



Ministerial Forum on

“Twenty-five years of the World Summit for Social Development: Addressing emerging societal challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda”

Tuesday, 11 February 2020, 10:00am-1:00pm

Chair’s Summary

The Commission for Social Development held a Ministerial Forum on 11 February 2020, under the theme of **“Twenty-five years of the World Summit for Social Development: Addressing emerging societal challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda”**. The forum was convened under sub-agenda item 3 (c) “Emerging issues” to contribute to the forthcoming 2020 High-Level Political Forum whose priority theme is “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

An opening statement was delivered by **H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the General Assembly**, via video message. The keynote speaker was **Mr. Liu Zhenmin**, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Panellists included **Hon. Mavis Hawa Koomson**, Minister for Special Development Initiatives of the Republic of Ghana, **H.E. Ms. Ariela Luna**, Minister of Development and Social Inclusion of Peru, **H.E. Ms. Aino-Kaisa Pekonen**, Minister for Social Affairs and Health of Finland, **H.E. Ms. Yulia Sokolovska**, Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine, and **H.E. Mr. Ghanem Mubarak Al Kuwari**, Assistant Undersecretary for Social Affairs, Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs, Qatar. The panel was moderated by **Dame Louise Casey** of the United Kingdom.

In his opening statement, **H.E. Mr. Muhammad-Bande** stated that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action aspire to all people in all countries to reach their full potential. After 25 years, both new challenges and opportunities are before the world today with four notable mega-trends—technical innovation, demographic trends, migration, and climate change—that could impact social development. The Commission, he emphasized, has the mandates to discuss issues across the whole spectrum of social policy and social development, and to continue to review the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and contribute to the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda.

Addressing persistent poverty

As the international community embarks on the Third Decade for the Eradication of Poverty and 25 years after the Copenhagen Declaration, poverty rates are still high in many countries, especially in Africa and the least developed countries. In 2013, of the 783 million people living in extreme poverty, more than half were in sub-Saharan Africa and close to a third lived in South Asia. Pockets of poverty also afflict middle and high-income countries. In 2017, extreme working poverty remained widespread, with more than 300

million workers in emerging and developing countries having a per capita household income or consumption below \$1.90 per day. Actions need to be accelerated in order to achieve the SDGs for all, and leaving no one behind.

Reflecting on its development path from a poor, post-conflict agricultural society to “the happiest nation in the world”, **Finland** highlighted the importance of putting universal social policies at the centre of economic and social development. Over the past decades, sustained investment in health, education, employment, gender equality, and social protection contributed to sustainable economic growth and the building of a more equitable, inclusive society for all people. The principles contained in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action remain relevant today and the work of the Commission is, therefore, very important. The social dimensions of sustainable development must be fully integrated in the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Many low-income countries lag in social development and in the implementation of the SDGs due to insufficient resource mobilization and policy coherence, among other challenges. **Ghana** dedicated significant resources to the eradication of extreme poverty and improve the well-being of all citizens. It was the first country in Africa that met the MDG target on poverty reduction before 2015, with over 2.4 million people moved out of extreme poverty. To overcome the challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for all, the Government committed its budget, mobilized other available resources for social programmes, and enhanced policy coherence through innovative strategies. This included building broad-based partnerships and strengthening accountability systems. It instituted an inter-ministerial committee with multiple stakeholders, including community leaders, women, and faith-based organizations, that involved them in the design and implementation of social development projects.

Ukraine takes poverty eradication as a priority for its development. The relevant national poverty reduction strategy includes employment guarantees for those out of the labour market, particularly youth, and measures targeted to population groups in vulnerable situations, such as families with young children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Pension reform has been key in reducing poverty, which has been nearly halved between 2016 to 2019.

Qatar has strategically focused its efforts on key social development areas that include poverty reduction, increased investment to improve access to health care, education and skill training, as well as decent jobs and the provision of social protection and assistance. The positive outcome is showcased in uplifting the living standard of its people and the advancement of Qatar in human development ranking in recent years.

Combatting high and rising inequality

According to DESA’s Report on the World Social Situation 2020, income inequality has increased in most developed countries and remains very high in developing countries despite notable reductions in some countries. Additionally, inequality in access to education and healthcare – based on gender, race, ethnicity, urban or rural residence, disability, or migration – persists. This often leads to a concentration of wealth and political influence among those who are already at the top of the income scale, threatening social cohesion. There is a widespread perception that the current socio-economic system is not working for many, as well as increasing dissatisfaction with institutions that have not been able to address the structural causes of inequalities.

Countries have taken actions to reduce income and non-income inequalities. **Ghana** focuses its efforts on equalizing opportunities and empowering those in more vulnerable situations. It has implemented several

social protection programmes including the conditional cash transfer programme LEAP. Support was also provided to improve access to education, safe drinking water and sanitation, and access to affordable housing by providing mortgage support and upgrading slums. **Ukraine**, with its government the youngest in Europe, put youth as the top priority. To address inequalities, a human rights-based approach was taken to combat discrimination and ensure equal opportunities. In addition, Ukraine took a people-centred approach to promote social development that targeted policies to increase the employment of youth and persons with disabilities and provided support to families with young children (e.g., the municipal Nanny programme reimburses childcare expenses for up to 3 years). **Finland** actively promoted a wider concept of sustainable development called “Economy of Well-being”, a policy orientation and governance approach which aims at putting people and their wellbeing at the centre. The Partnership for Universal Social Protection by 2030 is recognized as one of the good examples of this initiative. **Finland** suggested including the promotion of the right to social protection for all and the development of inclusive social protection systems in the mandate and agenda of the Commission for Social Development.

Responding to the economic and social impacts of population change

The world’s population is projected to reach 8.5 billion in 2030, and 9.7 billion by 2050. This growth will put great pressure on the food supply, housing, and other resources such as land and water. Populations are also ageing in many countries. By 2050, an estimated 16 per cent of people in the world will be over the age of 65, compared to 9 per cent in 2019. This trend will have an impact on pension systems, employment opportunities for older persons, health care and long-term care. In 2020 alone, the World Bank estimates that about 42 million additional jobs need to be generated for people 65 years and older. In some other countries, including sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, there has been a faster growth of the working-age population relative to the rest of the population. This has the potential to expand human capital and investments in infrastructure and to accelerate economic growth, provided that decent work opportunities are created to take advantage of this demographic dividend.

In this regard, **Peru** shared its experiences in addressing demographic changes. From 2018, through the *Primero la Infancia* (Childhood First) policies, Peru prioritized early childhood development as a measure to combat inequality and pursue sustainable development. Evidence showed that investment in early childhood reaps high returns. Targeted actions aimed at preventing premature births, ensuring nurturing and adequate nutrition as well as communication and mobility development, which is accomplished by providing a full package of services that includes vaccination, school enrollment at age 3, and access to safe and clean water. Peru also established programmes for children with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities, to promote their inclusion in education. These programmes are evidence-based, implemented with a results-oriented budget and broad-based consensus across society. Similarly, **Qatar**’s National Development Strategy (2011-2017), and its extension (2018-2022) were adopted/implemented to increase investment in quality education and skills training for the current and future generations of labour forces. Provision of quality education started from early childhood.

Adapting to technological progress and the future of work

The current changes in the world of work will affect everyone. Technological change such as artificial intelligence and automation could have profound consequences for workers in many sectors. New technologies and the shifting organization of work have become a permanent feature of the modern workplace. In order to keep up with the demand for higher-level skills, workers cannot rely exclusively on the formal schooling acquired before entering the labour force. Lifelong learning and support during

labour market transitions will thus become more relevant for equality of opportunity. Yet, there is no solid evidence that recent technological advances have led to massive increases in joblessness, or that they will make certain work obsolete. New technologies are widening income inequality mainly through increasing workforce polarization and non-standard working arrangements, as many jobs are contractual and lack the benefits and stability of traditional jobs.

To make information and services more accessible to its citizens, **Ukraine** actively promoted eGovernance. It also adopted a new law on social services that came into force in 2020, aiming to further enhance accessibility of seventeen basic social services, and to ensure that these services, as well as technology-powered services, will benefit all people including those in more vulnerable situations. **Qatar** focused on ensuring decent work for all, including migrant workers. Promoting the right of migrant workers is an integral part of its social policy. For example, social protection schemes are extended to non-Qatari citizens. All these policies and programmes aiming to protect and support all people, including women, older persons, and person with disabilities, are adequately financed and proven to be “the best and quickest way” to achieve the SDGs for all people.

Mitigating climate change and natural disasters

Climate change and extreme weather events have emerged as a defining issue of our time. Environmental degradation and climate catastrophic events are taking a heavy toll on the well-being of people, particularly the most vulnerable and those living in low-income countries. Small-holder farmers, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and rural coastal populations are exposed to greater risk and incur greater losses.

Mitigation measures will affect different population groups in different ways and social justice should play an important role in implementing ambitious climate policies. In this context, **Finland** has incorporated climate impact assessments in the process of drafting legislation to ensure that everyone is kept informed and that climate related policies have strong public support.