



Aide-Mémoire

Inter-Agency Expert Group Meeting on Employment and Decent Work for Poverty Eradication, in Support of the Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017)

4-6 May 2016
Bangkok, Thailand

I. Purpose of the meeting

The Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing an Inter-agency Expert Group Meeting on “**Employment and decent work for poverty eradication, in support of the Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008 – 2017)**” under the theme “**Full employment and decent work for all**” and the inter-agency Plan of Action for the decade from 4 - 6 May 2016, in Bangkok, Thailand, as part of the preparations for the 71st session of the UN General Assembly.

The Inter-agency Expert Group Meeting will evaluate progress made over the past decade to eradicate poverty through employment creation. Specifically, the meeting will examine the contributions of the UN system to implementing the objectives of the Second Decade. The meeting will seek to answer key questions such as what happened in terms of impact on poverty and employment levels; what actions were put in place at the national, regional and global levels to promote the implementation of the objectives of the Second Decade; how do we measure success or the lack of thereof; what kind of policies should be promoted at the national, regional and global levels to address the unfinished business of the Second Decade and the Millennium Development Goals; and how can the Second Decade contribute to progress in realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The meeting is continuation and follow-up of the Inter-agency technical meetings on “*Broadening coherence and collaboration for rural development through employment and decent work*” held in Rome in November 2011, “*Building employment and decent work into sustainable recovery and development – the UN contribution*” held in Turin in November 2010 and (iii) “*Inter-agency and expert group meeting on implementation of the second United Nations decade for the eradication of poverty (2008-2017)*” held in Addis Ababa in May 2015.

Over the years, the Second Decade has made important contributions to facilitating normative discussions surrounding the imperative of poverty eradication, with a focus on full employment and decent work for all. Within the broader global development agenda encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals and the formulation of a post-2015 development agenda, the decade provided countries with a framework within which they tackled poverty in all its dimensions and shared national experiences. It has also served as an effective platform for the UN system to focus and coordinate its development efforts in support of national initiatives to eradicate poverty.

In that regard, the meeting scheduled for 4 - 6 May 2016 is convened in the context of General Assembly resolution 70/218 in which the General Assembly decided to include in the provisional agenda of its seventy-first session, under the item “Eradication of poverty and other development issues”, the sub-item entitled “Implementation of the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008–2017)”, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-first session a report, including a review of the progress made by the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations development system in the implementation of the resolution.

The objective of the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017) is *“to support, in an efficient and coordinated manner, the follow-up to the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, as established by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, relating to the eradication of poverty and to coordinate international support to that end.”*¹

To further advance this objective, the UN system-wide Plan of Action on the Second Decade also seeks to enhance the coherence and synergy of the activities of more than twenty-one agencies, funds, programmes and regional commissions in the area of employment and decent work towards poverty eradication while General Assembly resolution 70/218 encourages the alignment of the work of the UN system on poverty eradication with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

II. Background

The goal of eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly for Africa, the least developed countries, Small Island Developing States and in some middle-income countries. This imperative was reaffirmed by General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

With less than two years left of the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017) and with the 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium

¹ A/RES/70/218

Development Goals having passed, considerable progress in reducing poverty has been made. Levels of poverty have dropped in all regions and more than one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty since 1990. More importantly, the world met the target of cutting the global rate of extreme poverty to half its 1990 level.

World Bank data indicate that at the regional level, the number of people living below \$1.25 has fallen dramatically in East Asia and Pacific – from 957.1 million in 1990 to 86.4 million people in 2015. In South Asia, extreme poverty fell sharply, from 53.2 per cent in 1990 to 18.1 per cent in 2015, and is projected to reach 13.8 per cent in 2020. In the Caucasus Europe and Central Asia, the proportion poor declined from 8 to 2 percent between 1990 and 2015 and in Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion poor fell from 13 to 4 percent during the period. Poverty levels have also fallen in many African countries, but not fast enough. In 2011, an estimated 39.6 per cent of Africa's population lived on less than \$1.25 a day as compared to 46.6 per cent in 1990. In sub-Saharan Africa, 40.9 per cent of the population lived on less than \$1.25 a day in 2015 compared to 56.6 per cent in 1990. Sub-Saharan Africa's poverty rate is projected to fall to 34.2 in 2020. In contrast, Northern Africa has managed to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty - from 11.7 per cent in 1990 to 4.4 per cent in 2011.

