

Executive summary

1. No social group is inherently vulnerable. However, all groups face vulnerabilities that are largely the outcome of economic, social and cultural barriers that restrict opportunities for, and impede the social integration/participation of the members of the groups. Common to the analysis of vulnerabilities among these different groups is the existence of some form of exclusion that is not primarily market-related or market-generated but socially-generated. The main emphasis in this report is therefore on group-specific vulnerabilities, and consequently, on the challenges of social inclusion. This approach helps to identify barriers that prevent social integration for these groups. The particular groups dealt with in this report include: children and youth; older persons; persons with disabilities; indigenous persons; migrants and persons in situations of conflict, with due consideration to gender-specific challenges.

2. Vulnerability and poverty interact with each other, creating a vicious circle in which the two reinforce each other. Poor people are the most vulnerable to economic shocks, material losses and losses of well-being. These events can easily destroy their ability to move out of poverty in the long as well as in the short run, by depleting their human and physical assets, which may be irreversible. An increase in vulnerability especially affects the poor because they have greater exposure to many downward risks (illness, death, loss of employment, famine, etc) and they are less capable of coping with them. Poverty and inequalities also may increase vulnerability indirectly by fueling social

tensions and undermining social cohesion needed to pre-empt and respond to emerging dangers.

3. While vulnerability, uncertainty and insecurity in the life of people are not new, what is new is that their causes and manifestations have multiplied and changed profoundly over the last decade. Examples include civil strife and the proliferation of conflicts, growing inequalities within and among countries further accentuated by globalization, mixed outcomes of poverty reduction efforts, increased mobility of populations and changes in family structures.

4. In order to achieve a reduction in vulnerability, it is important to gain an understanding of the factors and forces that lie at its source. In other words: what makes an individual or group vulnerable – or at greater risk to becoming vulnerable – to a variety of social ills? There are both internal and external dynamics at play in determining one's level of vulnerability, encompassing a variety of economic, social and environmental concerns.

5. Whereas income insecurity and lack of access to gainful employment stands out as one of the most important sources of vulnerability, it is not only the lack of financial assets and incomes that reduces coping capacity. Social ills such as lack of education, poor health, limited access to health services and education are important contributors as well significant factors determining earnings capacity and personal development. Also the presence and persistence of both socio-cultural biases and discriminatory attitudes and practices can be readily identified as major contributors to vulnerabilities.

6. Proper identification of trends and driving forces, coupled with an assessment of the underlying causes leading to structural vulnerabilities, can provide a proper basis for a

well thought-through and balanced policy action. Anchoring this policy response to empowerment and social integration increases the chances of success in the long run. It is to these issues of sources of and policy responses to vulnerability that the present report is devoted.

Policy challenges and recommendations

Addressing barriers to employment

7. Experiences in the last two decades of the 20th century clearly show that a reorientation of macroeconomic policy to explicitly target employment creation is needed in both industrialized and developing countries in order to reduce poverty and vulnerability in a permanent fashion. This shift in policy focus would be a concrete, practical example of the integration of social and economic policies, an approach widely embraced. The implementation of employment creation policy is complex, not the least because the same goal meets challenges that take on different forms in different sectors and in addressing different concerns of various social groups, as well as gender-based discrimination.

8. Trade and diffusion of technology can reinforce economic growth, job creation and productivity gains when appropriate macroeconomic policy that promotes job-creating growth is in place. Appropriate macroeconomic policies should be advanced that result in an increase in productive investment and employment-intensive growth.

9. Industrialized economies should be encouraged to provide greater market access for the exports of goods from developing countries as a means of supporting their development and improving existing labour market conditions in these countries through export growth. Market access for exports by developing countries is not a matter of charity; a number of international agreements (including WTO agreements) call for the phasing out of all forms of export subsidies and substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support and the improvement of market access for the developing countries.

10. Development policies should be refashioned so as to guard against premature liberalization and misguided policy reforms, which, in the absence of appropriate institutions and productive capacity, can serve to worsen labour market conditions in developing countries.

