



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2016

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-fifth session

1-10 February 2017

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, 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

Introduction

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd welcomes the priority theme for this 55th Session of the Commission for Social Development, “Strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all.” It is the experience of our organization that placing people at the centre of development is critical to addressing the multidimensional root causes of poverty. Poverty imposes a disproportionate burden on girls and women, who are most likely to be ‘left behind,’ and be vulnerable to human rights violations. Girls and women living in poverty experience a series of systemic obstacles that are difficult to overcome, resulting in deprivation in their own lives and losses for the broader society and economy. While poverty affects people of all genders, girls and women have far fewer resources to cope, especially in patriarchal societies. They are likely to be the last to eat, least likely to access healthcare and education, and most likely to perform unpaid domestic tasks. They have limited options to own land, build businesses, and access capital. Their political voices are rarely heard in decision-making, including on managing an economy, or sharing benefits and costs. Poverty leaves girls and women vulnerable to gender-based violence, and to being forced into sexual exploitation and human trafficking as part of a basic struggle to survive.

Social Protection Floors

An excellent policy framework towards ending poverty, inequality, vulnerability and social exclusion is social protection floors (SPFs) implemented by national governments. SPFs are guarantees of basic income security and access to essential social services. Social protection is fundamental for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, enhancing resilience against natural and manmade disasters, as well as economic and social crises. Social protection floors can be instrumental in addressing the systemic root causes of poverty and inequality.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Recommendation 202 concerning national floors of social protection is the principal benchmark against which SPFs are designed, implemented and evaluated. The recommendation rests on a strong foundation of international human rights law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to social protection is universal — it exists for all people, regardless of age, sex or ethnicity. Implementation of SPFs is the most promising human rights-based approach to the global elimination of extreme poverty, with the potential to ensure that the poorest 15-20% of the world’s people enjoy increasing levels of economic, social and cultural rights.

The Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights uphold the right to social security and urge States to ensure that persons living in poverty, in particular women and those working in the informal economy, have access to social security benefits. Low wages and unpaid, informal care work reduce the ability of women to contribute to and benefit from traditional social protection schemes, security, access to networks, rights, and power. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights social protection policies, including floors, as vital tools to achieve poverty eradication in Targets 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 8.5, and 10.4. Of particular note,

Target 5.4 puts forward social protection policies as tools for justly compensating women and girls working in unpaid care and domestic work. In order to most effectively promote the empowerment of girls and women living in poverty, the greatest investment must first reach those in the informal economy.

The Guiding Principles also state that social protection policies take into account the particular needs of persons living in poverty. Policies must recognize and enhance girls' and women's identity as citizens and enable them to assume the roles they choose. By defining and eradicating poverty in accordance with the experiences of people who are entitled to social protection, governments can guarantee social protection, and redress gender imbalances by restoring the accountability of the state to women, girls and their families.

Though social protection floors cannot alone meet girls' and women's rights to an adequate standard of living or decent work, they can complement people-centered economic development policies, labour rights and investments in quality public services for more sustainable and long-term changes to gender equality. Social protection floors must be embedded into the broad matrix of economic and social policies to be most effective.

Case Study

Universal social protection policies that benefit all of society must reach women and girls who are in the most vulnerable situations, for whom barriers tend to remain even when services and national human development averages improve. These programs must empower girls and women, strengthen their citizenship, and equip them with the knowledge, spaces and networks with which to claim their entitlements.

The Good Shepherd Microfinance No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) in Australia provides individuals and families on low incomes with access to safe, fair and affordable loans for essential goods and services. Participants recognize that repaying their loan means that those funds become available to someone else in the community — consequently, the repayment rate is consistently 95-97%. Follow-up analysis shows that four out of five NILS participants are moving away from crisis and hardship towards stability and resilience — achieving economic mobility.

In Australia, more and more women are turning to high cost, predatory payday loans, suggesting that a growing number of women are being excluded from the financial mainstream. NILS focuses on improving opportunities for women and girls, with women representing 67% of NILS participants. Microfinance programs promote gender equality through financial inclusion, and are essential for ensuring women living on low incomes and their families are able to enjoy improved quality of life.

The NILS commitment to education and financial literacy is also empowering for women. The loan process begins a conversation about money and household finances with each microfinance applicant. These conversations lead to increased financial literacy and confidence dealing with money. This improves women's self-esteem, and participation in decision-making processes.

Financing Social Protection Floors

In our globalized world, when wealth and power are sought as ends unto themselves, there is a danger that society can be reduced to a collection of faceless individuals, and the common good reduced to fit economic outcomes focused on profit, rather than human rights. Pope Francis speaks of “the scandal of poverty in a world of plenty as a moral challenge for the whole human community.” He continues, “A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table.”

All is dependent upon the strong political will to empower and invest in people. While in many developing countries social protection floors were previously considered unaffordable, they are now regarded as important investments to support sustainable economic growth. In the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, governments recognize the multidimensionality of poverty, and commit to provide fiscally sustainable and nationally appropriate social protection systems. This commitment must be upheld and implemented urgently.

With strong political will and commitment to human rights, it is possible to finance SPFs, even in low-income countries. SPFs are country-designed, country-owned, and country-financed. Redirecting a percentage of military spending budgets to cover the cost of social protection can benefit economic and social well-being while also addressing one of the main root causes of instability and conflict. As has been proposed by UN experts and civil society, a Global Fund for Social Protection could support the least-developed countries that need financial support to introduce national SPFs. As countries achieve higher levels of economic development, the quantity and quality of benefits and services in social protection policies can be extended. Three-hundred million people could benefit from financial support within the next 15 to 20 years. Technical assistance and capacity building to nationally-financed SPFs within a medium-term timeframe would reduce poverty for millions more. An important source of innovative financing for social protection floors is the financial transaction tax. The cost of inaction is continued poverty, inequality and injustice.

Recommendations:

- Implement ILO Recommendation 202, SDG 1.3 on National Floors of Social Protection, all other SDGs related to social protection, and the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights
- Ensure that social protection policies are gender-responsive, with full participation of women and girls at all levels
- Expand innovative sources of financing for development, prioritizing public financing over public-private partnerships, e.g. redirecting military spending, Global Fund for Social Protection, and financial transaction tax