



## COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Fifty-third session, 4-13 February 2015

### **Agenda item 3 (a), priority theme: “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”**

#### **Chair’s Summary**

The Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2006/18 requested that the outcome of the Commission's review of the priority theme should be in the form of a Chair's summary. The Commission for Social Development at its 53<sup>rd</sup> session held discussions, including a high-level panel discussion, under agenda item 3(a) on the priority theme: “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”.

In addition to general discussions, the Commission heard presentations from the following panellists: His Excellency Dr. Caleb Otto, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Palau to the United Nations; Sir Richard Jolly, Honorary Professor, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, United Kingdom; Dr. Asunción Lera St. Clair, Senior Principal Scientist, Climate Change Programme, DNV GL- Strategic Research and Innovation, Norway; Ms. Priti Darooka, Executive Director, Programme for Women’s Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, India. The panel was moderated by Mr. Michal Boni, Member of the European Parliament, Poland.

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Rethinking and strengthening social development requires a transformative people-centered approach to sustainable development. Since the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, enormous progress has been made in improving the human condition. However, many challenges remain. While the world has reduced the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half, the progress has been uneven and more than one billion people remain poor. Rates of unemployment, particularly among youth and other disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups also remain unacceptably high. Many countries also continue to grapple with the challenge of fostering social inclusion. Vulnerabilities are also becoming more acute, with people living in poverty and other disadvantaged social groups bearing the brunt. The opportunities presented by the ongoing process to formulate a post-2015 development agenda, with a particular emphasis on integrating the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development provided the Commission with a unique opportunity to rethink and strengthen social development.

## **Continued relevance of the World Summit for Social Development**

Commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 - eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and decent work, and fostering social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights - remain unfulfilled and the vision of the Summit continues to be relevant today.

Many lessons have been learned since the Copenhagen Summit; particularly that market forces alone do not bring equality and inclusion; piecemeal approaches to social development do not succeed; and that coherent, complementary, evidence-based economic and social policies supported by political will are essential to achieving the goals of the Summit.

Throughout presentations and in the ensuing debate on rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world, panellists, ministers, and senior officials reaffirmed their commitment to fulfilling the goals set out in Copenhagen. Delegations stressed that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action continue to be as relevant today as they were in 1995, with social development goals as pertinent as they were twenty years ago. They emphasized that sustainable development must be people-centered and inclusive, and must integrate in a balanced manner the social, economic and environmental aspects of development – the vision and principles of Copenhagen that are gaining renewed recognition today. They reaffirmed their commitment to fulfilling the social development goals agreed to at the Summit, particularly in light of the unequal and fragmented progress achieved to date. Social justice is critical to inclusive and sustainable development. Achieving the core objectives of poverty eradication, full employment and decent work for all and social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights are cornerstones for the sustainable future we want.

It was made clear that challenges to social development are universal. Rising inequality within and across countries, the dire consequences of climate change, and the effects of financial crises all show that coordinated regional and global action is necessary for progress in social development. This includes closer cooperation between the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN system as well as efforts by the Commission for Social Development to ensure that the social pillar in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda is strong. Delegations also referred to the important role of the Commission for Social Development, particularly in the context of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. The Commission was urged to play a concrete role in the monitoring and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

## **Social development in the contemporary world**

Rethinking social development brings with it new opportunities to address persistent and emerging challenges. More impactful solutions should be sought in the experiences of countries over the past twenty years, while recognising that a one-size-fits-all policy approach is not particularly useful. There is a need to reflect on periods of progress in social

development as well as methods used to overcome barriers and to manage new trends, including the opportunities presented by information and communication technologies. Countries making progress in social development over the past twenty years have shown that a strong involvement of the State and a strong foundation for human development can lay the necessary basis for continued social advances, and that investments in social development pay off very well over time. An important lesson drawn from the experience of Latin America and other regions is that the attainment of social progress requires continued focus and effort, including the sufficient allocation of public resources to critical areas such as health, education, and the provision of social protection.

