

V. Promoting social integration and social protection

286. Of all social groups, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and, more recently, older persons have been the most active in articulating a vision that puts social integration at the centre of social development. The claims made by the groups rest on the understanding that the success of social policy revolves around a proper balance between empowerment, social inclusion and social protection. It is a vision that also suggests that building inclusive and cohesive societies should be at the top of the policy agenda.

287. Social protection is an important component of an integrated approach to reducing social vulnerability, complementing policy measures aimed at preventing social exclusion. However, recent experience with targeted social protection measures and the implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in developing countries has highlighted the need to pursue a comprehensive strategy. It calls for a careful comparison of the long-term total social costs and benefits of various measures and a respect for differences between countries, rather than a “one size fits all” approach.

Equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities

288. The term “disability” encompasses a great number of different functional limitations. People may have physical, intellectual or sensory impairments, medical conditions or mental illness. Such impairments, conditions or illnesses may be permanent or transitory in nature. Persons with a disability are not inherently vulnerable. However, as a result of environmental factors, a disability can become a handicap. The term “handicap” means the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on an equal level with others. It describes the encounter between the person with a disability and the environment. The purpose of the term is to emphasize the focus on the shortcomings in the environment and in many organized activities in society, such as, information, communication and education, that prevent persons with disabilities from participating on equal terms with the non-disabled.

289. Current definitions of a person with a disability such the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*, adopted by the World Health Organization in 2001, stress that a person’s functioning or disability lies in a dynamic interaction between health conditions and environmental and personal factors. This approach to disability represents a fundamental shift from a focus on physical, sensory or developmental abilities to a focus on opportunities in society and on the centrality of social inclusion. The key issue is access by individuals to choice in decisions about their well-being, livelihoods and civil and political participation, without recourse to aid or assistance. In this sense, economic self-sufficiency is not viewed in terms of an individual’s ability to earn income but in terms of the individual’s capacity to influence and control economic resources as well as to address risk and uncertainty.

290. The ability of people with disabilities to make social and economic contributions and achieve sustainable livelihoods is determined by the extent to which they are able to overcome individual, social and environmental barriers that restrict access to social and economic opportunities. They must also be enabled to pass through the following stages of physical and social integration: (a) adapting to a disabling condition and maximizing functional capacity; (b) interacting with the community and with society; and (c) gaining access to types of social and economic activities that give life meaning and purpose, which include contributing to one’s family and community, actively participating in society or obtaining productive and gainful employment.

291. From the disability perspective, policy guidance for the design of positive measures to address social vulnerability is provided by the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, in particular Rules 5 through 8. Rule 5 addresses accessibility to the physical environment and to information and communication. In the design of policy options to address social vulnerability, universal design concepts and principles provide a basis to assess accessibility with reference to interactions between people and the wider environment. The value proposition of universal design is that the design of products and environments should be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible. The same

universal principle underpins Rules 6 through 8, which deal with measures to ensure equal opportunities to participate in mainstream education; exercise the basic right 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.

292. For purposes of policy design and evaluation, it is important to distinguish between access and accessibility. Access is not an act or a state but rather refers to freedom of choice in entering, approaching, communicating with or making use of a situation.⁷³ Equal participation occurs if equalization of opportunities to participate is provided through measures that enhance accessibility.

293. Policy concern with environmental accessibility reflects a shift in emphasis from medical models of disability, with their emphasis on care, protection and assistance to persons with disabilities in adapting to “normal” social structures, to social models with a focus on empowerment, participation and modifications of environments to promote equalization of opportunities for all.⁷⁴

294. Fostering sustainable livelihoods for people with disabilities involves addressing all types of barriers simultaneously in ways that facilitate the passage of people with disabilities through the various stages of physical and social integration. It would require local, national and international disability strategies based upon comprehensive and integrated combinations, including (a) rehabilitation strategies that maximize the functional capabilities of people with disabilities; (b) inclusion and empowerment strategies to facilitate their active participation in their communities, societies and economies; and (c) architectural and design strategies that remove and prevent unnecessary barriers in infrastructure, including transportation systems, technology and communications, and other features of the physical environment.

295. Some persons may have disabilities so severe that they cannot pass successfully through all three stages of physical and social integration and are therefore at risk, or vulnerable. Members of this subgroup would therefore require services both to augment asset capacities and to reduce the potential of risk. Those needs can be addressed through the provision of specialized support services throughout the person’s life (for instance, ongoing personal assistance services). However, all such services must be developed as part of comprehensive inclusion and empowerment strategies that promote sustainable livelihoods, social integration and the well-being of persons with disabilities.

