



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2015

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-fourth session

3-12 February 2016

**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 International Federation of Business and Professional Women and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world: Taking Action for People-Led Sustainable Social Development

Summary

Social development in the contemporary world is critical; it underpins the Sustainable Development Goals and achieves the globally agreed principle of “leave no one behind”. When prioritising “people and planet”, social development must be placed at the centre of development initiatives.

That the Sustainable Development Goals were agreed by all 193 UN Member States shows collective agreement that social development must be achieved universally. Social development should not be considered a “global South issue”; it is relevant to all countries, with none yet having achieved social development. This statement outlines actions that should be taken to rethink and strengthen social development over the next fifteen years.

We call for:

- Inclusivity in policy creation, implementation and evaluation. This means that all disadvantaged groups, traditionally viewed as “vulnerable” should be automatically considered key development agents, and be involved in policy making, implementation and evaluation at every level. This will foster effective action at the grassroots level, and facilitate the input of experience-based expertise.
- Citizen generated data, including qualitative data, must be used to assess social development progress. Quantitative data alone cannot indicate whether all people experience the benefits of social development. Their stories and information must guide effective, practical solutions and implementation.
- Social development needs to be underpinned by economic development and financing for development; these modes of development are interconnected. This integrated, cross-cutting approach must mainstream the achievement of equality, and promote access to human rights for all. Dedicated resources must be allocated to social development efforts at all levels.
- NGOs, as accountable stakeholder organisations, have a specific role to play in ensuring that social development mechanisms produce the results needed for an inclusive 2030 Agenda to be successful in all countries.

If these actions are taken, governments will demonstrate their political will to achieve social and sustainable development by committing to actions. Behaviours and approaches need to be changed to affect transformative, sustainable change. If development is truly to be for “people and planet”, then people-led, social development must be at the centre of sustainable change.

People-led Sustainable Development

By definition, social development focuses on people. To fully understand the extent and impact of actions taken to further social development as part of the

Sustainable Development Goals (which promised to be an agenda of, by and for the peoples of the world) comprehensive qualitative data is needed. This means that disadvantaged groups need to be able to report on their experiences of development, and that this information must guide implementation. That value of social development cannot be seen in statistically-driven data. Disadvantaged groups in society must be empowered to generate and supply citizen-generated data as part of wider data collection methodologies and approaches that reflect the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

Internationally, the Commission for Social Development must be the space where participation from all non-state actors is equal and States' actions and policies are reviewed. This will show that the 2030 Agenda is putting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged first. By participating at the Commission for Social Development, NGOs at the local, national, regional and global levels are able to report the experiences of disadvantaged groups, empowering them at the international level. Representative NGOs at all levels should be given the same voice, ability and access to offer practical solutions. Their contributions are equal to academia, science, business and the large INGOs. Specific efforts must be made to increase the number of NGO and grassroots panellists and participants. Unless this is done during the Commission that is devoted to the social dimension, we will not achieve the globally agreed, universal, primary goal of "leaving no one behind".

Within the working methods of the Commission, more effort should be made to open-up space to ensure widening participation and input. The input of civil society, NGOs and other representatives of disadvantaged groups should not be included as token actions, but seen as critically valuable. It is important that the Commission leads by good example on inclusivity to demonstrate the value of people-led development.

Social Development Policy Creation and Implementation

It is essential that those who would benefit most from social development initiatives are able to influence and develop social development policies. Traditionally marginalised groups, including women of all ages and girls, youth, indigenous people, those with disabilities, older persons and those who experience multiple discrimination; can all contribute to social development, promoting the expediting of effective social development strategies, programmes and approaches. Countries, UN Agencies, NGOs, civil society and other stakeholders, including individuals, all have a role to play in ensuring that currently disadvantaged groups are included at all levels of decision making, hold positions of leadership and access the services which promote inclusion and empowerment.

