, etc.) into a financial instrument. The intent of financialization is to be able to reduce any work product or service to an exchangeable financial instrument, like currency, and thus make it easier for people to trade these financial instruments. It can be also described as “pattern of accumulation in which profit making occurs increasingly through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production (G. Krippner)”.

³ Financialization & Equal Opportunity, Wallace C. Turbeville, Demo, Senior Fellow <http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Financialization%20and%20Equal%20Opportunity.pdf>

Despite success in reducing poverty and enhancing labour productivity worldwide, the underlying vulnerabilities of those living in poverty or just above the poverty line has not been sufficiently examined. Addressing vulnerability to poverty would require three different sets of policy goals: 1) to sustain escapes from poverty until it is eradicated; 2) to prevent descents into poverty; and 3) to tackle chronic poverty.

Some policy measures would support the above three goals, namely: 1) measures aimed to achieve universal access to primary and secondary education, health coverage and social protection; and 2) targeted/special measures, including anti-discrimination measures to address specific needs of vulnerable groups, communities and individuals. In addition, measures cut across social, economic and environmental dimensions are also necessary, including those related to land tenure and disaster-risk management. Regarding health coverage, it was noted that resource constraints to universal coverage were often perceived, not actual, and that resistance to universal coverage came from the private sector but also, in many instances, from the public sector.

It was noted that chronic poverty was linked to the persistence of multiple disadvantages (or “intersecting inequalities”), which generated exclusion. The majority of chronically poor and members of excluded groups were economically active, yet work had not been a means of escaping poverty. Addressing those multiple disadvantages would mean correcting deep structural injustices. This would require a combination of universal and targeted measures as well as anti-discrimination laws, but also social mobilization, constitutional reform and other actions needed to slowly change social norms and institutions.

Growing job insecurity would mean that individuals and families could not rely on stable jobs to stay out of poverty. The main challenge for social policy was, therefore, to help build the resilience of people to be affected, while addressing their vulnerabilities. Thus, social policy needs to move away from addressing narrowly-defined income poverty within a short-time horizon towards comprehensively defined development-focused policy. Social policy needs to be transformative. This would require securing progress and ensuring that it would be sustainable in the long term. It would require an approach grounded in universal rights (social policy based on universal approach), aiming to: 1) enhance the productive capacities of individuals, groups and communities; 2) reinforce the progressive redistributive effects of economic policies; 3) reduce the burden of growth and reproduction of society, including care-related work, and protect people from income loss and costs associated with unemployment, pregnancy, ill-health or disability, and old age. It is also critical to focus on institutional complementarity or synergies

Access to universal social protection was highlighted as a key measure to address vulnerability and strengthen resilience in both developing and developed countries. Since World War II, many countries with advanced economies recognized the importance of social security for all as a key objective of economic policies along with economic growth. Evolving from the earlier approach to social security aimed to assist those who are sick, unemployed or old, newly formulated national plans for social security were designed to provide universal and adequate protection to address various risks.

Social protection helps to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerabilities of individuals and families by enhancing people’s capacity to manage economic and social risks, including through preventing and overcoming situations which adversely affected people’s well-being, and guaranteeing the minimum

income to sustain livelihoods. More broadly, social policies remained to be the main venue to influence the access to adequate and secure livelihoods and income and were, therefore, an integral element of every development strategy.

Session III: Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary Context: Regional Approaches

Middle East and Northern Africa

The Middle East and Northern Africa region is currently facing protracted political challenges. Policy-makers in the region however are facing similar social development challenges with other developing countries. In the 1990s, countries in the MENA region began to make formal acknowledgement of the presence of poverty in their societies. Since the 2000s, the region has witnessed a growing interest in the contribution of social protection policies to human development. These policy shifts reflect realities on the ground: the ineffectiveness of the “Growth first” approach; the persistence of extreme poverty and the protracted nature of social problems in the region; and most recently, the popular uprising which called for human dignity and social justice. The added value of a focus on social protection reflects a concern with reducing the number of those living in extreme poverty and mitigating the effects of economic vulnerability.

Many countries in the region have subscribed to the international conventions on labour and social security laws but the extent to which these countries implement them is varied. While some countries have social welfare systems that promote entitlement to social protection, they primarily take a residual approach to social policy. In the MENA countries, social concerns have traditionally played a subsidiary role to economic growth. The national development programmes of the region make clear that the economic function of social protection is the priority. For example, much emphasis is placed on the employment based earning related social insurance scheme where three quarters of the population engage in the informal economy. There is strong emphasis on benevolence which takes the form of cash assistance. The social expenditure on the social safety net in this region is the highest in the world, hence very high reliance on social safety nets but equally on a brand system of social insurance that exists in the region.