296. To address vulnerability and the advancement of persons with disabilities, it is necessary to recognize that persons with a disability do not represent a homogeneous group. Moreover, persons with a disability, for policy purposes, are defined by a condition rather than by an attribute, as in the case of international instruments concerned with gender or the rights of children (a cohort-determined group).

297. It is best to approach an analysis of policy and programme responses to vulnerability in terms of action to prevent or reduce conditions in the environment that affect the mobilization of assets or the creation of opportunities to participate on the basis of equality in social life and development. Such action is a theme of the proposed comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, which was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/168 of 19 December 2001.⁷⁵

298. The aim of the convention is for all citizens to be involved as agents and beneficiaries of global development; none should be excluded from the process.⁷⁶ A major issue in the elaboration of a convention is the identification of strategic options to bring the disability perspective into mainstream international development instruments, such as the Millennium Development Goals, which do not specifically address the situation of persons with disabilities.

⁷³ Scott Campbell Brown, “Methodological paradigms that shape disability research”, in *Handbook of Disability Studies*, Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman and Michael Bury, editors (Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications, 2001).

⁷⁴ Office of the Deputy President, “Situation analysis”, in *Integrated National Disability Strategy: White Paper*, chap. 1 (Government of South Africa, 1997).

⁷⁵ Available from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disA56168e1.htm>

⁷⁶ Statement by the President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, 10 November 2001.

Indigenous identities and aspirations

299. Marginalization and discriminatory practices have historically been the primary sources of vulnerability of indigenous peoples and eventually led to their struggle for recognition, equality, self-determination and the right to development according to their own values and culture. The ultimate goal of indigenous peoples is to be recognized as distinct cultures, valued as peoples and given the economic, social and cultural opportunities to ensure their basic right to self-determination and cultural survival.

300. Indigenous peoples from different walks of life have organized and led the dialogue between their own societies and the dominant culture. The paradigm has shifted from an assimilation model and welfare-based interaction with mainstream societies to one that is more open to the articulated demands and aspirations of indigenous peoples. The replacement of ILO Convention No. 107 concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries, which promoted the assimilation of indigenous populations with a view to protecting their health and welfare, by ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, which recognizes the identity of indigenous peoples and their rights to participate in decision-making regarding their own destiny emphasizes the shift in conceptual approach.

301. Bound by a common struggle for their rights, indigenous peoples bring a diverse set of issues to the negotiating table. Some are concerned primarily with land, others with culture. Some indigenous peoples push to preserve their way of life; while others subscribe to full participation in the material and cultural life of the societies around them while simultaneously maintaining their own identities. In any case, the fundamental principle on which the advancement and empowerment of indigenous people is to be based is the recognition that indigenous traditions and ways of life, while being valuable in their own right, also contribute extensive and useful knowledge of medicinal plants, sustainable agriculture and approaches to environmental and ecological protection and conservation to the entire world community.

302. The resolution of indigenous land claims and cultural rights ultimately rests within States. Political

and judicial systems as well as social and cultural justice in each State are central to policies granting of indigenous rights. Development objectives of both the State and the indigenous peoples need to be weighed, reconciling points of conflict. Pressure from the international community lends support to the struggle of indigenous peoples.

303. In this context, it is critical to formulate and enact laws that secure the rights of indigenous peoples and protect them from institutional racism and discrimination. The international human rights instruments should provide the standards for an effective framework in that respect. In addition, it is essential for indigenous peoples to participate fully in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes addressing their problems.

304. It is very important to encourage and support the dialogue between indigenous peoples and mainstream society, particularly through forums within the United Nations and other international organizations. Such forums provide a vehicle to sustain awareness of the plight of indigenous peoples and to allow them to present their case to States, the international media and civil society at large. The forums are an essential component of the process that will ensure that all stakeholders in modern and indigenous societies can arrive at solutions to problems in a peaceful and effective manner.

A society for all ages

305. For the majority of older persons, situations of risk and vulnerability increase with age. Older persons possess both strengths and vulnerabilities accumulated since childhood that have an impact on their ability to manage risk and insecurity in later life. As one advances in age, transitions are typically intensified, and the likelihood of stressful life events increases.

306. Older persons are not by definition vulnerable, but as a group they share some common basic features that are considered to generate a set of shared problems, particularly with advancing age. Although ageing is not a risk in itself, as persons reach the higher ages, they are often forced to adjust themselves to situations over which they may have little control, and their physical, social, psychological and economic circumstances in life will determine their ability to respond to situations of adversity, be they chronic

diseases, loss of physical strength and material well-being, widowhood, discrimination, conflict or emergencies. Hence, tension develops between vulnerability and independence — when an independent past is at odds with an emerging need for care and reliance on others. Older persons' responses will depend on the suitability of their own defences built up over a lifetime, the presence and level of outside sources of support and their ability to adapt to new situations that arise as a result of the risk.