Moving forward, the intersectional nature of vulnerability needs to be better addressed, especially when considering the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as mechanisms for achieving social development. Women, girls and gender are referenced 53 times in the Copenhagen Declaration, with Commitment 5 focusing exclusively on gender equality and women-specific issues being referred to nine times. Meanwhile, those with disabilities are referenced six times in the document, older persons twice, and indigenous persons four times. Many vulnerable groups are not directly referenced in the declaration at all, for example those with psychological illness and disability, persons of all ages, homeless people, those living in conflict situations, and those who experience

discrimination due to sexual orientation and gender identity. To properly engage with the structural issues and causes of social exclusion and inequality that all disadvantaged groups face, there must be more and better quality information on discrimination and the effects of policies.

In comparison, women, girls and gender are referenced 45 times in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with Goal 5 focussing exclusively on gender equality and gender-specific issues being referenced ten times. Additionally, disability is referenced eleven times, aging and older persons seven times, indigenous persons six times, and refugees and internally displaced persons twice. Again, multiple groups that experience discrimination are not directly referenced at all. This is indicative of the lack of progress, commitment and push-back that has been seen around social development issues. This cannot continue. It is critical that The Copenhagen Declaration is used to compliment the Sustainable Development Goals and that governments demonstrate practical commitments to social development by fully engaging with disadvantaged groups and allowing them to participate in policy creation, implementation and evaluation at all levels. By promoting inclusivity, social development will necessarily be rethought and strengthened for those who need it the most.

Social Development as an Integrated, Crosscutting Approach

Despite the acknowledgement within the Copenhagen Declaration in 1995 that “economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development” (paragraph 6), and that a “multidimensional and integrated approach” is needed (Commitment 2), development approaches have been siloed.

Regardless of which measures are used, the gap between the richest and poorest is widening. This was a trend that was recognised in 1995 and is still being seen 20 years later. Considering this trend, economic development cannot continue to be divorced from social development. Consistently, when discussing where the poverty line can be drawn, the human factor of dignity, the realisation of human rights and access to services are not adequately discussed, despite being directly connected to economic mobility and empowerment. As social and economic disempowerment compound each other, they must also be tackled together in order to achieve sustainable change for the advantage of all. Therefore, the aims of economic development and financing for development cannot be seen as independent from social development. This crosscutting and integrated approach should not only be seen on a macro level, but also at the community and individual levels.

Implementing a multidimensional and integrated approach that ensures that economic, social and environmental sustainable development mutually reinforce each other is not a new idea. However, it must be strengthened and used in order to achieve social development and sustainable development more broadly. All development approaches, including social development, should be underpinned by human rights and national action plans to ensure successful implementation.

The Monitoring and Accountability of Social Development Efforts

For currently disadvantaged groups to effectively contribute to data collection they must understand why data is being collected and what is being assessed. Too

many people do not know about globally agreed social development aims and goals. More must be done to raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals, human rights and social development aims, through media, campaigns and education. Without this knowledge, traditionally disadvantaged groups will be disempowered from contributing to social development, from benefiting from current social development programmes, and from holding governments accountable for their actions. This is true for both the developed and developing world.

Voluntary review mechanisms are not sufficient to promote accountability or to strengthen social development efforts. Moving forward, more should be done to promote the creation and uptake of accountability mechanisms which are essential for ensuring that social development is achieved.

Conclusion

Our organisations call for a reinvigorated commitment and global effort to achieve social development in every country. Social development will not be achieved unless communities are peaceful, socially and economically inclusive, environmentally sustainable and all people have equal access to justice. All of these principles ensure all people will experience the benefits of development. Social development will be strengthened by taking a responsive, integrated and inclusive approach. This approach will promote the legitimacy of institutions which will drive efforts to achieve sustainable social development.

All of the ten commitments in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development remain directly relevant to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Therefore, the Commission for Social Development has a key role to play in reviewing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly as inclusive social development directly contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. At the Commission for Social Development, traditionally vulnerable groups including women and girls, youth, indigenous peoples, those living with disabilities, and older persons need to be able to report their experiences of social development as a critical component of the 2030 Agenda.

The Global Sustainable Development Goals promise to be an agenda of, by and for the peoples of the world. They hold the promise of being transformative; they are interconnected and interdependent. The three pillars of social, economic and environmental sustainability will determine the outcome of the Sustainable Development Goals. The practical actions outlined in this statement will strengthen and promote social development as part of sustainable development.