



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving  
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and  
decent work for all**

### **Statement submitted by SOS Kinderdorf International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## **Statement**

### **Creating a world where each child can thrive by empowering families and communities**

Eradicating poverty and achieving social justice are arguably two of the greatest challenges facing humanity today. Poverty has multiple dimensions and different social groups bear a disproportionate burden of its impact. The empowerment of all people through full participation, particularly marginalized social groups, in all aspects of political, economic and social life ensures a people-centred approach to poverty eradication.

SOS Kinderdorf International defines empowerment as the ability of one child, one mother or one family to lift itself out of poverty to rise above its circumstances. We believe that by creating the conditions for every child to thrive, we take the first crucial steps towards building the foundation of a just and equitable society where opportunities to achieve one's full potential in life exist for all children.

SOS Kinderdorf International is the largest non-governmental organization focused on children without parental care and families at risk and is convinced that we must ensure that families are strengthened to provide quality care for their children, and must empower communities to provide strong social support networks to all families.

#### **A world where each child can thrive**

A world where each child can thrive is a world where all children have equal opportunities in life and the chance to reach their full potential. In such a world, families are empowered to provide quality care for their children. Quality care goes beyond meeting basic needs, including quality education and health care, healthy nutrition, sanitation and housing, and ensures that every child grows up nurtured within a protective family environment that is so vital to their personal development. Children in such a world can then grow into confident, self-reliant adults and contributing members of society who, with access to these opportunities, will break the cycle of poverty and inequity.

Without quality care, children are especially vulnerable. They are at increased risk of marginalization, stigmatization, exclusion, violence, maltreatment and abuse. They are less likely to be healthy or go to school and, as young people, they rarely have equal job opportunities or a chance to make a decent living to support a family of their own. What is more, too often children who grow up without quality care pass on the same conditions to future generations, entrenching and even exacerbating poverty and inequality.

#### **Strengthening families to provide quality care**

With more than 60 years of experience working to strengthen families, SOS Kinderdorf International understands that two of the most essential mechanisms in strengthening families to provide quality care for their children are social protection and employment. Both allow families to meet their responsibilities towards their children, prevent family breakdown and help to ensure that children grow up nurtured by a protective family structure.

Social protection guarantees basic income security in the form of social transfers and universal access to essential affordable social services. It ensures that, no matter what their circumstances, families will be able to meet their children's basic needs, as well as their own, freeing them also to provide children with positive stable and nurturing relationships.

Social protection measures that truly support vulnerable families must be geared towards their diverse needs. Some might need basic short-term emergency aid, such as food parcels, safe drinking water or temporary shelter. Others require access to long-term social support or child welfare schemes, legal advice, birth registration services, parental skills training, day-care services, financial resources to start a business, or targeted support to access employment, education or health-care services within the community. Mothers, elderly caregivers and caregivers with disabilities encounter particular barriers that limit their opportunities, making it crucial that social protection measures also target them directly.

### **Examples of good practice: a diverse approach to family strengthening in Malawi**

In Malawi, poverty continues to be chronic and widespread. In 2009, about 74 per cent of the population still lived below the income poverty line of \$1.25 per day, and over 70 per cent of the children were suffering from the consequences of malnutrition.

Since 2002, SOS Kinderdorf International has been running a family strengthening programme in Lilongwe, providing for the diverse needs of the families in the area. Through the programme, families with land are supported with farming resources, such as seeds, fertilizers and livestock, so as to make this a reliable source of food and income. Land has also been provided for community gardens, which are managed by village development committees, and families receive support for income diversification. As a complementary short-term measure, monthly food packs for children have been distributed, servicing around 1,600 children per month in 2004. Schoolchildren also receive materials and uniforms.

SOS Kinderdorf International also partners with local authorities and community-based organizations to provide a mobile health clinic, making quality health care accessible to families that would otherwise be unable to access it due to costs and/or distance.

The key to the success of this programme is the diversified support that SOS Kinderdorf International has provided to children, families and the community. The combination of immediate aid to children, needs-based support to their families and access to basic services, provides families with a sustainable solution that will help them overcome their challenges in the long term.

Though income security through social protection is vital to vulnerable families, access to employment opportunities or a sustainable source of income, especially for mothers, is just as important in order to keep families together and ensure quality care. This implies much more than just supporting heads of families in their search for jobs. It entails helping parents and caregivers to obtain professional skills that match labour market needs or to encourage the set-up of a small business. This should be complemented with social skills training to enhance employability and inspire entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, the conditions surrounding a family must also be conducive to parental employment. Parents need access to adequate day care, so that they can safely leave their children while they are at work. They also need equal access to job opportunities on the labour market and to microcredits or interest-free loans in order to venture into self-employment. Parents and caregivers should be guaranteed decent pay and fair labour conditions, especially considering they often work in temporary or informal employment.

### **Empowering communities to support families**

To give families the protection and support they need to provide quality care to their children, communities must be empowered to build social support networks. Strong communities are best placed to organize themselves and address their own challenges. They can best identify the problems affecting their community and can help find tailor-made solutions to support families and children.

Community representatives can mobilize families and members of the community. They are well set to coordinate all service providers, governmental as well as non-governmental, that offer specialized services in different areas in order to minimize the duplication of services and to ensure that families know where to find them.

Finally, when communities are empowered to provide social services to children and families, they take ownership of the services and of the problems, mobilizing families as partners rather than aid recipients and making for sustainable solutions to community challenges.

### **The way forward**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, a child should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

SOS Kinderdorf International is convinced that, to achieve this, all children and young people must attain their right to receive quality care. We believe that families and communities must be empowered to provide that quality care for their children. Strong social protection measures and equal job opportunities enable families and communities to meet their responsibilities towards their children.

We call on decision makers to ensure that legislation and policy appropriately and adequately support families to provide quality care through social protection measures and employment and, furthermore, to empower communities to strengthen their social support networks.

It is time for actors at the international, national and local levels to put aside differences and coordinate efforts that ensure equal access to equal opportunities for all. Only then can we hope to eradicate poverty and establish a just and equal society where all children can thrive.