There have been some policy changes since the Arab uprising, however, countries in the region have not yet envisioned more comprehensive long-term strategies for social protection and sustainable development. Conceptual clarities on the role of the state, the market, the family and the community should be further pursued. It is also important to look at the structures of governance and the institutional mechanisms for social policy and sustainable development. The focus of attention should not merely be on developing solidarity but also on promoting social responsibility.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The traditional model of social policy that this region has followed is the male bread winner model. Some citizens claimed that there has been favouritism. Currently, there is an increase in social investment and the state has a greater regulatory role in facing market asymmetries. Policies to reduce poverty are comprehensive and are designed to increase the assets and capabilities of the population. Social policies are now seen as responses to the basic human rights. There is increasing micro-economic priority of social security and assistance, education, health, and increasing coverage of people aged 65 and above by

pensions and the coverage of conditional cash transfers which cover more than 20% of the total population of the region.

The human rights based approach is taken seriously and this has led to a shift from a programme and emergency based approach to entitlement based policy. The state now has a leading role in social policy. Recognizing the need for comprehensive social policies, countries have created social development ministries. Poverty and inequality are declining, although inequality still remains high. The region also has the demographic window of opportunity with a large number of people in the economically active age range.

More recently, however, economic growth has been slow and poverty reduction progress has stalled. Social investment is no longer growing and there is a continuing demand for improved quality and coverage of health and education services. The reduction in poverty in the weak economy of the region was mainly due to the creation of jobs, mostly in the formal sector but also with better wages. It is also attributed to social programmes and policies such as the minimum wage, which was decreased and dissected to benefits like the social pension. While growth has played a fundamental role, democratization and expansion of social policies has also helped.

Although it might be difficult to link human rights with the SDGs, the human rights approach is something that needs to be embarked on immediately. The importance of better coordination and management of social policies also needs to be emphasized. Increasing taxes can also be seen as a solution since taxation as percentage of the GDP is low for countries in this region.

Asia and the Pacific

This region is one of the most salient regions in the world. Its per capita income has doubled and poverty has substantially decreased. The region has met the MDGs at various levels, while much still needs to be done. The challenges are greater in this region, because of its large population size.

The region has five sub-regions. The regions of East and Northeast Asia consist of highly populous countries like China. Their economies are affected by demand and export market levels. They have aging populations. The North and Central Asia region is among the five regions with low economic growth and high inflation rates. The Pacific Island developing countries have shown good progress but face frequent natural disasters, infrastructure maintaining constraints, and youth unemployment. For South and Southwest Asia, the economy is led by India. Structural reforms are very limited in the sub-region. Southeast Asia has slow growth and needs to improve infrastructure and enhance the quality of education.

There is a recognition that the growth trajectory is positive and most of the countries are striving for inclusive growth. The region, after going through crises, has learned that it is important to have social protection systems as an overall long-term framework. Governments have now begun to enter the micro-economic landscape and to rethink the role of their interventions.

For example, Thailand's universal healthcare system has become famous because it is funded by general revenues and has proven to be instrumental in providing affordable, accessible and acceptable healthcare services for all. Another strategy is the different multifunctional linkages. In Singapore, for example, a multinational society, there is a requirement of ethnic quotas in public housing. This has resulted in very positive unintended consequences because different ethnic groups coexist in the same neighborhood,

which has promoted social cohesion. This is an example of using one social policy to affect other dimensions.

Human trafficking and migration are major challenges in the region. Six countries have made a commitment called 'Commit' where they signed a multilateral agreement to work on trafficking. The UN has also played a very positive role on disability. The region has developed a specific regional strategy called Asian Decade for Persons with Disabilities using the UN Convention as the base. Eight countries in the Pacific cooperating on environmental issues have entered into an agreement called the 'Parties' to regulate fishery preventing over fishing in its territorial borders.

The social development systems however need to be reformed since the demand is changing towards higher quality services. The region needs to continuously work on ongoing financing and further integration.

Sub-Saharan Africa

In reflecting on social development in Africa, four pillars of development were identified: growth and poverty reduction; social sector progress; progress in governance, peace and security; and resilience building and sustainable development. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) consists of countries with diverse economic and social backgrounds: six are among the world's fastest growing economies (in 2015, Ethiopia, Angola, Ghana, Mozambique, Kenya and Nigeria); four constitute almost 50% of Africans living in poverty (DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Tanzania); countries with high inequalities (Gini coefficients above 0.55, Angola, CAR, Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, Comoros and South Africa); countries with rising inequalities (Cote d'Ivoire, South Africa and Uganda). SSA accounted for 70% HIV related deaths (2011) and recently experienced a high rate of deaths from the Ebola Virus. This region experienced the slowest growth (at an average rate of 5%).

