



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2017
English
Original: French

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-sixth session

31 January–7 February 2018

**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 the Centre Africain de Recherche Industrielle (CARI), 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

The rapid spread of poverty in the twenty-first century is of great concern to all development actors, in particular policymakers. Indeed, poverty is at the centre of all national development programmes. Poverty has an adverse effect on production, consumption and workforce productivity, and the severity of the issue has drawn the attention of researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders, who are studying ways to reduce it.

Poverty was the priority theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission for Social Development, held in February 2017, and participant contributions centred around strategies for eradicating poverty.

In its written statement to the fifty-fifth session, Centre Africain de Recherche Industrielle avoided using the term “poverty eradication” and opted instead for “poverty reduction”, because the dictionary definition of “eradicate” is to do away with completely or put an end to something. Our point was that the eradication of poverty is an impossible goal because poverty is closely linked to population growth, resource wealth, capital flows and demographic changes, among other factors.

However, resource wealth is not distributed evenly among countries, nor are opportunities to create such wealth. Some countries are resource-rich, while others have very few resources or none at all.

In 1798, the economist Thomas Malthus said that “the power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man”. He noted that population growth was outpacing food production, which would eventually lead to the death of resource-poor communities.

Even countries rich in resources can find themselves unable to ensure that those resources are distributed evenly to all citizens, who may be living in extreme poverty. That is the case in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Resources are important because they can generate employment, which enables people to lead a stable and decent life.

Thomas Malthus’s doctrine clarifies our own position regarding the impossibility of eradicating poverty at a time when the population of developing countries is growing at a rate of 3 per cent per year, all while resources are being depleted and natural disasters are striking more frequently than ever.

Understanding poverty

People aspire to live free of poverty; earn a comfortable living; have access to health care, stable employment and decent housing; be taken care of in old age; participate in activities free from oppression, safe in the knowledge that their human dignity will be protected; and be better educated. In short, they wish to do, know and have more in order to be more. Those are the aspirations of humankind, yet vast numbers of people are condemned to live in conditions that make fulfilling such legitimate desires unrealistic.

Poverty should not be defined solely in terms of money or consumption, but also in terms of opportunities, power, aspirations, skills and education. Analysing

that definition will enable us to better steer our thinking regarding poverty reduction.

Such rhetoric appears to indicate that poverty is a problem that affects the least developed countries, in particular African countries.

According to paragraph 10 of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008–2017) (A/71/181), “the challenge of poverty remains daunting in Africa and the least developed countries”. We have not reproduced the statistics contained in the report due to space constraints. It is not just the Secretary-General who sees poverty as an African problem. When the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, development partners and other organizations discuss poverty, they are thinking about Africa. It is not worth opening up a debate on whether they are right or wrong; poverty is a general problem.

Strategy development

It all began in the 1980s, when the Bretton Woods institutions developed trade and financial liberalization measures aimed at poor countries; known as structural adjustment programmes, they were intended to reduce poverty. Significant budgetary resources were allocated to the programmes.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative replaced structural adjustment programmes in the 2000s. Together they make up the new policy of the Bretton Woods institutions aimed at the Governments of developing countries. To improve transparency, a participatory process was introduced to promote the democratization of countries with dictatorial regimes, with a view to enabling all sections of the population to make their voices heard.

The Bretton Woods institutions then put in place a strategy on good governance. The strategy targeted international aid, which had been heavily criticized by many observers and development actors for having been used to finance dictatorial regimes instead of helping the poorest in society.

As for the United Nations, it proclaimed the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, which covered the period 1997–2006.

During that decade, Heads of State and Government from around the world met in New York to adopt the Millennium Development Goals, the primary aim of which was to reduce by half the number of people living in extreme poverty, that is on less than \$1 a day. The advantage of the Millennium Development Goals was that they shifted the focus of all national development policies back to poverty and required Governments to use all available means and demonstrate willingness to promote development and eradicate poverty.

The First Decade was followed by the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, which covers the period 2008–2017.

During the Second Decade, in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets out the Sustainable Development Goals, was adopted by the Heads of State and Government of Member States. Like the Millennium Development Goals, the focus of the Sustainable Development Goals is on reducing extreme poverty in all its forms everywhere. Some analysts view the Sustainable Development Goals as the Marshall Plan for poverty eradication.

The General Assembly has proclaimed the period 2016–2025 as the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa. Africa is behind in terms of development and has high rates of poverty.

These are opportunities that must be seized. Strategies that have already been implemented successfully elsewhere could be introduced in places where results have been mixed, with adjustments made according to the environment. To that, we can add:

- The political will and commitment of policymakers;
 - Strong cooperation for industrial development in order to create decent jobs, which are essential for sustainable development according to the International Labour Organization. Industrialization can stimulate growth and sustainable development. It is an opportunity to create jobs and reduce poverty and inequality;
 - The construction of sustainable cities to put an end to the rural exodus of the productive workforce;
 - Entrepreneurship among young people, women and men;
 - Technology and knowledge transfer;
 - The optimization of the work of subsistence farmers to enable them to increase their revenues: agriculture should be supported through mechanization, the provision of high-quality inputs, increased yields, marketing for goods and local processing;
 - Greater promotion of microfinance, which should be intended to reduce poverty, unlike at present, where microfinance is becoming a commercial enterprise in our countries;
 - The provision of all public services to rural areas.
-