There was recognition of the need to understand and leverage opportunities presented by new global trends such as the burgeoning youth population, expanding access to new technologies, and increased international migration flows. Growing calls and support for truly inclusive growth will ensure the achievement of social development goals, including enhancing equality of opportunity, and empowerment and participation of people. The importance of the participation of all stakeholders in social development was mentioned.

We know much more now about how to address social development challenges including poverty, inequality and unemployment. This new knowledge should support the transition to the post-2015 development agenda. In rethinking social development, creativity is also required to embrace new ways of looking at old patterns. The shift from examining purely income-based measures of poverty was one such change that has gained popularity in many countries. This new knowledge will be of particular value when it comes to monitoring the achievement of social indicators under the future Sustainable Development Goals. And by adopting a unified post-2015 vision that places people at the center of development, the international community would give renewed significance to the World Summit for Social Development.

### **Poverty eradication**

Delegations reaffirmed their commitment to eradicate poverty and welcomed the prominence given to eradicating poverty in the post-2015 development agenda. While progress had been made in reducing poverty and reaching other social development goals in most regions, progress remained uneven, with many poor countries lagging behind. Of particular concern are the more than one billion people still living in extreme poverty.

Poverty reduction is a challenge facing all nations. It is disconcerting that austerity measures adopted in some countries, particularly cuts in social services have contributed to a rise in levels of poverty and vulnerability. Linkages between poverty and natural disasters and man-made shocks that have a tendency to increase poverty in the absence of adequate social safety nets were also highlighted. Breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty requires an integrated approach in all fields in which vulnerable groups face disadvantages. Countries also need to focus on the root causes of poverty, paying particular attention to its disproportionate impact on women and vulnerable groups. It is encouraging that some

countries have increased the share of public resources devoted to social spending, especially on health, education and social protection.

### **Employment creation**

The WSSD goal of creating full employment and decent work remains unmet. With more than 202 million people unemployed globally, creating full employment and decent work remains a top priority. Without providing job opportunities to all, it is much harder to reduce poverty and to foster social inclusion. The prolonged years of jobless growth have led to unprecedented unemployment, underemployment, especially amongst the growing youth population, and growing inequality. Informal or precarious jobs are often the only options available.

Employment and decent work are critical to inclusive sustainable development. Meaningful progress towards sustainable development cannot be achieved under the prevailing growth model, which is not employment friendly. Efforts should be made to change the policies that produced the global financial and economic crisis, whose effects continue to undermine social progress in many countries. The financial economy should be replaced with the real economy at the helm of the global economy as finance creates wealth but not jobs.

As a way forward, speakers welcomed recent efforts by the Group of 20 to prioritize employment creation; including efforts aimed at bringing more women into the labour market. To better prepare workers for the labour market, countries were encouraged to focus on life-long learning and aligning skills training with market needs. Other good-practice policies include those that seek to promote small and medium sized enterprises, create jobs tailored to the green economy and providing assistance programmes that promote human capital formation. In a majority of countries, there are growing calls for social policies that prioritize job creation.

Policies must be coherent and people-centred if they are to produce the desired impact. It is also necessary to reorient thinking by recognizing that growth alone is not sufficient to reduce poverty and improve human well-being. And to address the youth employment challenge, concrete suggestions made include paid internships, youth guarantees, dual education, skills training, vocational education, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship promotion and incentives for businesses that hire young people.

### **Social protection**

Social protection is one of the critical aspects of decent work. There is growing consensus on the role that social protection floors can play as a foundation for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. It was noted that universal access to social protection is a human right as well as a social and economic need. However, a majority of people across the world lives without any social protection.