While economic growth has been adequate, it has not been sufficient to reduce poverty. The region managed to reduce poverty by 8 percentage points (from 56% in 1990 to 48% in 2014). Poverty has been reduced in 24 countries (i.e., Gambia, Burkina Faso, Niger, Swaziland, Ethiopia, Uganda, Malawi, etc.), but has increased in some countries (Central African Republic, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Zambia, Madagascar, Sierra Leone). Africa's growth largely depends on extractive industries, which has neither created sufficient decent jobs nor responded well to economic shocks, rapid urbanization and rising inequalities. While the region has mineral resources, many countries have failed to distribute the benefits of growth to properly channel the revenues to human development. Thus, even if there is growth, there would be rising inequalities. This is also due to lack of transformation in terms of the economic base and sources but also in terms of transforming the industrial sector and has implications for the economy in the continent.

Africa is a continent ravished by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It has still the largest population living with HIV/AIDS and high HIV related deaths. The region has also been recently stricken by Ebola. These have massive effects on the region. On the other hand, there has been substantial progress in health mainly because of the expansion of treatments and prevention of tropical diseases such as TB, Malaria and HIV/AIDS.

The region has made progress on education, particularly on primary education, because of the universal education policy. There are however huge issues surrounding the quality of education. Security has been key and indispensable in the region. There were 28 countries out of the 46 that had experienced some form of conflict in the 1990s but reduced to 10 in the 2000s. Efforts were also made to put the right policies for poverty reduction. There is currently a push for structural transformation in terms of the vision for 2063 and also the vision on sub-regional policy instruments that are put in place.

In order to tackle the prevailing challenges, measures that are being taken in the region including expansion of secondary education, prevention of HIV, development and implementation of UN led strategies on security, and resilience building.

Good governance is required not only at the national level, but also global level as a means to the implementation of the development agenda. The region has a well-recognized youth bulge that presents challenges as well as benefits, and many migration issues that need to be resolved.

Summary of Discussion

Participants reiterated that growth has increased but wage share, employment, and distribution of income have decreased at the global level. In the past ten years, all the regions have made massive progress in policy implementation and there is now greater effort for better coordination of policies.

The participants highlighted several issues: 1) the role of growth in achieving social development goals needs to be well thought of, as the quality and source of growth have an impact on social development outcomes; 2) the quality of services could be poor even after achieving access to these services; 3) social development in the contemporary world is all about sustainable development and that growth is necessary but not sufficient.

It was noted that transformative social policy is not a narrow approach to the MDGs, rather it requires addressing inequalities. This explains the linkages between poverty and exclusion. It entails fundamental renegotiation of the terms in which states, individuals and the private sector interact with each other.

It was agreed that there is a strong need for increased political participation, especially among the most marginalized, and changing social norms and consensus around these critical issues, and reopening conversations about pre and redistribution. Demographic transition is also a critical development policy issue. Inclusive social policies that can address issues of poverty, economic crisis, social exclusion, impoverishment and natural disasters need to be designed and put in place.

They recalled that most of the regions have increased social expenditure and broader engagement in different schemes of social protection. They stressed that it is necessary to strengthen and sustain the progress in poverty reduction and to respond to the rise in labour, and the growing attention to inclusiveness/ inclusive growth to bring about inclusive development in a broader term.

Session 4: Decent work and social protection: new directions

Global employment trends

The meeting reaffirmed the importance of decent work to social development, noting however a number of significant recent global trends that have hindered achievement of the commitment to full and decent

work for all. In particular, there have been two big disconnects since 2000 – between productivity and wages, where wages have not kept up with increases in productivity, and between growth and jobs, where jobs have not kept up with growth rates. Participants also noted some reasons for optimism looking at the global labour picture – including increasing educational attainment and decreasing working poverty. However, these improvements have been modest and uneven and the formal employment sector is not expanding with general development as expected. Indeed, 672 million jobs are needed to meet the goal of full and productive employment for all by 2030 especially for youth, who are disproportionately affected by unemployment and underemployment. Decent work deficits among youth can have long-lasting consequences for this and future generations. Also, in the face of increased vulnerability and instability in employment, the quality of these jobs (rather than just the quantity) has become increasingly important. The ILO’s concept (and measurement) of vulnerable employment has been valuable in tracking these developments but participants noted that the challenge of measuring labour market performance globally will be a big challenge for the SDG follow-up process.