11. The youth unemployment problem should be addressed through a combination of efforts to improve their employability by enhancing their job skills, and by removing legislative and other barriers which can lead to discriminatory practices adversely affecting youth employment.

12. Credit policies should be modified so as to enable older persons, women and young people who wish to start their own businesses to have greater ease in gaining access to micro credit and other loan schemes.

13. Older persons should have the opportunity to continue working and contributing to the economy for as long as they wish. To this end, older men and women should be able to avail themselves of retraining and skills upgrading programmes to help them keep up with technological and other work-based changes.

14. Persons with disabilities in developing countries should be supported in their efforts to better integrate into the mainstream economy through wider participation in the labour market. Opportunities for self-employment should be encouraged, including improved access to credit schemes, along with the provision of training on all aspects of small business operations.

15. In developed countries, it is important to mainstream disabled men and women into open employment rather than to shunt them into sheltered or supported work environments.

Promoting social integration and social protection

16. Discrimination and social/cultural biases will not automatically disappear with reduction in poverty. Explicit policy measures and strict enforcement of legal protection are needed to address and rectify barriers to social integration.

17. Barriers to social equity and social integration deprive marginalized populations not only of the ability to protect their economic rights, their full potential to contribute to society, but also the opportunity to earn adequate income. Therefore, policy measures to reduce social vulnerability need to take an integrated approach to the problem while keeping appropriate priorities to maximize the effectiveness of such policy responses.

18. A society for all – girls and boys, men and women - encompasses the goal of providing all social groups with the opportunity to contribute to society. To work

towards this goal, it is necessary to remove whatever excludes or discriminates against them and to enable their full participation in decision-making.

19. With a view towards fostering sustainable livelihoods for people with disabilities, national and international efforts should be advanced to promote: rehabilitation strategies designed to maximize functional capacities of persons with disabilities; architectural and design strategies that remove unnecessary barriers in the environment; and inclusion and empowerment strategies to facilitate greater participation in society.

20. Persons with disabilities should be granted equal opportunities to participate in mainstream education, to seek productive and gainful employment in open labour markets, and have access to appropriate social safety nets in terms of income maintenance and services.

21. As elaborated in the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, universal design concepts should be advanced to ensure that products and environments are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible. Improving accessibility of persons with disabilities to the built environment, and to information and communication technologies, will help them overcome barriers that restrict their access to social and economic opportunities.

22. Using the international human rights instruments as a guiding framework, laws and policies should be formulated and enacted to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and guard them against institutional racism and discrimination. Issues concerning land rights and the protection of indigenous people's culture warrant particular consideration. The full participation of indigenous peoples in the design, implementation and evaluation

of these laws and policies should be guaranteed as part of an open dialogue process between indigenous peoples and mainstream society.

23. Although as a group older persons are not inherently vulnerable, the ageing process can force people to adjust to physical, social and economic circumstances over which they have little control, increasing their level of risk. Older persons' vulnerabilities can be significantly reduced through a combination of their own defences built up over a lifetime and the presence of outside sources of support.

24. Policy makers, including development institutions and national Governments, should pay greater attention to the impact of a growing older population in their development strategies, being mindful both of the contributions that older men and women can make to the development process as well as the demands they will place on social protection and care services.

25. As recognized at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, ageing should be mainstreamed into all policy areas, most notably national development frameworks and poverty reduction strategies. Furthermore, older persons' issues should be addressed within a context of poverty reduction, participation, gender equality and human rights, and linked to development targets and agendas.

26. Given the enormous implications of population ageing, policies that reduce vulnerability of older persons should be advanced with a view to producing gains not only for older persons and their families, but the community, society at large and future generations.

27. Community-based targeting of social protection services can offer a promising means of delivering services to those in need, as the community becomes directly involved in identifying beneficiaries, thereby increasing accuracy in determining beneficiaries and promoting equity and inclusion by fostering greater local control over the programmes. Community-based targeting should be advanced in conjunction with the development of a politically sustainable social contract.

28. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers process is being revisited in light of the Millennium Development Goals and other commitments made at United Nations conferences and summits and their follow-up processes, with particular emphasis on promoting comprehensive measures that produce real and tangible benefits for poor people. In this context, more systematic consideration should be given to waiving user fees to ensure access to basic services such as primary education and preventive health care and clean water by poor people, or bursars should be provided so that poor children can attend school.

Rights deficit and rights-based approaches

29. The special status that is attached to the language of human rights rests on the fact that it gives a universal moral authority to social claims whose fate would otherwise depend on a value judgement. However, the cases analyzed in this chapter point to the force of law arising not so much from the fact that existing provisions obligates the States, but from the social contract on which it is based. In the absence of such social understanding, there seems to be little hope for enforcing existing entitlements as evidenced by the reluctance of States to join, or to enforce, a very large number of

binding international instruments dealing with economic, social and cultural rights. In fact, the connection between social development in general and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights remains tenuous at best and non-existent at worse.

30. The legal status of indigenous peoples as well as the scope of jurisdiction accorded to States under treaties between these States and indigenous peoples should be clarified.

31. Innovative legal approaches are needed, at both the national and international levels, to address: the issue of indigenous land rights: how to incorporate indigenous peoples' communal ways of life into land rights solutions and; to protect the culture of indigenous peoples. These should include resolving the inconsistency between mainstream intellectual property rights and the traditional forms of collective ownership.

32. The agreement on Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) should be amended to better protect indigenous knowledge and resources.

33. New legal frames of reference for immigration should be developed, at both the national and international levels, that take into account the complex nature and dynamics of current flows of migrants. An international consensus should be sought on the basic rights of migrants. Enforcement of the basic rights of migrants should be moved to the top of the human rights agenda. International guidelines for the treatment of undocumented migrants should be developed.

34. The decision as to the scope and purpose of the proposed convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly in respect to the relation between the convention and other general convention should be informed by a realistic assessment of the

contribution of human rights instruments to social development and the protection and empowerment of major social groups.

Reduction of vulnerabilities, lack of policy coherence and International cooperation

35. Economic insecurity underpins social vulnerability defined in the context of this report. Thus, economic growth and employment creation should be given due importance among policy steps taken to reduce social vulnerability. This echoes the emphasis placed on poverty reduction in the Millennium Declaration. However, experiences have shown that the trickle down effect of economic growth *per se* cannot be relied upon to remedy social problems.

36. Social vulnerability is indeed a complex phenomenon with its causes rooted in social, economic and cultural institutions and practices. As a result, approaches to policy aimed at reducing social vulnerability must be multi-pronged and internally consistent. In other words, an integration of social and economic policy is a necessity in the efforts to alleviate the impact of vulnerabilities on affected individuals, households, communities and social groups. However, this does not imply that policy measures have to be implemented simultaneously or that prioritization is impossible. Quite to the contrary, focus and priorities are necessary for policy to be effective, especially in today's general environment of limited public sector resources. Policy makers need to take an integrated approach to the problem while keeping appropriate priorities to maximize the effectiveness of policy responses. This requires an understanding of the complex

relationships among the various dimensions and causes of social vulnerability as well as developing new and effective “joined-up” delivery of economic and social policies.

37. The prominence of sound economic policy notwithstanding, enhancing the capacity of excluded groups to make demands on service provision and policy change is of paramount importance to the reduction of social vulnerabilities as is assertive public intervention to promote social cohesion.

38. Also, institutional capacity building and the development of some form of social protection are important steps to take for developing countries to deal with the consequences of modernization and globalization. In developed countries, reforms of the pension system and other programmes of social protection also need to take into account the changes that are taking place with regard to population ageing, the family and the increased movement of goods, capital and people among countries. Finally, better-targeted, informed and participative policies are also necessary in tackling specific dimensions of social vulnerability.

