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**Priority Theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to
social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social
protection policies**

Statement submitted by Smile Foundation, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

Background:

India ranks 130 among 189 countries in the 2017 Human Development Index (HDI) UNDP Report. India's HDI value for 2017 is 0.640, which put the country in the medium human development category, according to the Human Development Report (HDR) released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Between 1990 and 2017, India's HDI value increased from 0.427 to 0.640, an increase of nearly 50 per cent and an indicator of the country's remarkable achievement in lifting millions of people out of poverty.

About 26.8 per cent of India's HDI value is lost on account of inequalities.

This confirms that inequality remains a challenge for India as it progresses economically, though the government and various state governments have, through a variety of social protection measures, attempted to ensure that the gains of economic development are shared widely and reach the farthest first.

In India, despite considerable progress at the policy and legislative levels, women remain significantly less politically, economically and socially empowered than men.

For instance, women hold only 11.6 per cent of parliamentary seats, and only 39 per cent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education as compared to 64 per cent males as per UNDP 2017 report. Also, female participation in the labour market is 27.2 per cent compared to 78.8 for men.

Addressing the gender equity issues affecting the HDI of India Government of India has taken special initiatives in launching key programmes like POSHAN Abhiyaan, Ayushman Bharat-National Health Protection Mission.

National Nutrition Mission (POSHAN Abhiyan): National Nutrition Mission was launched as an expansion of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the International Women's Day on March 8, 2018. The main objectives of this scheme are to attain proper nutritional status among children from 0–6 years, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers in a timely manner; reduce stunting, under-nutrition, and anaemia among young children, women, and adolescent girls; and lowering low birth weight by at least 2% per annum.

POSHAN Abhiyaan is a multi-ministerial convergence mission with the vision to ensure attainment of malnutrition free India by 2022. The objective of POSHAN Abhiyaan to reduce stunting in identified Districts of India with the highest malnutrition burden by improving utilization of key Anganwadi Services and improving the quality of Anganwadi Services delivery. Its aim to ensure holistic development and adequate nutrition for pregnant women, mothers and children.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is implementing POSHAN Abhiyaan in 315 Districts in first year, 235 Districts in second year and remaining districts will be covered in the third year. There are a number of schemes directly/indirectly affecting the nutritional status of children (0–6 year's age) and pregnant women and lactating mothers. In spite of these, level of malnutrition and related problems in the country is high. There is no dearth of schemes but lack of creating synergy and linking the schemes with each other to achieve common goal. POSHAN Abhiyaan through robust convergence mechanism and other components would strive to create the synergy.

To complement Government initiatives, Smile Foundation is also contributing to efforts to overcome nutrition and health inequities. Under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Smile Foundation has started special projects focusing on addressing the health and nutritional needs of vulnerable tribal groups, covering children, adolescents and women in the society.

Smile Foundation: Making a Difference

Smile Foundation was set up in the year 2002 with mission to make a difference in the lives of the underprivileged. Smile Foundation works as a catalyst in bringing change in the lives of poor children, youth and women, through life-cycle approach with focus on SDGs pertaining to poverty and hunger, education, empower women, child and maternal mortality, health.

Smile Foundation has four flagship programs, namely Mission Education, Smile on Wheels (SoWs), SWABHIMAAN and Smile Twin e-Learning Program (STeP). Further, in the year 2017 it was felt that there are few themes which need special focus in the community and need to be addressed specifically. Hence special nutrition projects are included in the program to address the needs of the tribal and vulnerable groups. Projects on theme such as early childhood development, social inclusion of marginalized groups, livelihood opportunities etc. are conceptualized and implemented in selected districts identified by Government of India.

Smile Foundation with their flagship programs are working towards addressing the existing inequities in the communities. Currently, Smile Foundation through its work is directly benefitting over 350,000 children and their families through more than 175 welfare projects on education, healthcare, nutrition, livelihood and womens' empowerment, in more than 750 remote villages and slums across 25 states of India.

Smile believes that 'Life Cycle Approach' holds the key to address the ecosystem of education, healthcare, poverty, population control, unemployment, social justice or human rights etc. Smile Foundation empowers the underprivileged by helping them realize their potential, to emerge as productive assets, and sets the foundation for nation building.

Project Briefs

Smile Foundation is implementing projects in two States, namely Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, to address social inclusion and financial & nutrition inequities in the community by targeting children (6months–10 years), adolescent girls (14–19 years), pregnant women and lactating women. Under the projects Smile is working to reduce anemia and improve nutritional status of the target beneficiaries through formal and informal community trainings, meetings and health system strengthening. The projects talk about raising awareness on risk perception of iron deficiency and other nutrients, along with the importance of a balanced diet. Also, the project implementation aims on creating livelihood opportunities for the adolescent girls.

The projects follow a three-pronged strategy for meeting their objectives. The first strategy focuses on awareness and knowledge building among adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and caregivers. This aims to improve the nutrition and reduce iron deficiency by bringing a behaviour change. The second strategy works on provision and promotion of nutrition supplements available locally. It is being done by building capacity of the beneficiaries in preparing nutritious recipes (scientifically proven) along with its free distribution for improving health and nutrition status. It also works on promoting intake of micronutrient supplements provided by the Government of India through programs like Iron Folic Acid, Calcium etc. The third strategy focuses on providing vocational training to adolescent girls for livelihood opportunities through local partnership with different institutions.

Further to these themes, the projects also touch on a few cross-cutting areas like promotion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), menstrual health hygiene, WASH and life skills, To make the project meaningful and successful Smile always believes in partnering with Government. Hence strengthening the government system is also part of the project. Capacity building of frontline workers is also one of the component.

As a way forward through the structured, scientific and holistic ‘Life Cycle Approach’, Smile is contributing to helping the underprivileged to fight the menace of poverty and address prevailing social inequities in the community affecting human development. It aims to empower them through power of education, health and employability and considering all these factors in mind the interventions is designed in a manner so that social inequity can also be addressed.

To address the challenges of project partnering with key players is critical for sustainable development and thus Smile through its projects has been successfully coordinating with existing Government structures and with funding partners in joining the mission of bringing change.

In summary, Smile’s innovative interventions strive to bring hope/change in the lives of marginalized underprivileged women, children and adolescents and present an implementation model to scale-up support for existing Government initiatives. Further, there is a long way to go in improving the social conditions of the targeted and make Smile’s contribution in addressing social inclusion, inequities on a large scale.