In order for economic growth to reduce poverty, macroeconomic and social policies should focus on job creation to reduce inequalities and aid social protection. Some countries have

adopted a life-cycle approach to poverty eradication and social protection programmes which incorporate investment in human and social capital while others have undertaken extensive measures to make social protection systems more impactful, resulting in some modest gains. This includes implementing several interventions such as cash and in-kind transfers and labour market programmes; and also establishing a national targeting secretariat to coordinate the creation of a single registry database on people living in extreme poverty and vulnerable groups to facilitate coordinated interventions. Furthermore, delegations urged to make social protection a cross-cutting theme of a transformative post-2015 development agenda, with targets for poverty eradication, inequality, decent work, education, food security and nutrition.

### **Social inclusion**

Several delegations underscored the importance of promoting social inclusion. Inclusion must be integral to both national and international efforts to improve people's lives. Countries highlighted their focus on inclusive and sustained growth through national programmes that enhance the participation of women and girls, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and persons belonging to ethnic minorities. The involvement of young people in the formulation and implementation of an inclusive sustainable development agenda was also considered essential. It was noted that the social inclusion of young people, particularly that of young people with disabilities, was a huge challenge facing many countries. Therefore, youth should be part of ongoing efforts to build the world we want.

### **Inequality**

Participants noted with concern that both income and non-income inequalities are growing in many countries and are hard to tackle. However, lessons can be learned from success stories, where some countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia have succeeded in curbing inequalities. Success has been registered in those countries that have taken concrete steps to improve access to and quality of education, including secondary and tertiary; more supportive labour market policies; increases in social expenditure beyond education; increases in progressive taxation coupled with redistribution; and the adoption of democratic political processes. Specifically, participants expressed appreciation for the UN Social Protection Floor initiative as a key opportunity to reduce inequality. They welcomed UN action to promote its principles and implementation. They also noted that, although today's economic realities challenge social protection systems, it is crucial to maintain investment in them to ensure people's well-being.

Inequality based on gender was also highlighted as a major barrier to social development in the future as poverty and a lack of labour market protections still affect women disproportionately. Involving women in all aspects of life must be a priority, and laws securing a minimum wage for all people, increased participation of women in labour unions and cooperatives, all provide an opportunity to strengthen gains in women's empowerment and participation, including their contribution to economic growth.

## **Climate change**

All main social development goals are affected by climate change, and the consequences of climate change are often more severe for those least able to cope. However, because the risks posed by climate change have structural socioeconomic roots, addressing these risks will therefore require social, economic and environmental solutions. Therefore, a better grasp of the social dimensions of climate change and the integration of social concerns in climate change strategies is crucial for them to succeed. There is a need to acknowledge trade-offs between addressing climate change and reducing poverty so as to minimize them. Addressing the social aspects of climate change now is the most cost effective way to pursue sustainable climate solutions and this demands a new sustainable development paradigm which opens up new policy space and opportunities to address persistent social concerns such as the imperative to create new green jobs. The Commission of Social Development can therefore play a key role in bridging the gap between climate change and social development.

## **Global governance for social development**

The opportunity to rethink social development also brought into focus the question of whether the current global governance structure provides the best framework to address social development challenges. A number of participants noted that the structure still rests on the post-war balance of economic power despite the shift in the global economic centre of gravity. This changing balance should be reflected and it is essential that emerging economic powers continue to promote a positive global vision in any fresh approach to global governance. A number of participants noted that the debate on global governance should be held both in New York and Washington D.C. to bring about great cooperation and coordination between the UN system and the Bretton Woods institutions post-2015.

## **Future role of the Commission**

Participants discussed the future role of the Commission for Social Development and the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in better reflecting the interests of the social development community, mobilizing political will, and contributing meaningfully to the ongoing processes related to the post-2015 development agenda. Among specific examples, participants suggested the Commission to provide a framework of accountability for partnership with businesses under the SDG agenda; have a role in monitoring and accountability of SDGs; task DESA to focus on capturing the needs of the most vulnerable populations during the transition to sustainable development – the current 'economistic' approach to social issues that does not do that; as well as call for better data on social indicators to support social development policy recommendations to Governments.

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