New challenges & opportunities

A number of new challenges and opportunities in the world of work were identified, including the role of globalization and the potential benefits of the demographic dividend, which may be forgone in many countries due to persisting employment deficits. Disruptive technological change – through automation, digitalization of production, and virtual ‘on-demand’ work – and its implications was also discussed as participants pointed to increased precarious employment but also the ability of technology transfer to help generate employment in the developing world.

New policy directions

A number of important new policy directions have emerged that will affect the employment situation, including: the adoption of Social Protection Floors in many developing countries – with universal pension coverage adopted in 25 developing countries, funded by increased domestic tax revenues; expansion of informal collective bargaining arrangements that have been shown to help the most vulnerable – especially important in the light of weakening of workers’ rights in the developed world; and the promotion of rural non-farm employment opportunities for employment generation in LDCs.

Gaps between labour policy and the current labour market situation

This session also pointed to a number of important gaps between labour policies and institutions, created to address formal employment, and the current reality of the world of work in many developing countries, where the majority work in the informal sector, as well as in a growing number of developed countries, where greater labour market flexibility has resulted in growing job instability and a rise in precarious forms of employment. Growing employment insecurity was increasing in both developed and developing countries, and labour market policies alone could not ensure the adequate protection of workers. Participants agreed that a combination of labour market and broad-based social protection policies were better suited to promote formalization and ensure the adequate protection of all workers.

Participants highlighted the need for more coherent and integrated analysis and policymaking; in particular, helping member states to improve statistical data collection to better reflect the reality of employment situations including low wages, informality and precarious employment, as well as working

with Member State ministries to avoid a ‘silo approach’ to labour policy. Participants also noted the importance of country context where other policies such as access to credit in rural, mainly agricultural economies, can also supplement traditional labour policy to improve employment creation, as can alleviating the burdens of care work as well as educational barriers in order to improve female labour participation rate in South Asia. Many innovative labour-focussed policy measures are already being implemented in the developing world but are not being adequately captured and analysed at the global level, for example training schemes in the informal sector; social insurance programmes driven by individual foundations; and supported seasonal migration programmes to help individuals move from rural to urban areas for work.

Integrating decent work into the sustainable development agenda

Finally, the session tackled the question of how to integrate decent work into the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. Participants noted that work is a key area of integration between social and economic areas and offers an opportunity to work across the pillars of sustainable development. The environment is also an example of a similarly transversal issue, meaning that integrating the work and environment agendas present similar challenges and opportunities. For example, countries have failed to properly account for the social value of specific labour legislation, for example minimum wage legislation, instead only counting the costs to employers; just as it fails to account for environmental value of other policies. As such, protecting non-traditional assets (and count them socially) like national insurance or pension rights (as long-term contingent assets) is essential to building resilience. In other words, we need an asset-driven approach to social protection where vulnerability is linked to lack of asset protection, and conversely resilience is about increasing the protection of assets. The UN needs to help governments assess the social and environmental benefits (and costs) of different policy options.

Session V: The role of social development in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda

Various speakers presented their distinct perspectives on how to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, focusing on the role of social development in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Engaging the private sector in strengthening social development

The UN Global Compact views “corporate sustainability”, defined as a business’ creation of long-term value in economic, social, environmental and ethical terms, as business’ main contribution to sustainable development. It entails the responsibility of business to respect universal principles, including on all internationally proclaimed human rights and labour, and the opportunity to go beyond the avoidance of harm to bring about benefits to society, the environment and governance. In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council endorsed the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which codify in specific terms the minimum/baseline role for Governments and businesses regarding business impacts on people.

Among other initiatives, the Global Compact has worked to help companies achieve their sustainability goals through partnering with UN entities and others to develop the Women’s Empowerment Principles, Children’s Rights and Business Principles, and business reference guides to the UN Declaration on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the latter is in development), and is further considering a set of business principles on the rights of older persons.

There are several key ways in which business can support social development. The first is through their core business and inclusive business models, for example, through employment, implementation of special measures to promote diversity and inclusion, and provision of goods and services to meet basic needs, such as staple foods with micronutrients. Second, through strategic social investment and philanthropy, companies can contribute financial resources, human resources, goods and services, expertise and guidance, facilities and equipment to assist social causes, such as through investing in education initiatives that will contribute to a future employee base. Third, companies can engage in public policy and advocacy, such as speaking out on a social issue. The fourth (cross-cutting) way is through partnerships and collective action, whereby companies pool their expertise, financial and human resources, technology, facilities and the like with partners such as other companies, Governments or academic institutions. In particular, the number of UN-business partnerships and multi-stakeholder initiatives has grown in recent years.

