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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 Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and Salesian Missions, 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

If we want to promote the empowerment of people so that they can escape extreme poverty and become members of their societies and workforces who are better able to contribute overall, we need to address systems, customs and structural mechanisms that impede the progress of peoples. As Ester Duflo, the eminent development economist, has noted, we need to address ideology, ignorance and inertia, which prevent the success of initiatives to empower marginalized and excluded people. These forces must be overcome in experts, aid providers, policymakers and those who are empowered.

The results of surveys that we and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with Economic and Social Council accreditation conducted with those living in poverty indicate that the most successful initiatives in addressing poverty and achieving social integration in a community showed the following characteristics: listening; motivating and supporting participants; building trust and respect; being non-judgemental; and educating and training staff and government officials to achieve these traits. When all stakeholders saw themselves as equal partners in promoting the common good and solving common problems, progress was made in improving the lives of all.

Based on our experience of working with individuals and communities living in poverty, we have found that encouraging the participation of all members in decision-making, providing opportunities for education, whether formal or non-formal, and offering and providing easy access to services covered in social protection floors are key elements in the empowerment of people. In fact, we have found that when we helped to create an empowering environment that stressed a culture of inclusiveness and welcome, individuals and communities were transformed.

Participation

Participation is power. “Lack of power is a universal and basic characteristic of poverty. Poverty is not solely a lack of income, but rather is characterized by a vicious cycle of powerlessness, stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation, which all mutually reinforce each other” (see [A/HRC/23/36](#), para. 12).

The distribution of power in many groups is often associated with inequality especially owing to gender bias and economic resources. A shared society is based on mutual respect and human dignity where each member is responsible and has a contribution to make that is needed by all. A society rooted in relationships based on human dignity and mutual respect that flow from human rights and equality works to remove all economic, legal, cultural, political and physical obstacles that impede access by marginalized groups to services and programmes. This distributes power more equitably among all members of a society.

Full participation in making the decisions that affect one’s life begins with the availability of choices linked to an enabling environment to make those choices. People become effective agents of human well-being when their vision is valued, their capacities are developed and they have the will to make their aspirations a reality.

Education

Education, both formal and non-formal, has been found to empower people, providing them with the opportunity to develop their skills and to explore new ways of approaching problems. Societies are enhanced and workplaces improved when members of a society are more highly trained and educated and their capacities are utilized.

With education, people are able to reach satisfying levels of personal and professional capability. For women, higher levels of education have contributed to better health and nutrition, which in turn has lowered the levels of child and maternal mortality. As more girls and women achieve higher levels of education, intergenerational benefits have also risen. For each additional year of formal education completed by a mother, research has found a correlation with her children remaining in school for an additional third to one half of a year.

Additionally, as people become more educated they begin to recognize the relationship between the lack of education and poverty. To help empower more people to escape the poverty trap, societies must address the special educational needs of vulnerable groups, especially girls, persons with disabilities and those already living in poverty.

Specialized educational opportunities are required for persons with particular needs or specialized professions. We strongly support increased technology transfer, greater sharing of information and capacity-building in the use and development of information and communications technology.

Teacher training is essential for quality education. Teachers who are culturally sensitive and utilize and respect the knowledge and resources of the learners create empowering environments that expand the future prospects of their students.

Social protection floor

The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda, noted that “under international human rights law, States have an obligation to immediately meet minimum essential levels of the rights of food, health, housing, education and social security. The enjoyment of these rights by all individuals is not conditional on the performance of certain actions or the meeting of requirements” (see Magdalena Sepúlveda and Carly Nyst, *The Human Rights Approach to Social Protection* (Finland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012), p. 49). The concept of the “deserving poor” denies whole groups of people their inherent dignity and rights.

Social protection programmes address many of the most complicated and intransigent dimensions of poverty and deprivation, inter alia, decent work, education, health care, food security and income security. As such, they are a powerful tool in overcoming poverty and inequality and have a direct impact on eliminating discrimination and social exclusion. Additionally, the productivity of the labour force is enhanced because the health and hope of the workers are secure.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) found that: “Extending social protection is a ‘win-win’ investment that pays off both in the short term, given its effects as a macroeconomic stabilizer, but also in the long term, due to the impacts on human development and productivity” (see www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/

news/WCMS_166292/lang--en/index.htm). We support ILO Recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors of social protection

A social protection floor has been shown to improve social cohesion; assist in the eradication of poverty; facilitate the participation of people in social discourse and life; contribute to human capital development; and stimulate greater productive activity. It has also been a stabilizing force in times of crisis increasing resilience against economic shocks and has contributed to accelerating recovery towards more inclusive and sustainable development paths (see *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2011)).

Recommendations

We recommend to Governments that the following actions be implemented as concrete means of empowering people:

(a) Work to promote the common good through mechanisms that allow for the participation of all its citizens at the local and national levels to engage in the social, political and economic life of their societies;

(b) Commit to an agenda, developed with the participation of people living in poverty or who have been economically marginalized, that specifies policies, programmes and allocation of resources that empower people;

(c) Promote the legal empowerment of all people, especially those living in extreme poverty, by insuring that they have access to justice, property rights and labour protections. Birth registrations and providing identity documents are essential for participation;

(d) Include labour policies that prioritize the development of decent jobs and adequate compensation;

(e) Provide formal and non-formal education for all across the lifespan empowering people to become agents of change in their societies while exercising their rights. Additionally, guarantee citizens choice and control over the decisions that affect their rights and well-being;

(f) Remove all barriers to education for girls, including school fees, discriminatory attitudes and curricula, and ensure their safety both when travelling to and from school and in the classroom;

(g) Undertake systemic reform of education at all levels, creating rights-based, gender-sensitive curricula, infrastructure and pedagogy designed to promote equality for all students and the rights of all students to quality education at all levels;

(h) Develop public policies that focus on the use and development of information and communications technologies. Technology infrastructure and inclusive public access must be enhanced as a concrete means to empower societies;

(i) Work to expand the innovative sources of financing for development through the reduction of military spending and redirecting the funds for the implementation of social protection floors. The adoption of a financial transaction tax with the revenue directed specifically for development would provide a long-term, stable and accountable source of revenue for developing countries.