

54th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Summary

Panel Discussion on Emerging Issues: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: moving from commitments to results for achieving social development

4 February 2016

Pursuant to Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) decision in 2006, the Commission for Social Development has included the agenda item “Emerging issues” in its work programme since its 2007 - 2008 review and policy cycle. Under this agenda item, the Commission addresses current issues affecting social development requiring urgent consideration or new cross-cutting issues in the context of evolving global development challenges. The Bureau of the Commission decided “Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: moving from commitments to results for achieving social development” as the topic of emerging issues of the 54th session.

During the 54th session of the Commission for Social Development, an interactive panel discussion on the above emerging issue was held. The panel was moderated by Mr. Paul Ladd, Director, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), and former Director of the UNDP Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Panellists included Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, UN Secretary- General’s Envoy on Youth as a keynote speaker; Prof. Kunal Sen, Professor of Development Economics and Policy, University of Manchester; Ms. Claire Melamed, Head of Programme, Overseas Development Institute (ODI); and Ms. Cristina Diez, UN Representative for the International Movement ATD 4th World.

At the United Nations Summit in September 2015, Member States reached an unprecedented agreement to transform the world in a more inclusive and sustainable path, and adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The year 2016 is equally important as it is during this year that the objectives of the Agenda will start to be translated into action. There was a consensus on “what” should be done, but the international community must now find “how” to do it.

The Youth Envoy of the Secretary-General shared the outcomes of the ECOSOC Youth Forum (1-2 Feb 2016). He reminded that the Commission brought global attention to issues affecting youth for the first time 20 years ago. Today, thanks in part to the World Programme of Action for Youth, 115 countries have formulated national youth policies. He also highlighted the critical role of the World Summit for Social Development in the formulation of the post-2015 Development Agenda, as its principles and commitments had strongly influenced the new Agenda.

The active participation of youth, as well as improvements in their well-being, are key to the successful implementation of the Agenda. Young people who constitute about a half of the world population face stark challenges. For example, 6 million youth live in areas inflicted by conflict, and it is estimated that 600 million jobs will need to be created by 2030 for new entrants into the labour market. The Commission for Social Development should be a forum to discuss youth issues, cross-cutting the 17 SDGs and their targets, as well as to ensure the participation of youth in all stages of implementation processes. In this regard, the need for identifying and monitoring specific targets relevant for youth under each Goal was emphasized, so that progress can be measured to achieve this “invisible” Goal.

Panellists highlighted a number of issues considered key to create a momentum for implementing the 2030 Agenda, including: strong political will both at the national and local levels; national mechanisms to enhance policy coherence; a platform for sharing good practices and knowledge for mutual learning; broad policy coalitions and effective multi-stakeholder partnership; and resource mobilization. In particular, better synergies between economic and social policies are crucial to reducing poverty and inequality.

Creating broad policy coalitions and effective partnerships among national and local governments, members of parliament, civil society organizations, the private sector, academic and scientific communities, and media was identified as a key challenge, especially for those countries in which such partnerships do not exist or have not been fully developed. It was also pointed out that many governments might face difficulties in creating a space for various stakeholders to be constructively engaged in the implementation processes. Yet partnerships based on mutual trust could bring many opportunities and buy-in to the implementation of the Agenda at the national level.

It was noted that the Agenda's overarching objective of "leaving no one behind" encourages the international community to look at all types of inequalities, beyond income inequality, and their drivers. Member States should pay closer attention to process, not just goals, as how to achieve the Goals is equally important. Participation of people, especially those living in vulnerable situations, in the implementation processes is one of the key elements to ensure "leave no one behind" and "reach the furthest behind first". The Agenda is not only for people, but also by and about people. People should be seen not only as beneficiaries, but also active agents of change. There is a need to deepen our understanding of people in need, particularly those being left behind. Investing in national capacity in improving the availability of disaggregated data, and utilizing existing data at its fullest will be necessary to identify who they are, where they live, and what their needs are.

To achieve social development objectives within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, identifying key areas that require a social development perspective, and creating better synergies among social, economic and environmental policies are essential. The current context of slower economic growth and low commodity prices pose particular challenge for strengthening the social dimension of SDGs, as budget reductions are expected to impact 132 countries in 2016, according to IMF analysis. However, resources allocated to social development are investments in people or human/social capital that would help stimulate more inclusive, equitable and sustained growth – addressing the interlinkages between economic and social dimensions. Thus, political will is needed to overcome challenges in financial resources and administrative capacity.

Strengthening policy coherence will require comprehensive and integrated policy analysis, particularly to identify trade-offs and complementarities across sectoral policies (for example, among social, aid, taxation, trade policies). The Commission for Social Development should facilitate the sharing of good practices and knowledge at the national, sub-regional and regional level, and lessons learned to strengthen policy coherence across the social, economic and environmental sectors.

Employment and decent work are key pathways to sustained poverty reduction and inclusion. The promotion of the decent work agenda is, thus, an important area for action to translate commitments to results in achieving sustainable development for all envisioned by the 2030 Agenda. The role of governments in creating an enabling environment for job creation in partnership with various actors was highlighted. The Global Initiative for Decent Jobs for Youth, in this regard, is an example of policy integration and multi-stakeholder partnership.