Regarding inter-linkages among the different aspects of sustainability, leading companies have been forming cross-functional committees to help them better identify and manage risks and achieve their sustainability goals. However, there is much more scope for integration of three dimensions of sustainable development beyond this good practice.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives will be more effective and impactful if a specific stakeholder lens is applied to them and if there is full participation of relevant stakeholder groups to help avoid pitfalls and achieve maximum benefit from the action. There is much potential for researching and showcasing good practice examples of adding a social “twist” to, for example, environmental initiatives to encourage more companies to explore how they might integrate a social dimension into their environmental initiatives and realize an “inclusion dividend”, namely benefit for the individuals, for the business and for society. Cross-functional and cross-sector collaboration and information exchange will likely be key and could be a great source of innovation and inspiration.

Monitoring social progress through the SDGs: challenges and opportunities

A draft framework of indicators that consists of key global, thematic/sectoral, national, and sub-national indicators has been designed to monitor progress in the SDGs at different levels. Global indicators (key indicators, limited in number) will be used to measure progress at the global level. In addition, thematic/sectoral indicators will be developed for each of the elements covered by the global indicators to enable “thematic” monitoring, and national and sub-national indicators will be selected by each country based on their priorities and circumstances.

The relationship between these indicators is not yet clear but the statistical community would favour a certain level of consistency to make sure that all the work done on international standards and classifications is not lost but still maintained at the level of comparability. Indicators at different levels will have to include elements of disaggregation, which is critical for the new agenda to be inclusive. To realize the concept of “no one will be left behind”, the data has to be disaggregated so as to monitor where progress is being made and/or lagging. While disaggregation of data (by sex, age, urban/rural, etc.) is important, looking at different groups of the population is also necessary.

Indicators to be selected should be methodologically sound; measurable; accessible and easy to interpret; relevant; timely, and regularly produced over time. The global indicators need to be internationally comparable. There will, however, be some level of flexibility especially for the first few years during which the indicators may or may not be well developed, and data sources need to be further strengthened. Indicators should not be used to redefine/distort priorities or to focus on only one aspect of the target.

As there will be a limited number of indicators, the challenge is how to address and maintain the same level of attention to every target and every aspect of all targets (do we have to address target?). By selecting indicators on one specific aspect of the target, there is a risk of neglecting certain aspects that are not being measured, therefore it might distort overall priorities. Other challenges include: how to select indicators to address issues of inequality; and how to cover all groups of the population.

When monitoring the social dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals, there would be tremendous opportunities if focusing on the area identified at the Social Summit: the eradication of poverty, the promotion of productive employment and decent work for all, and fostering social integration. The challenge would be the disaggregation of statistical data, due to data availability and accessibility problems. Even if the indicators are few in numbers per goal or target, it is important to select those that can capture the essence of what needs to be measured.

There are various data sources such as censuses (only every 10 years, fewer variables), household surveys (more variables, but limited coverage in terms of age groups, geographical units, different population groups), administrative records (limited availability & quality, cannot cross tabulate), and civil registration and vital statistics, and each of them has its advantages and/or disadvantages over the other. These sources can be integrated in order to come up with an indicator that has better coverage. For example, 94 out of 125 countries included questions on disability in their Population Census in 2010 round⁴, and 17 out of 20 countries in Latin America included or plan to include self-identification in their census (identification of the indigenous population) in the 2010 round⁵. There is a need to strengthen the data sources to inform the required indicators as well as deepen the understanding of the scope and necessary coverage. For this reason, household survey programmes should begin to look at the broader agenda and ideally be determined by countries in an integrated way.

Potential role of ECOSOC functional commissions in the implementation of the post – 2015 development agenda: perspective of the Commission on the Status of Women

The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) is mandated to play a central role in the follow-up and review. The ECOSOC system, which includes the functional commissions, will contribute to the overall review and appraisal in some fashion. The functional commissions and ECOSOC have been the lead in the coordinated follow-up of the major UN summits and conferences in the last 20 years. They have sufficient experience in follow-up to commitments made at various international conferences, although the post-2015 development agenda is of different quality, complexity and nature.

⁴ Source: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/NewYork/2013/UNSD_Population_topics.pdf

⁵ Source: ECLAC, 2014. Guaranteeing indigenous people's rights in Latin America: Progress in the past decade and remaining challenges

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal inter-governmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The mandate of the Commission was expanded following the fourth World Conference on Women in 1996, as taking a leading role in overall policy-making and in coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

It was later decided that the Commission will have five key refined roles: 1) policymaking role; 2) review role; 3) a catalytic role in terms of gender mainstreaming; 4) a convening role to accelerate the realization of gender equality; and 5) provide gender equality expertise and gender specific reporting within the ECOSOC system. The CSW also continues to make strategic connections between the Platform for Action and the broader global agenda, such as the post-2015 development agenda to be adopted at the United Nations summit in September 2015, so as to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The 2015 CSW undertook a review of the MDGs and its negotiated outcome providing a very useful input in terms of linking the SDGs and the way forward with regard to gender equality and empowerment. The Commission, while it would play a leading role in the review, did not claim its exclusive responsibility for a possible mandate for gender equality.

