



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 November 2012

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-first session

6-15 February 2013

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment
and decent work for all**

**Statement submitted by American Psychological Association,
International Association of Applied Psychology, International
Council of Psychologists, Society for Industrial and
Organizational Psychology, Society for the Psychological Study of
Social Issues and World Council for Psychotherapy,
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.



Statement

There is broad recognition supported by psychological and social science research that empowerment is essential to progress and stability in development. There is less understanding and acknowledgement within the international community that empowerment is a multidimensional psychological and social process that involves individuals and groups gaining control over and improving events in their lives. The outcome document of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development recognizes that poverty eradication and employment in decent jobs are crucial to achieving social integration and a society for all. It also recognizes the interactive nature of the goals of the Summit, which are ultimately rooted in psychosocial empowerment and other psychological processes.

Governments, United Nations agencies and the international community generally focus solely on economic policies and indicators in their efforts to achieve the goals of the 1995 Summit. While we recognize the importance of economic policies and measures, the purpose of the present statement is to advocate that governments, United Nations agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations and other stakeholders, should address psychosocial factors as significant, complementary dimensions associated with poverty eradication, full employment and social integration. We offer the recommendations below concerning the importance of psychosocial empowerment, mental health and psychosocial well-being to the achievement of sustainable societies for all.

Psychosocial empowerment

Provide access to productive employment in decent work and formal education

Research in psychology indicates that being engaged in decent work promotes psychosocial empowerment by developing a sense of ownership, optimism and confidence in one's ability to be effective in dealing with challenges. Empowering people to be productive and resourceful members of their families, communities, and society reduces poverty and marginalization.

Therefore, we urge Governments to create meaningful jobs and to increase and strengthen opportunities for training about entrepreneurship and income-generating activities, life skills development and access to primary, secondary and higher education as important pathways to decent work, social inclusion and the alleviation of poverty. Culturally relevant psychological assessments should be used to help find the most effective fit between individual strengths and available job, vocational or career opportunities.

Promote social equality, human rights and social justice for all

Poverty conditions, including structural inequality, and social and economic disparities affecting individuals, groups and communities, are violations of the human rights to survival, protection, development and social participation. Psychological and social science research demonstrates that social inequalities prevent people from developing their capacities and contributing as productive members of society, create stereotypes and discrimination that function as barriers to social cohesion and are sources of intergroup conflict and social instability, which in turn perpetuate poverty.

We therefore urge Governments and all stakeholders to:

- Put human rights at the centre of their frameworks for national development, and review and replace the laws, policies, programmes and practices at all levels that discriminate against individuals on the basis of their gender, age, race, ethnicity, colour, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, rural/urban/suburban residences and other categories of social identity.
- Provide ongoing human rights learning for all members of society, especially individuals and groups living in poverty, in order to foster their vitality, resilience and activism to alleviate poverty conditions.
- Reduce the physical and mental burden of paid and unpaid work by rural women and girls by providing access to services, tools and technology, and support Convention No. 189 of the International Labour Organization on the rights of domestic workers.

Promote engagement in decision-making and capacity-building networks

Psychological research has demonstrated the value of engaging individuals and groups marginalized or living in poverty as active partners in social and economic planning and operating programmes at all decision-making levels. Group cohesion can be developed by a diverse group coming together on an equal basis and a shared purpose, and working interdependently to achieve a larger, common goal.

We therefore urge Governments and all stakeholders to encourage and provide opportunities for expanding and strengthening cooperative capacity-building community networks through which information about entrepreneurial and social opportunities can be shared.

Mental health care and social protection

Psychological, social science, and mental health literature increasingly confirms that poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, which often includes conditions of isolation, lack of education and economic opportunities and resources, and inadequate access to health and mental health care and other social services, especially in rural areas. These multiple stressors interact to cause anxiety and depression, which have a negative impact on the ability of individuals to cope, resulting in the persistence of poverty. Further, poverty may result from environmental migration due to climate change and natural disasters, which are associated with mental health issues for the affected populations such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, child abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence. In addition, poverty has intergenerational effects within families and communities.

We therefore

- Urge Governments and the international community to implement the Social Protection Floor Initiative, including access to mental health care within primary health care to address the basic needs of all vulnerable groups, and taking a lifespan, inclusive, rights-based approach that includes health insurance for all age groups, especially those most in need.

- Recommend the provision of accessible multidisciplinary service centres and mobile vans, especially in rural areas, to provide one-stop services, including mental health care, literacy, continuing education and entrepreneurial training.
- Recommend the provision of trained psychologists, mental health counsellors, and social workers well versed in culturally specific methodology and techniques, to train and work with local community peer coaches, especially in rural areas, to recognize mental health problems and to provide services and referrals in an informed, non-discriminatory manner.
- Urge that special care be taken to ensure that all services and interventions are implemented according to ethical principles and with respect for the human rights and dignity of all individuals.
- Support the efforts of the World Health Organization (WHO) for quality care as outlined in their Quality Rights Toolkit campaign.

Psychosocial well-being

The importance of well-being is highlighted in the reports of the Secretary-General on poverty eradication; measures of well-being are addressed in a past *Human Development Report*; mental health on the WHO website is referred to as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community; and the concept was discussed at the high-level meeting on the theme “Well-being and happiness: defining a new economic paradigm”, held at United Nations Headquarters on 2 April 2012, and at a panel sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in June 2012.

The connection between well-being and employment status is supported by the World Happiness Report, research in the field of psychological and related sciences, studies published in professional journals, including one on health and well-being, and in the book entitled *Humanitarian Work Psychology*.

We therefore urge Governments and stakeholders to include the concepts of “psychosocial well-being” and/or “mental well-being”, in all actions, policies and programmes initiated to eradicate poverty and advance social integration or social inclusion, in the outcome documents of the sessions of the Commission for Social Development in 2013.

Needs of the most vulnerable groups

Research also shows that marginalized and disenfranchised groups, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, racial/ethnic and religious minorities, migrants and refugees, and rural populations are at the highest risk for poverty and social exclusion and for related psychosocial and mental health problems.

We therefore recommend that disenfranchised and marginalized groups be given special attention in efforts to eradicate poverty and that programmes and policies be examined with regard to addressing gender and other disparities.

Programme evaluation

Strategies and programmes implemented to eradicate poverty and unemployment and to promote social integration need to be evaluated to ensure their effectiveness and to determine the degree to which the policies they are intended to address have had the desired effects.

We therefore recommend that measurement and evaluation of poverty eradication and social integration or inclusion initiatives and programmes be undertaken and that such measures should be developed and analysed in consultation with, and with the assistance of, psychological, social science or other experts in programme measurement and evaluation.
