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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 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, 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

Empowerment is a concept utilizing multidimensional approaches towards its promotion. Achieving poverty eradication, social integration, full employment and decent work point to persons and communities having attained some degree of empowerment. Duncan Green in his background paper prepared for the Expert Group meeting on policies and strategies to promote empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all, held in New York on 10 and 11 September 2013, entitled “The role of the State in empowering poor and excluded groups and individuals” used a definition of empowerment based on Rosalind Eyben’s paper, “Supporting pathways of women’s empowerment: a brief guide for international development organizations” (Pathways Policy Paper (Brighton, 2011)): “Empowerment happens when individuals and organized groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realize that vision by changing the relations of power that have kept them in poverty, restricted their voice and deprived them of their autonomy.” The reason Duncan Green chooses this definition is that it places the issue of empowerment squarely in the minds and hearts of persons and communities living in poverty, seeking a proper balance between enhancing their own sense of agency and making the structural changes to institutions and policies that are needed for emancipation. The definition stresses the centrality of “power” to empowerment.

Situation

This statement presents a good practice in empowerment. The Good Shepherd Sisters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo work in a project site adjacent to Kolwezi. The site is situated in the copper belt containing world-class resources of copper, cobalt, zinc and uranium. The communities in the area developed as a result of economic migration in response to labour demand from the mines and were never part of an urban planning system. These people lack much-needed services and infrastructure. Poverty, social unrest and lack of opportunities for decent work characterize the life of these communities. People are victims of human rights abuses, forced displacement, ill-treatment, harassment, extortion and violence, as mining concessions are awarded to international companies. Extreme poverty, hunger and competition lead to conflict and tensions in the communities, which are further fuelled by alcohol and drug abuse. The multi-ethnic composition of the communities also plays a part in exacerbating division and social disintegration.

The most vulnerable groups are women, girls and children. Gender inequalities are rooted in traditional attitudes and practices, as well as stemming from policies and legislation that reinforce gender discrimination. This vulnerability is compounded by discriminatory clauses in legislation which uphold marital subjugation and traditions such as early marriage and polygamy. Women are also less likely to participate in the labour force than men because they must have male spouse permission to do so. Furthermore, girls are less likely than boys to be enrolled in school at all ages.

There is an overwhelming acceptance of violence against women by both women and men in the community. Even adolescent girls agree that there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten. The forms of violence experienced in intimate partnerships include psychological and physical violence as well as forced sexual intercourse. Concomitant with an overall tolerance of violence is a general lack of

disclosure or discussion about violence in the community. The culture of economic dependence on men and lack of ownership rights leave women and girls vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. Many are forced to engage in survival tactics that include sex work, which opens them to the risk of HIV and AIDS.

Research

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd conducted research using two complementary methodological tools: a participatory approach that involved the public administration, civil society, private sector operators and the community in Kolewzi and a community-based participatory research component, interviewing women, girls and child victims of violence and abuse. The research also took account of the Government growth and poverty reduction strategy, the country assistance framework of the development partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the programmes of local partners in and around Kolwezi.

Initial outcomes

Undertaking the initial project assessment served as a catalyst for collective community dialogue and the beginnings of empowerment as individuals and communities began to imagine their world differently. “Power within”, the first of a “three powers” model, presented by Duncan Green in his paper began to be experienced. Using methodological tools — focus groups, life history interviews through home visits, key informant interviews, participatory rural appraisals, mapping exercises, structured interviews and interviews with key stakeholders including Government — released the emergence of “power within”. A sense of right, dignity and voice emerged through the sensitive and ethical way in which the assessment was undertaken and the interpersonal skills of the interviewers. The World Health Organization ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women were used as guiding principles.

How do poor and excluded groups and individuals acquire power and the ability to exercise it? Duncan Green in his article writes that power is best seen as an invisible force linking individuals and actors, in a state of constant flux and renegotiation. Empowerment of excluded groups and individuals involves the redistribution of that power, so that it accumulates in the hands of women and men living in poverty.

The community has begun the process of moving from “power within” to “power to” which is the second of the “three powers” model. The experience of “power within” has ignited hope and capacity to imagine differently. This is evidenced in the actions already taking place in the community. Up to 600 children are presenting for informal education, talking about child rights and self-reporting on issues of child protection. The communities are discussing alternative livelihoods in agriculture and animal husbandry to ensure food security. Women’s and girls’ groups are breaking the silence around gender-based discrimination and violence, including sexual violence. People in the communities are coming together and opening up the possibilities of joint action towards poverty eradication, social inclusion and decent work. The experience of a sense of personhood, dignity and respect is affirming people’s desire and capacity to act creatively together.

Moving from “power to” to “power with”, the third of the “three powers” model, presents a formidable challenge as it requires the Government and mining

companies, together with the community, to find common ground among different interests and build collective strengths. Discussing, negotiating and implementing ways forward to fulfil all human rights, address poverty eradication and decent work is central to the agenda. The process is initiating. It promises to be a holistic process, addressing the multidimensional aspects of poverty simultaneously in dialogues of mutual listening and respect. The tiny beginnings of “power with” released in the research process are continuing to develop. Discussions are taking place as to how to influence the mine operators and the Government for implementation of already existing laws. The project outputs include decreasing gender discrimination through social, political and economic empowerment of women and girls and strengthening cohesive citizenship in order to engage Government for equitable distribution of resources and accountability of mining companies.

Recommendations

We call on Governments to:

- Ensure legal empowerment of persons living in poverty.
- Use the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights adopted by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 21/11 of 27 September 2012 and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework endorsed by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 17/4 of 16 June 2011.
- Implement International Labour Organization recommendation No. 202 (2012) concerning national floors of social protection.
- Regulate the powers of international mining companies through legally binding mechanisms such that human rights, dignity, safety and decent work are provided to citizens.
- Complete the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 as committed to in the forthcoming outcome document of the special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, adopted on 25 September 2013.
- Implement the recommendations on gender equality of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
- Allocate resources towards making the change.

Any one of the recommendations seriously adopted by national Governments in moving forward can create a ripple effect, pioneering good practice and bringing about significant advancement in empowering persons and communities living in poverty. Have Governments the political will and determination to enter into dialogue with citizens in “power with” and “power to” making the structural changes to institutions and policies that promote the empowerment of people?

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Carmelite NGO, Dominican Leadership Conference, International Federation on Ageing, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Passionists International, Salesian Missions, Salvation Army, International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Sisters of Charity Federation, UNANIMA International and VIVAT International.