307. The main factors that make older persons vulnerable in society — exclusion, discrimination, lack of social protection — are overlapping and cross-sectoral issues that go far beyond ageing and are part and parcel of development and human rights. That view was recognized at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, which called for ageing to be mainstreamed into all policy areas, with particular emphasis on national development frameworks and poverty eradication strategies. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing acknowledged the significant advances over the past decade that went beyond the narrow social welfare concerns and linked ageing to development, giving legitimacy to efforts to address ageing within a framework of poverty reduction, participation, gender equality and human rights. Thus, in order to move on to the next level, the Madrid Plan of Action has called for ageing to be linked to development issues and embedded into development targets and agendas.

308. For the most part, however, both development institutions and national Governments have largely ignored the impact of a growing older population in their development strategies. References to older generations are dramatically absent from International Development Targets and the Millennium Development Goals. Yet the backdrop for the targets and discussions is demographic ageing, a phenomenon that is gathering enough force to make obsolete many policy recommendations on poverty eradication, health and employment that do not take into consideration either the large numbers of persons entering old age who will be able to contribute to the development processes on those who will require social protection and care. Addressing the reasons for the exclusion of millions from the overall development process and from development targets and poverty eradication strategies in particular should be a major concern of policy makers.

309. The challenges posed by population ageing are enormous, not only for older persons and their families, but also for the community and society at large. Consequently, policies that reduce the vulnerability of older persons also result in gains for the family, society and future generations — a potentially win-win situation.

Limitations of and difficulties with targeted approaches

310. During the 1990s, the priority given to poverty eradication and good governance triggered a shift in the approach to social protection, from a universal benefits perspective towards highly targeted transfers. The main argument in favour of the move to targeted transfer programmes is that, in lower and middle income countries, universal social programmes have proven inefficient, costly and unsustainable; that they are biased towards the middle class; and that they do not benefit the poor and the most vulnerable. While there still is a consensus on the need to target the scarce public resources that are available for social protection, the debate on targeted versus universal approaches has been reopened in the wake of the recent financial crises in Asia and Latin America.

311. The fact that a wide spectrum of people affected by those economic crises, both poor and non-poor, suddenly appeared vulnerable, without any means of support, and that many children had to leave school out of economic necessity prompted the realization that some form of universal social protection was needed to mitigate the social consequences of such crises. That view has been reinforced by the further realization that in a globalizing world no developing country, however economically successful, is immune from volatility driven by fluctuations in international trade and capital flows.

312. Obviously, safety nets that focus only on the poor fall short of providing a framework for broad-based emergency intervention. An assessment of the various social safety net responses implemented after the crises finds that success was most likely under the following circumstances: when the responses built on pre-existing, well-functioning programmes; when the institutional and delivery capacity of central and local agencies was sufficient to cope with rapid expansion; when budgetary allocations were adequate; and when redistributive and poverty alleviation efforts were

driven by political will and commitment, a dimension often missing when safety nets are entirely supported from external funds.

313. However, more fundamental questions have been raised as to the difficulty of targeting adequately and assuring its social sustainability in non-emergency contexts. One of the strongest arguments in favour of targeting is that it is cost-effective, as it aims to get benefits into the hands of those who need them most, with minimal distribution to the non-needy. However, from a social inclusion and empowerment standpoint, the economic benefits of the approach may be offset by its social costs. In addition to the feelings of stigmatization that targeting can generate, there is a danger that the non-targeted group will grow resentful of those receiving assistance. In some cases, there may be little that separates a target group from a non-target group in terms of need. Moreover, targeting often involves high administrative costs, reducing the resources going to the selected groups.

314. Under a targeted system, the determination of who receives assistance versus who does not can be based on a variety of factors external to the individual or group level of need, such as donor preferences, programme design, political considerations or geographical location. One of the more promising forms involves community-based targeting, where the community is directly involved in identifying beneficiaries, using eligibility criteria of their own choosing. Not only are people at the community level more likely than programme administrators to be aware of the actual circumstances in which people live, the participatory process itself can be quite empowering for the community, as it increases local control over programmes. Thus, community-based targeting is attractive on two main fronts: one, it draws upon local knowledge, thereby increasing accuracy; and two, it involves beneficiaries directly in the decision-making process, thereby promoting equity and inclusion.

