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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: rethinking and strengthening social
development in the contemporary world**

Statement submitted by Social and Healthy Action for Rural Empowerment, 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

Social development at the grass-roots level entails dedication and the provision of humanitarian services to the communities living in adverse conditions and in areas where facilities are hard to reach. Generally speaking, and particularly in the Indian context, people who suffer most find it hard to get timely support, owing to the lack of means of communication, resources and, above all, the will to reach out to those most in need. We have seen the uneven and unequal distribution of resources among different classes in society. This leads to unrest and a forced division of wealth among the most disadvantaged groups of people, who live unrecognized by society. Social development work should focus on such sectors as water supply, forest management, human resources and livestock. These are the areas to which most of the world's contributions should flow. In the context of Indian society, it is necessary to ensure social development by instilling faith, while driving away such social evils as witchcraft, the payment of dowries, drug addiction, alcoholism and the differentiation among castes and creeds.

We generally work with tribal and indigenous communities in distress that need to receive the attention of governments. A rise of distress and disadvantage leads to a greater number of Naxalites and diverts young minds from their course. It is on that point that every intervention at the social level should be focusing. Young people and their families need to know themselves and their abilities, and this can only be achieved by ensuring the quality of mentors at the grass-roots level.

It is also necessary to control the menace posed by diseases spreading widely at the grass-roots level. The migration of distressed families to high-risk zones and large cities has always been a threat to social development. These migrants not only learn about but also adopt an immoral way of life. Our village life is very serene and lacks immorality, but exposure to worldly needs and habits gives rise to greed among immature minds. Migration fuels unhealthy and immoral practices at the grass-roots level, including witchcraft and alcoholism.

The menace of witchcraft has been a very serious concern and a social problem among widows and single women in rural areas. Victimizing widows by accusing them of witchcraft is a very common way of grabbing land and wealth from those unfortunate. Even police and community leaders are reluctant to tackle this problem or to protect the victims of allegations of witchcraft.

Another distressing social evil is the trafficking of girl children. This is a burning issue in social development, that shows that we need to educate parents about the importance of girls' education. The forced migration or trafficking of girls is the result of a poverty-ridden life at the grass-roots level. When the families of the poorest of the poor are left with no alternative but to sell or send their daughters to work as maids in cities, the result is girl trafficking. The migration of poor girls can be seen as the curse of poverty in rural areas. It is also an area on which we need to focus and work more efficiently.

In reality, funds and projects can hardly change the situation. It is only our will and honest mentoring that will bring about change and that need to be pressed into service through social development. Nowadays, we lack a sincere effort to tackle the situation and the issues at stake. Donors and supporting partners should seriously consider the changes taking place in human beings who work towards social development in needy areas. It should be the concern of agencies to assess

performance not only on the basis of reports but also on hard facts, which should be established through visits, interaction and an assessment of the performance of the approaches delivered by the social development organizations working in those areas. Before we compile huge reports and provide positive feedback so that we may survive until the next funding period, we need to ensure that each penny of support reaches those for whom it is meant. The scope of social development in developing countries is still very large and innovations can be introduced to ensure efficiency. We need to implement programmes whereby the participation of all community members is ensured and heartily accepted by their communities. Cruel poverty is the chief cause of social evils. Once we create prosperity and livelihoods in a community, we can ensure the existence of peace among its members.

Social opportunities, which include the provision of basic public services, such as health care, child immunization, primary education, social security, environmental protection and rural infrastructure, are essential aspects of development. In addition, we should focus on women's empowerment, women's entrepreneurship and the pre-defined role of women in decision-making in order to solve the problems that afflict women. To work effectively in social development, we must consider the following issues:

- (a) The meaning and concept of development;
- (b) Theories and perspectives: economic, sociocultural, political and legal;
- (c) Sustainable development versus economic progress;
- (d) Parameters to evaluate development;
- (e) Social policies and social development.

In addition, we need to do the following:

- (a) Identify special groups, such as children; destitute, delinquent, marginalized, exploited, victimized, abandoned, homeless, orphaned, handicapped and disabled people; youths; adults; ageing populations; the families of those convicted; and families affected by HIV/AIDS and chronic and acute illnesses;
 - (b) Assess the needs of those groups when developing programmes and services for treatment, care, support, rehabilitation and development;
 - (c) Understand the societal aspects of the vulnerability of special groups and develop strategies for the early identification of vulnerable persons and groups and for intervention.
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