



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
25 November 2014

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-third session

4-13 February 2015

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 Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, 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

Introduction

We, the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries (also known as Medical Mission Sisters) and the organizations around the world that endorse this statement applaud the decision of the Commission for Social Development to select the theme “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”. The theme has particular relevance for a global community faced with three crucial issues in the twenty-first century, namely, growing inequality, increasing conflict and climate change. It is also apt in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, in which civil society organizations continue to emphasize people-centred development approach based on human rights.

The dominant model of economic growth, with its focus on the gross domestic product, is highly dependent on extractive industries and fuels inequality within and between nations. This model of economic growth should be challenged by one focused on genuine progress indicators. In the 1990s, a think tank based in the United States of America developed the genuine progress indicators, which measure the total well-being and sustainability of regions based on economic, social and environmental factors. The use of genuine progress indicators resonates with text in the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, which states: “We the peoples of the United Nations determined ... to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”. The report of the Secretary-General entitled “A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015” reminds the global community to leave no one behind and to pursue the common good.

Social development and globalization

In the contemporary world, technology has brought humanity into one global village and enhanced economic growth. In the process of economic globalization, the village has become divided between a minority that has benefited and a majority that has not. The gap between the rich and the poor has grown in many destructive ways. The market-based economy has gained such power over national Governments that the 85 richest individuals own as much as the poorest 50 per cent of the global population. Individual rights and property rights are being protected while collective rights are being weakened. Governments must stop favouring multinational corporations and owners of private capital over the common good. Policies that have dismantled social programmes must be replaced by transparent, inclusive, people-centred and planet-centred development.

If we unpack the elements of social development, we can see that services such as health, education, social welfare and employment are under-funded or are being privatized. Many poor countries with weak national Governments have signed free-trade agreements that further jeopardize the interests of their peoples.

We have been involved in the area of health for several decades and realize the interconnectedness of social, economic, environmental and political factors and that all those factors have an impact on people’s health. An inclusive approach, in which the people participate in decision-making, is imperative, along with the right mix of national and international policies to regulate the pursuit of short-term profits by

corporations. People in the private sector who are in a position to contribute to the well-being of their fellow citizens should step up to the plate to strengthen the social dimension; there is no sustainability without sustaining the global village.

Social and sustainable development goals

In the outcome document of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, social development priorities were highlighted in as many as 15 of the 17 goals that were listed. This fact is an indication that the sustainable development goals cannot be achieved without strengthening the social dimension. The United Nations and the global community should not wait another 15 years to assess why the sustainable development goals have not been achieved. It has been widely noted that the success of the Open Working Group has been due to its open and inclusive approach, which has encouraged the participation of multiple stakeholders. Increased participation and more effective policies are required to achieve universal goals and solve global problems. Living in the twenty-first century, we are indeed blessed with the information and communications technologies needed for contributing to the common good. The outcomes of previous sessions of the Commission that addressed the themes of social integration, poverty eradication and empowerment need to be revisited and implemented in order to strengthen the social development agenda.

Social development and policy options

The theme chosen by the Commission serves as an invitation to all to determine which policies are to be prioritized and which policies need to be revisited. If the goal of social development is to improve living conditions for all people, the global community has a long way to go. The historic World Summit for Social Development was held almost 20 years ago, and 52 sessions of the Commission for Social Development have been convened since then. Despite of all this, extreme poverty still exists. According to a 2014 report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 805 million people throughout the world do not have enough food to lead healthy and active lives. That is about one out of every nine people on Earth. The vast majority of hungry people live in the developing world, where approximately 13.5 per cent of the population is undernourished. Poverty, violence and crime often go hand-in-hand. Extreme poverty is in no way justifiable or acceptable in the contemporary world.

The world is in urgent need of policies that ensure universal social protection floors for people of all ages who are hungry, especially for those who are most vulnerable: women, children and the differently abled. The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing estimates the annual cost of a global safety net to eradicate extreme poverty at \$66 billion. Global public and private savings, estimated at around \$22 trillion per year, would be sufficient to cover the cost of not only social protection floors but also of other needs. The Committee proposed a “basket of policy measures” encompassing a tool kit of policy options, regulations, institutions and programmes from which Governments could choose appropriate policy combinations. Given that the world has the requisite resources and knowledge, these goals can be achieved with commitment and political will.

We and the organizations endorsing this statement recommend that the United Nations and its Member States:

- Implement the commitments agreed at previous sessions of the Commission and of the World Summit for Social Development
- Revisit trade policies that have negative impacts on the lives of those living in poverty
- Ensure universal social protection floors for the marginalized, particularly for women of all ages, children and the disabled
- Regulate destructive extractive industries, which are a threat to the environment and therefore to social development
- Utilize genuine progress indicators instead of the gross domestic product as a measure of economic growth and as a tool for strengthening social development and, therefore, sustainable development

It is our hope that the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development will revitalize the global vision for the common good of the people and the planet. We raise the voices and dreams of the people who have been left behind for centuries as victims of greed and injustice. We support the genuine commitment to and political will for people-centred development.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Casa Generalizia della Societa' del Sacro Cuore, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Curia Generalizia Agostiniana, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Salesian Missions, Sisters of Charity Federation, UNANIMA International and VIVAT International.