In addition to its own responsibility for the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, the CSW would contribute to the post-2015 development agenda through accelerating gender equality and the empowerment of women. It confirmed the existing linkages between the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development, and highlighted the need for further integration of these two agendas. The CSW would enhance its catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in support of the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. The CSW has a role in ensuring that the system wide mandate on gender mainstreaming will be fully taken on in the follow-up, review, and monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda.

The social drivers of sustainable development

A representative of DESA's Division for Sustainable Development spoke on the social drivers of sustainable development. The SDGs are centered on promoting the well-being of people. In order to track progress, it is essential to look beyond GDP per capita and examine the distribution of income and assets and the distribution of capabilities and opportunities. The phrase "no one left behind" characterizes the new agenda for many. The process of formulating the SDGs has attempted to reflect the notion through focusing on empowerment of those who are marginalized and living in poverty; tracking progress for all through disaggregated data; and giving to those who are marginalized and living in poverty a voice at all stages – from conceptualization to follow-up. It accounts for people's role as both active and unwitting agents of change (through, for example, population and consumption), and their interactions with the ecosystem (through incentives to change behavior, mobilization, etc.). Beyond the number of references to specific social groups in the agenda, it is important to look at the basic vision of the agenda and its "preferential option" for marginalized groups, as well as how Governments work with stakeholders to internalize social inclusion in policies, legislation and programmes.

It was suggested that the UN monitor international commitments and UN conventions, such as with regard to persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, older persons and youth, be aligned with the

follow-up to and review of the post-2015 agenda. Moreover, it should promote an international voice for vulnerable and marginalized groups in holding Governments accountable for their commitments to leave no one behind.

Comments and Additional Suggestions

While the MDGs were successful in galvanizing international efforts on a limited number of specific measurable goals, they didn't capture the full scope of the development agenda (i.e. inclusive and equitable growth, addressing inequalities and exclusion, environmental protection, etc.). The Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted at the UN Summit would take a more holistic and integrated approach to address social, economic and environmental challenges. Since the SDGs process (formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation) involves not only Member States but also all segments of a society, it has a potential to make governments and other public institutions more accountable. In this sense, the post-2015 development agenda is much stronger than the MDGs.

On the other hand, some concerns were expressed in the current construct of SDGs. As the agenda is very broad with seventeen goals and 169 targets, and with competing economic and environmental agendas, there is a risk of diluting key social development objectives. It is necessary to position social development not only as an end but also as a means, a contributor and key input to achieving sustainable development. There is also a risk that some goals would be selectively monitored, instead of its original intention to address social, economic and environmental sustainability in a coherent and comprehensive manner. Further guidance as to how to implement SDGs is deemed necessary to avoid a fragmented silo-approach.

In order to strengthen the social dimension of sustainable development, the role of the UN as well as the international development cooperation frameworks needs to be strengthened. The UN system (specialized agencies, funds and programmes and UN departments) should find a common ground to promote social development and ensure that "no one is left behind" would help achieve the SDGs. The UN could play a key role in reviewing and monitoring overall progress on an annual basis at the global level. At the national level, the UN should support national governments in integrated and inclusive policymaking, based on its experience during the past 20 years and ensure that the principle of participation be applied in the implementation and follow-up of major UN summits and conferences.

While the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action presented a comprehensive and integrated approach to social development, a challenge would be to formulate a strong transformative conceptual framework for social development, to which various social policies (employment social dialogues, social rights, access to social services, etc.) could be linked.

As the SDGs are very complex and comprehensive, governments may prioritize the goals and targets that can be delivered. In doing so, it is important to understand and identify key social policy areas that will serve as catalysts for transformational changes, and/or create synergies between other targets and goals. This way, social policies could critically contribute to achieving economic and environmental goals and targets. For example, social protection was identified as an example of such key transformational social policy.

In reviewing the progress of the SDGs, data disaggregation is, while a fundamental challenge, central to the notion of "leaving no one behind". In addition, there is a need for building/strengthening statistical

and administrative systems in many developing countries. In particular, civil registration systems need to be completed, which is fundamental to the right to legal identity, making the excluded population visible. This should be addressed as a cross-cutting issue, as it touches upon various goals (governance, legal rights, poverty, inequality, access to social services, participation, inclusive economic growth, etc.) It was also noted that some of the crucial elements in achieving sustainable development might not be statistically measured, due to lack of existing methods or data-sets. Continuous efforts should be made to develop a common approach to assess progress in such areas (for example, how to monitor a change in one's values or behavior).