315. Community-based targeting may, however, have some disadvantages as well. Decision makers in the community may divert assistance away from the neediest to their own families and friends. Another danger is that the process can become highly divisive, causing resentment and tension in the community between those chosen for assistance and those left out. Experience with community-based targeting suggests that its success is highly contingent on local sociocultural contexts and eventually rests on the

development of a politically sustainable social contract. That lesson may be of general value to any small or large-scale effort to develop some permanent form of social assistance.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and social protection

316. Recognition of the multidimensional nature of poverty lies at the core of the principles underlying the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). About two thirds of the Papers explicitly discuss social protection issues, although the depth to which they are addressed, and the extent to which policies intended to promote social protection are elaborated vary considerably.⁷⁷ That reflects a belief that social protection plays a limited and optional role rather than an integral one in poverty reduction.

317. Overall, the social protection measures mentioned in the PRSPs also appear to be weakly redistributive. Where redistribution occurs, it is mainly through increased expenditures on public services for the poorest. Thus, in the PRSPs, social protection has primarily been dealt with in terms of its ability to alleviate the worst effects of poverty rather than in terms of its potential to help people escape from poverty.

318. A striking feature of the PRSPs is that none of the strategies make the connection between social protection and measures to ensure that poor people benefit from economic growth, implying that social protection is not seen as one of the tools for redistribution and development. Furthermore, one finds little sense of coordination among policies to promote the social inclusion of the poorest and most marginalized groups on the one hand, and development on the other hand. This oversight is all the more puzzling as several papers have been elaborated in countries where there is evidence of decline in “traditional” social safety nets as a result of the breakdown of the extended family system, urbanization, rural migration or economic hardships.

319. Evaluation of the impact of social protection measures, to the extent they existed in the PRSPs,

⁷⁷ Rachel Marcus and John Wilkinson, “Whose poverty matters? Vulnerability, social protection and PRSPs”, Working Paper No. 1 (London, Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre [CHIP], 2002).

suggests that coverage was low and largely inadequate.⁷⁸ Measures tended to concentrate on livelihood, income support and access to key services. Cash transfers were an important element of some interim PRSPs, particularly those of countries with economies in transition. Nevertheless, as a result of resource restrictions, cash allowances were reportedly so low that few people actually availed themselves of the assistance. Pensions were mentioned in about one third of the PRSPs, focusing primarily on old-age pensions, although disability and war veteran pensions were mentioned to a limited degree. Once again, however, owing to resource limitations, coverage was low and inadequate.

320. A number of countries continue to rely fully on user fees for such fundamental social services as primary education and preventive health care, a practice that excludes the neediest and runs counter to the poverty-reduction goals of the PRSPs. Therefore, the benefits of facilitating people's access to basic services, such as health care and clean water, by waiving user fees or providing scholarships so that poor children can attend school should be promoted more systematically within the framework of the PRSPs.

321. Revisiting the PRSP process in the context of the Millennium Development Goals and other commitments made at earlier United Nations conferences and summits and their follow-up processes is encouraging, necessary and logical. It provides an opportunity to extend the formulation and implementation of the PRSPs beyond their present scope, particularly in focusing on comprehensive measures that have tangible benefits for poor people.

Recommendations

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

323. Barriers to social equity and social integration deprive marginalized populations not only of the ability to protect their economic rights and achieve their full potential in contributing to society, but also of the

opportunity to earn adequate income. Therefore, policy measures to reduce social vulnerability need to be based on an integrated approach to the problem, keeping in mind the appropriate priorities to maximize the effectiveness of such policy responses.

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

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

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

327. As proposed in the 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 physical environment and to information and communication technologies will help them overcome barriers that restrict their access to social and economic opportunities.

328. Using the international human rights instruments as a 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 peoples' cultures warrant particular consideration. The full participation of indigenous peoples in the design, implementation and evaluation of those laws and policies should be guaranteed as part of an open dialogue between indigenous peoples and mainstream society.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

329. 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.

330. Policy makers, including development institutions and national Governments, should pay greater attention to the impact of a growing older population on their development strategies, being mindful 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.

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

332. Given the enormous implications of population ageing, policies that reduce the vulnerability of older

persons should be advanced with a view to producing gains not only for older persons and their families, but for the community, society at large and future generations as well.

333. 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.

334. As mentioned above, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process is being revisited in the 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 tangible benefits for poor people. In that context, more systematic consideration should be given to waiving user fees to ensure that poor people will have access to basic services such as primary education, preventive health care and clean water, or scholarships should be provided so that poor children can attend school.