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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 International Association of Applied Psychology, 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

Psychosocial empowerment

Research and expertise in the field of psychology can provide powerful tools to help policymakers and programme administrators understand the importance of psychosocial empowerment, mental health and psychosocial well-being in achieving poverty eradication and developing sound policies and programmes in that regard. Examples of areas where relevant psychological research and application have demonstrated the usefulness of psychosocial empowerment are provided below, followed by specific recommendations for the development of policy and action by Governments and the international community.

Access to productive employment and decent work

Research in psychology indicates that being engaged in decent work in itself promotes psychosocial empowerment by developing a sense of ownership, optimism, accomplishment and confidence in one's ability to be effective. Decent work is a major factor impacting the ability of women and girls to climb out of, and remain out of, poverty. Empowering people to be productive and resourceful members of their families, communities and society reduces poverty and marginalization. Unemployment has been found to be associated with depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Interventions founded on research-based psychological approaches such as self-efficacy training result in decreased length of unemployment and reduced psychological issues associated with unemployment. Women's empowerment improves their sense of self-worth, the capacity to control their own lives and their ability to influence the direction of social change. Culturally relevant psychological assessments can be used to help find the most effective fit between individual strengths and available job, vocational or career opportunities.

Social equality, human rights and social justice for all

Conditions of poverty, including social and economic disparities affecting individuals, groups and communities, are violations of their human rights to survival, protection, development and social participation. Psychological and social science research demonstrates that social inequalities prevent people from developing their capacities and contributing as productive members of society. Social inequalities, stereotypes and discrimination are barriers to social cohesion within a society and are frequent sources of intergroup conflict and social instability, which in turn cause poverty to persist. Furthermore, individuals living in poverty are more likely to go to prison, where they do not get the skills training they need to return to society and successfully meet their basic needs, thus continuing their poverty.

Engagement in decision-making and capacity-building networks

It is critical to engage individuals and groups living in poverty as active partners in planning and operating programmes at all decision-making levels. Without having ownership and representation in social and economic planning, the poor may come to view empowerment interventions as too externally controlling. Psychological research has demonstrated that group cohesion can be developed

when the members of a group come together on an equal basis and with a shared purpose, and work interdependently to achieve a larger, common goal.

Mental health care and social protection

The psychological literature increasingly confirms that poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, which often includes isolation, lack of education and economic opportunities and resources, inadequate access to physical and mental health care and other social services. These multiple stressors interact to cause anxiety and depression, which have negative impacts on the ability of individuals to cope, resulting in the persistence of poverty.

Poverty also has intergenerational effects within families and communities. In addition, poverty may result from migration due to climate change and natural disasters, which is associated with mental health issues for the affected populations such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, child abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence.

The implementation of the Social Protection Floor Initiative has tremendous potential to address many of these issues.

Psychosocial well-being

Another psychological concept important to the achievement of poverty eradication is the concept of psychosocial well-being. Well-being is specifically mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on poverty eradication (E/CN.5/2012/3), once as “mental well-being”. Measures of well-being were included in the *Human Development Report 2010: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development* and should be expanded to include psychosocial dimensions.

In an article on the website of the World Health Organization dated October 2011 (www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/), mental health is defined as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”.

Bhutan launched an initiative at the United Nations towards using a holistic approach to development, based on its index of “Gross National Happiness” (www.un.int/wcm/content/site/bhutan/pid/4106). This was followed by the adoption of General Assembly resolution 65/309 on happiness: towards a holistic approach to development; a high-level meeting convened by the Government of Bhutan at the United Nations with the theme “Well-being and happiness: defining a new economic paradigm”; meetings held at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20-22 June 2012); and the first International Day of Happiness, celebrated at the United Nations on 20 March 2013. These events, along with the publication of the second “World happiness report 2013”, support quantifying well-being alongside economic strength in the measurement of development.

Programme evaluation

Strategies and programmes that are implemented need to be evaluated to ensure that they are effective. Programme effectiveness measurement is a major area

of expertise in psychology and includes both formative evaluation — to understand effectiveness when a programme is under way — as well as summative evaluation to assess final outcomes.

Recommendations

We urge Governments and the international community:

- To not only create meaningful jobs, but also increase and strengthen opportunities for training in entrepreneurship/income-generating activities, life-skills development and access to primary, secondary and higher education as important pathways to decent work and the alleviation of poverty
- To encourage and provide opportunities for expanding and strengthening capacity-building community networks through which information about entrepreneurial and social opportunities can be shared
- To put human rights at the centre of their framework for national development and to review and replace those laws, policies, programmes and practices at all levels that discriminate against individuals on the basis of their gender, age, race, ethnicity, colour, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, rural/urban/suburban residence and other categories of social identity
- To provide ongoing human rights learning for all members of society, especially individuals and groups living in poverty, in order to foster their vitality, resilience and activism so that they can advocate for positive social and economic changes in their own lives and the lives of others and alleviate the social injustice of poverty
- To implement the Social Protection Floor Initiative, including access to mental health care within primary health care; to meet the basic human needs of all vulnerable and marginalized groups; and to take an inclusive, rights-based approach for all age groups throughout their lives
- To establish accessible, multidisciplinary centres and mobile units to provide one-stop services, including mental health care and training in literacy, continuing education and entrepreneurship
- To provide trained psychologists and mental health counsellors, well versed in culturally specific methodology and techniques, to train and work with local community peer coaches, recognize mental health problems and provide services and referrals in an informed, non-discriminatory manner, according to ethical principles and with respect for the human rights and dignity of all individuals
- Include the term “psychosocial well-being” and/or “mental well-being” in the relevant resolution to be adopted by the Commission for Social Development in 2014

We also recommend that Governments support the “Gross National Happiness” index proposed by the Government of Bhutan, or a related index, and support the initiative of the Governments of Bhutan and France regarding well-being as a measurement of development, and that the United Nations Development Programme include indices of psychosocial well-being in the *Human Development Report*.

The effectiveness of United Nations policies and programmes can be significantly enhanced by including psychological science, research and practice in policy and programme development, implementation and evaluation.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, International Council of Psychologists, Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy.