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Statement submitted by Pragya, 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

Inequalities in development in the contemporary world

Sustainable development remains an unreached goal, partly owing to inequities in development that leave specific geographic areas and population subsets disadvantaged, marginalized and neglected. The regions of the world are not all blessed with an equal resource base, they do not display similar physical or historical characteristics and they have not enjoyed the same kind of attention in terms of development. The 2014 Social Progress Index indicates that South Asia has a long way to go in securing social progress for its citizens and that sub-Saharan Africa also lags behind. Specifically, the Index ranked Sri Lanka 85th out of 132 countries, Bangladesh 99th, Nepal 101st, India 102nd, Pakistan 131st, Kenya 103rd and the United Republic of Tanzania 114th. Most developing countries also display considerable subnational variations and related disparities in terms of income and poverty levels and in terms of access to health services and education. The factors of disadvantage have to do with socioeconomic aspects, including sociocultural differences from the mainstream populations, belonging to lower economic strata and lack of access to factors and tools that lead to development, as well as place-related characteristics, i.e. geographical distance from locations of power and/or urban centres. Rural and remote areas frequently do not receive the leading-edge technologies and the same quality of services that the more urban and developed areas receive. And national Human Development Index (HDI) rankings can be misleading where large regional disparities exist.

As the world changes in terms of climate, technology, values and practices, nations and populations at the bottom of the HDI have missed benefiting from the positive impacts of development, leading to stark gaps between them and the developed areas and mainstream populations. Disadvantaged and often excluded groups find themselves inhabiting the fringes of States, being marginalized by the political-developmental processes and being rendered voiceless and helpless to meet their needs. They suffer from multiple forms of poverty and their situation is exacerbated by weak infrastructure and environmental vulnerability. Apart from suffering as a consequence of low incomes, they also suffer from resource stress, livelihood insecurity, exclusion from the mainstream economy, discrimination and inadequate access to opportunities. In short, they experience overall physical and social marginalization. At the same time, the negative effects of development, such as degradation and depletion of natural resources, war and conflict, and disease, are magnified in these vulnerable regions and among their inhabitants. Such inequity and exclusion coupled with weak institutions are giving rise to serious societal disorders in the contemporary world, e.g. crime and violence, political instability, and conflict.

Major global trends and social development

Three critical global trends in recent years have had an impact on social development and they change what we need to do and how we do it: the financial and economic crisis; escalating conflicts and disasters; climate change and associated issues. Because the world is increasingly interconnected, these trends have affected the livelihoods of all and had serious adverse effects on human

development. Developed economies, which have been affected by a liquidity crunch, cutbacks on public services and social spending, unemployment and associated ills, have become inwardly focused, responding to the shocks of the financial crisis and reducing aid flows for the developing world. The credit crunch has had ripple effects throughout the global economy and has led to a stalling or reversal of development processes by Governments in developing countries. This has led to a change in global economic equations and the creation of a multipolar world in which the major developing countries (Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa) are replacing advanced economies and leading global economic growth despite scoring low on social development dimensions. The associated rise in the costs of food, fuel (now declining) and commodities has resulted in millions more sliding into poverty.

The impact on development of the financial and economic crisis gets compounded when sudden and extreme climate-related events occur, with their high tolls in terms of deaths, destroyed property and infrastructure and fractured lives and livelihoods. Climate change is in fact swiftly becoming a key factor in conflicts, and the effects are wide-ranging, on food and water, health and safety, livelihoods, biodiversity, and related facets of society. Climate change and weather-based natural disasters are affecting rural livelihoods, with severe consequences on human development. Consequently, each “geotrend” has a cause-and-effect relationship with the economy, the ecosystem and social development.

In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, these geotrends have had a snowballing effect on issues pertaining to poverty, climate change, vulnerable ecological systems and the marginalization of indigenous communities. These issues are likely to shape the future and the lives of the poor in these two geographic regions. Both South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are still experiencing the knock-on effects of the global recession. Besides, both regions are beset by a different set of social adversities. South Asia has huge gaps and inequalities in development, the highest number of poor, malnourished and illiterate people and performs abysmally on certain Millennium Development Goals. Parts of sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing poverty, drought, famine and an HIV crisis, as well as conflict and human rights abuses, and are off track in terms of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Critical focus areas for action in the post-2015 period

Social development involves prioritizing human needs in the growth and progression of society, and governs the norms and conventions that direct human interaction, with a focus on improving the lives of every citizen, especially the poor and marginalized, to make society a better place. It implies investing in people, removing barriers so that all citizens can make progress towards their dreams with self-confidence and pride, and giving all individuals the chance to grow, develop skills and contribute to their families and communities.

With the discussions for the post-2015 global development agenda under way, it is essential to prioritize the critical needs of the marginalized communities from underserved areas in the developing world. Efforts across the developing and developed worlds must seek to influence and catalyse supportive action for equitable, inclusive and appropriate development, overcoming the conditions of structural poverty, and facilitate endogenous and appropriate development for these

communities. Post-2015 dialogues need to prioritize action for particularly disadvantaged subgroups to remove the barriers, prejudices and other structural issues that contribute to the adversities they face. Key areas of action may include: (a) relief from chronic poverty and resource insecurity by creating suitable livelihoods; (b) improved welfare of children and women by ensuring basic welfare services, such as health care, education, nutrition, water and sanitation; and (c) inclusion and a more equitable and democratic social structure.

Realizing the future we want for all requires the post-2015 sustainable development goals to catalyse rapid and appropriate development of marginalized communities. Pragma believes that this requires adhering to the core values of “development without destruction” and “empowerment for enabling choices”. The development promoted needs to be closely attuned to unique ecologies and cultures, addressing people’s core needs while also preserving local resources and heritage. Interventions should build the capacities of local people so that they can manage their resources and address their development goals. Effective grass-roots action can propel an endogenous development that is enabled by focused research and supportive policies at the national and international levels.

Social development works best when it engages and influences social institutions and creates a more inclusive society. Hence, intervention strategies in social development should draw on local communities, along with Governments and international organizations, for its strategy package. Addressing the disparities at the regional and subnational levels in particular requires targeted capacity-building and the engagement of the underserved communities of end-users in the planning, delivery and monitoring of development services. These “last-mile populations” could respond better to the changing world and shape their own destiny in a more effective manner if they possessed the skills necessary to help themselves, if they participated in local-level interventions and were involved in designing policies and programmes that address their problems and unique conditions, and if they networked for solidarity and sharing.

Building the capacity of the disadvantaged would enable them to play an equal role in development and progress. With this in mind, interventions need to seek to empower individuals and groups, and thereby the human capital of underserved areas, through holistic capability-building efforts aimed at creating the right attitudinal base, developing the necessary knowledge and skills, and facilitating the productive use of individual and group capacities. The sense of community in marginalized and disadvantaged groups should be leveraged for the purpose of development. This may be achieved by imbuing these groups with a sense of responsible stakeholdership, providing them with the necessary structures and systems to enable such stakeholdership, and engaging and galvanizing strategic human resources within the community as social capital for change and development. Building effective citizenship of disadvantaged groups, which would reduce their marginalization and enhance their integration, calls for a two-pronged approach: empowerment and active democracy for the disadvantaged groups, and inclusion and solidarity by mainstream populations.