Religion was identified as one of the critical tools in a tool box of behavioral change. Many research studies, particularly in the area of poverty eradication, pointed out that the engagement of religious actors, personalities and organizations had some impact on changing angers and grievances. Further, an average of 30% of basic healthcare services has been provided by faith-based organizations worldwide. Statistics also indicate the high percentage of faith-based organizations among social service providers. Therefore, in discussing social development, the role of religion should be included as part of social determinants.

It was noted that many countries had begun integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development. However, there is a need for a more systematic approach, not only at the national level but also at the international level. Further conceptualization and agreement may be necessary in some areas, for example, social inclusion. Currently, any good welfare policies and strategies are lumped in as social inclusion; a common understanding will need to be established on: (a) what social inclusion is; (b) what its relationship to sustainability is; and (c) what its relationship to shared prosperity is, all of which are critical in the implementation of the SDGs.

Regarding the role of existing UN structures and processes and the role of functional commissions, the need for avoiding silos was emphasized. Each functional commission needs to strike a balance between its original mandates/agendas and the post-2015 agenda; a balance which needs to be reflected in its methods of work. For the first couple of years after the adoption of the new agenda, the Commission could work closely with (or integrate its work with that of) the Statistical Commission, as much work remains to be done to measure what we value. There is much space for the Commission to have a dialogue about data and measurement. All functional commissions may wish to be involved in this regard.

Recognizing political realities, it may be time for the Commission to take on a Ministerial approach to reduce a risk of communication gap. The norms established by the post-2015 agenda can have tremendous influence if linked to - and understood at - the national and local levels. To have transformative effect, effective communication on the new agenda to national and regional institutions is critical, through the full use of social media, civil society and the UN, as they often are unaware of the outcomes of the inter-governmental negotiations. If the outcomes of the next session of the Commission for Social Development are effectively communicated, that alone would be a big win for the agenda.

The representative of the NGO Committee on Social Development brought to the attention that discussions so far on social transformation had centered predominantly on policies and institutional frameworks, without paying attention to the role of people. SDGs should be people-centered for various reasons, including: a good policy may be in place, but not being implemented; a good policy may exist for the wrong reasons; a good policy may be in place and well-communicated, but people still decide to avoid it. In the context of the post-2015 development agenda, the value system has advocated putting

people at the center of development, emphasizing the three dimensions of sustainable development. Therefore, the ultimate objective should be creating an enabling environment for people to participate in policy-making processes, so that people's views can be reflected in policy itself. A transformation to social development would be based on consultation and inclusive processes. The NGO Committee plans to integrate the SDGs into the Copenhagen Commitments, demonstrating that there is already much coherence between them. This exercise may serve to guide the Commission moving forward, and also guide how to monitor progress in its social dimension.

Based on the conclusions of the expert group meeting on policy integration in government administration held in New York in January 2015, and of CEPA at its April 2015 session, the representative of Division of Public Administration and Development management of DESA shared his observations on policy integration at the national level. Policy integration is not "business-as-usual" for most Governments. Governmental processes for the most part do not reflect the inter-linkages between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, or even linkages within dimensions. Instead, government administration is usually organized along sectoral lines, at both national and local levels, as well as within international organizations.

There are reasons why institutions are organized in this specialized way, for example separating education, health and labour ministries. This has to do with the benefits that accrue from a concentration of expertise, as well as for reasons of efficiency and accountability. Institutional constraints to policy integration typically include overly hierarchical structures, lack of a common strategic policy direction, sectoral self-interest, and a complicated division of labour.

The foundations of integration rest on effective policy-making within sectors, which must be strengthened, as well as the ability to convince sectoral actors to explore the benefits of cross-sectoral cooperation. Sectors that have greater access to financial resources and analytical capacity may have an advantage. Policy integration efforts are more likely to succeed when there are values and clear goals that unite experts, the public and decision-makers, and top-level leadership in combination with bottom-up support from civil society. Participatory approaches to public policy can assist in this regard.

Policy integration efforts comprise both structural and behavioral approaches. A structural approach consists of redefining agency functions. A behavioral approach consists of providing a platform to promote a culture of sharing, for example of data and resources, reducing the silo-type mind sets of public officials. Establishment of institutions such as commissions, committees and task forces is not sufficient to ensure integration. Mechanisms and behaviors that support cross-boundary thinking and problem-solving are needed.