Despite the success at the global level, progress remains uneven across regions and among countries. Of greater concern has been the impact of fiscal consolidation and adjustment measures on child and family poverty. Furthermore, many countries continue to grapple with the after effects of the global financial and economic crisis, particularly its impact on jobs, poverty, inequality and exclusion. The world economy has not improved sufficiently to allay the fears of many. Falling commodity prices have refocused attention to sustainability of growth in many resource-dependent developing countries, including the ability of these countries to sustain critical public investments in poverty eradication programmes, education, health and infrastructure. The challenge on the jobs front remains particularly daunting. According to the International Labour Organization, the continued weakness in the global economy has pushed global unemployment upwards. In 2015, the number of unemployed people reached 197.1 million – which is over 27 million higher than pre-crisis levels. To tackle global unemployment, the ILO further estimates that 600 million new jobs will need to be created by 2030 if countries are to keep pace with the growth of the global working age population. This implies that about 40 million jobs will have to be created each year. There is also the imperative to improve the conditions faced by the 780 million people who are working but are not earning enough to lift themselves and their families out of \$2 per day poverty.

High and increasing levels of inequality remain in many countries, including in many high-income countries. This reduces the impact of growth on poverty reduction. Furthermore, millions of women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, and indigenous peoples continue to face exclusion from mainstream social, economic and political life. A lack of equal opportunity implies that these social groups can not realize their full potential and hence, lift themselves out of poverty. In some regions and countries, prospects for fostering social inclusion and promoting sustained, equitable and inclusive development have been choked by violent conflicts, extremism and terrorism.

Understanding the root causes and factors driving these trends is important in helping to achieve more broad-based success, to ensure that gains are irreversible and that no one is left behind. Therefore, it is essential that countries reaffirm their commitment to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the 24th special session of the General Assembly by changing laws and practices and removing physical and institutional barriers to full participation by all in order to realize inclusive and sustainable development.

Mounting concerns over the labour market have generated a shift in the policy discourse to one that places a firm emphasis on decent work as an outcome of growth and means for achieving sustainable development. An important example of this shift is its inclusion in the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a goal (Goal 8), which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which provides a global framework for shaping development cooperation for the next 15 years, also demonstrates the shift by linking finance and resource mobilization to the promotion of decent work. The Agenda acknowledges, prioritizes and mainstreams the decent work agenda throughout the outcome document.

In addition to focusing on full employment and decent work, which remains one of the best routes out of poverty, attaining the objectives of the Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty also depends on sustained, inclusive and equitable rural development efforts that pay adequate attention to both the farm and non-farm sectors. Therefore, efforts to end poverty in all its multiple dimensions should be underpinned by robust international cooperation and the adequate and predictable allocation of resources in support of agriculture and infrastructure development, including supporting smallholder producers, especially women farmers in developing countries. Concerted efforts are required to improve access to farms inputs, markets, credit, information, rural extension services, and quality public infrastructure. Promoting smart agriculture should also be a top priority in order to help rural farmers mitigate and adapt to the vagaries of climate change and environmental degradation.

To end poverty, countries should continue to prioritize tackling inequalities, expanding decent work and full employment opportunities for all; investing in human resource development; expanding the coverage of basic social protection; promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment; and promoting industrialization through structural transformation. Building peaceful and inclusive societies, strengthening governance and institutions and promoting the rule of law are also critical to achieving the objectives of the Second Decade, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Hence, initiatives such as The Global Jobs Pact and the Social Protection Floor represent unique opportunities to address the causes and challenges of poverty in all its multiple forms.

III. Objectives, Key Questions and Methodology

The objective of the meeting is to (i) review progress in the implementation of the Second Decade and what has happened in terms of impact on levels of employment, poverty and inequality; (ii) draw lessons learned in the design and implementation of poverty eradication programmes and policies at the country, regional and global levels

that can be leveraged to spur further progress in those countries or regions lagging behind as well as contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; (iii) share country practices in adopting policies more consistent with the ILO Global Jobs Pact, including addressing the global challenge of youth unemployment; (iv) come up with policy recommendations that can ensure that no one is left behind, particularly social, economic and environmental policies that foster social inclusion, promote empowerment of women, the poor and people in vulnerable situations; improve access to finance, microfinance and credit, remove barriers to opportunity, enhance productive capacity, develop sustainable agriculture and promote full and productive employment for all, including social protection systems and measures; and examine ways that countries can deploy to mobilize resources from a variety of sources in order to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its multiple dimensions.

The meeting will be a three-day event that will allow a robust exchange of ideas that contribute to achieving the objectives of the Second Decade among focal points of the Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, policy makers, the private sector and other representatives from the United Nations system, regional organizations, government officials, independent experts, and civil society. Presentations by the invited experts will focus on several key questions that include the following:

- i. What happened to poverty, inequality and employment over the past decade? Have we achieved full employment? If not, why and what kind of policies are required to address the full employment deficit?
- ii. What happened in terms of impact on rural employment and poverty eradication?
- iii. What actions were put in place at the national level to promote the decent work agenda as a strategy for poverty eradication and what can countries do to accelerate progress in implementing the objectives of the Second Decade?
- iv. What happened in terms of impact on women's employment and poverty eradication?
- v. What happened in terms of impact in eradicating poverty among various social groups – persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, indigenous groups?
- vi. How effective has growth been in contributing to poverty eradication, employment creation and inequality reduction in Africa and the least developed countries, Small Island Developing States, middle-income countries and more advanced economies?
- vii. How can the work done under the inter-agency, system-wide plan of action for poverty eradication be aligned with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
- viii. To ensure that no one is left behind, which social and economic policies and strategies have shown to be effective at eradicating poverty, hunger and malnutrition, reducing inequality, and creating conditions favourable to job creation?
- ix. What policies have been shown to be more effective at addressing longer-term structural issues faced by people living in rural and remote areas, women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons and indigenous groups?

- x. What set of policies priorities at the national and global levels are required to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development as part of a comprehensive strategy of structural economic transformation in eradicating poverty and promoting job growth?
- xi. How can national poverty eradication and decent employment creation efforts be complemented by concrete, effective and supportive international programmes, measures and policies aimed at expanding the development opportunities of developing countries?
- xii. How can countries boost domestic resource mobilization for inclusive development and ensure the effective use of those resources?
- xiii. How can the international community ensure that no country is left behind in the implementation of the objectives of the Second Decade and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
- xiv. How can the UN system address the causes and challenges of poverty eradication through integrated, coordinated and coherent strategies at the national, intergovernmental and inter-agency levels in accordance with the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields?
- iii. How can countries and their development partners ensure greater coherence among macroeconomic, trade, and social policies for poverty eradication and job creation?
- iv. How to build coherence and collaboration among agencies and other stakeholders, based on comparative advantages?

The interaction will foster the identification of concrete social and economic policies as well as encourage greater inter-agency convergence and collaboration within the United Nations system in sharing knowledge, promoting policy dialogue, facilitating synergies, mobilizing funds, providing technical assistance in the key policy and programmatic areas underlying the overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda of poverty eradication, the decent work agenda, and strengthening system-wide policy coherence on poverty, employment, and rural development issues.

IV. Expected outputs

The meeting will have the following outputs.

- i. Expert papers on the theme of the meeting will be prepared, with concrete policy recommendations;
- ii. A meeting report will be produced, highlighting progress and challenges on poverty and employment issues, a comprehensive review of the work of UN agencies, funds, and programmes and regional commissions in promoting the objectives of the Second Decade, as well as key recommendations to be included in the Secretary-General's Report to be submitted to the 71st session of the General Assembly.

V. Organizational and administrative matters

The Inter-Agency Expert Group Meeting will be organized by the Division for Social Policy and Development of UN-DESA. The meeting will be held at ESCAP in Bangkok, Thailand and is scheduled to take place from 4-6 May 2016.

A total of **10-15 experts** will be invited to participate at the meeting. Experts will be identified from Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America, and Europe and Central Asia.

The invited national and independent experts will be required to submit their presentations and written papers (5-10 pages in length, in English) to the United Nations Secretariat by 25 April 2016. All papers and presentations should be sent to Mr. Amson Sibanda (sibanda@un.org), copy to Ms. Meron Sherif (sherif4@un.org). Participants are expected to arrive in Bangkok on 3 May 2016 and to stay throughout the duration of the meeting.

In addition to the invited experts, the following will participate:

- i. Staff members of the Division for Social Policy and Development as organizers of the meeting and to provide administrative/logistical support;
- ii. Local participants from the government of Thailand, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations;
- iii. Representatives from the UN system;

All sessions of the meeting will be in plenary. The invited experts will lead-off discussions of each session by presenting papers which will then be followed by in-depth plenary discussions. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants will outline the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. A final report will be produced after the meeting.

VI. Documentation and the Language of the meeting

The documentation of the meeting will be comprised of relevant publications, documents and materials related to full employment and decent work, and poverty eradication. The presentations as well as the papers from the independent experts will be made available on the web site to be created for the meeting.

The working language of the meeting will be English. Documentation for the meeting will be provided in English.