Policy integration is taking place in many different areas and there are a number of tools and techniques available, among them participatory budgeting, gender-sensitive budgeting, economic-environmental accounting, ecosystem based management, sustainable development councils and strategies. The more ambitious and comprehensive the tool, however, the more likely it is that focus will be lost. It can be more productive to proceed with attempts at policy integration in response to a specific problem at a particular point in the policy cycle than to invest effort in developing a grand plan covering all sectors and comprising a myriad of strategic objectives and interests.

There may be opportunities to link the work of CEPA and the Commission for Social Development, and CEPA members who would be quite open to pursuing a conversation along these lines.

Draft conclusions and recommendations

- The vision, principles and goals adopted at the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) twenty years ago remain relevant today. Its implementation should be accelerated through a more coherent, holistic and integrated approach to development. While increased attention has been paid to the importance of policy coherence in recent years, further understanding and analysis of the interaction among the three dimensions of sustainable development is necessary. Looking ahead, it is critical to identify practical means to translate the notion of sustainable development into national policies and strategies, and effectively implement integrated policy frameworks for sustainable development. The Commission, in its 54th session, could focus its discussion on this issue.
- In rethinking social development, there is a need to build on the outcome of the Summit, 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 targets. A broad social development framework combining universal policies and targeted policy measures might be necessary to strengthen the social dimension of sustainable development. Social integration/inclusion policy should continue to support and to strengthen the voices of the most vulnerable, including people living in extreme poverty and just above the poverty line.
- The shifting context and priorities of social development should be well captured, analyzed and addressed. These include: widening inequalities, systemic fragilities of global economy, growing job insecurity due partly to global economic and financial integration, the financialization of global economy, technological progress and the intensification of cross-national competition, increased employment informality, overall labour market flexibility, as well as population ageing, changes of family structure, climate change, the intensification of natural disasters, environmental degradation and its negative effects on the well-beings of people, and recurrent and protracted crises resulting from armed conflicts. At the same time, opportunities have also been identified, such as the potential benefits of the demographic dividend, the ability of technology transfer to help generate employment in the developing world.
- Facing these new trends, a social policy framework should focus on building resilience while addressing vulnerabilities, which will address the structural causes of complex and inter-related challenges, in particular widening inequalities. This will require combining policy measures aimed to achieve universal access/coverage such as quality primary and secondary education, health coverage and social protection, with targeted/special measures, including anti-discrimination measures, to address specific needs of those who are left behind. In addition, measures cut across social, economic and environmental dimensions are also necessary, including those related to land tenure and disaster-risk management.

- Such a transformative social policy framework would require an approach aiming to enhance the productive capacities of individuals, groups and communities; reinforce sustained and inclusive economic policies; and reduce the burden of growth and reproduction of society, including care-related work, and protect people from income loss and costs associated with unemployment, pregnancy, ill-health or disability, and old age. In this regard, access to universal social protection is a key measure to address vulnerability and enhance resilience. In fact, many developing countries have adopted Social Protection Floors.
- The recent global financial and economic crisis shows that a dominant focus on economic growth is neither sufficient nor sustainable. Economic growth must be accompanied by social progress and well-being of all people. In this context, decent work is a key area of integration between social and economic dimensions. Protecting non-traditional assets (i.e. national insurance or pension rights) is essential to building resilience. An asset-driven approach to social protection is needed where vulnerability is linked to lack of asset protection, and conversely resilience is about increasing the protection of assets. The UN should help member states to assess the social and environmental benefits (and costs) of different policy options.
- The linkage between social development agenda and environmental goals needs to be strengthened. A possible approach would be to assign the value to natural assets/capital, through societal consensus. This would not only protect environment, but also contribute to the reduction of poverty and the promotion of employment and decent work, by valuing activities that provide services related to natural assets, and curb excessive consumptions by assigning different social values. This process will require devising a system of measuring human well-being and prosperity that goes beyond the merely economic variables used in GDP. In addition, public education to raise the awareness of imperatives of ecological preservation and environmental stewardship for the achievement of core social objectives is central to achieving the full integration of all three dimensions of sustainable development.
- There is a need for more coherent and integrated analysis and policymaking. To facilitate such an integrated approach to achieve the sustainable development goals at the national level, the United Nations should help member states to improve statistical data collection and analysis (to the extent possible, disaggregated data), as well as setting up institutional mechanisms for integrated policy-making.
- The capacity of the UN needs to be further strengthened to support member states in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, including through providing guidance on inclusive policy making, an integrated analysis and policy frameworks, resource mobilization at both international and national levels, in close coordination with existing regional mechanisms. For example, DESA could demonstrate an integrated approach to analysis, impact assessment and policy formulation, as well as identifying and promoting successful practices in this area.
- 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-linkages and social drivers for achieving other goals.