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Statement submitted by Movement for a Better World, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The psychosociological makeup of a particular culture is one of the main aspects leading to the advancement of innovations, scientific or technological. The reason for that is that culture is based on tradition. It offers security; it is what people rely on for their livelihood and relationships. When these aspects are threatened, people react adversely to whatever is introduced and to what is imposed without their participation.

Any process of change requiring the acceptance of and adoption by a particular human group must be examined by the group, which has been previously informed and exposed to all the advantages and disadvantages. People have to be active participants in the proposed change, if they are to own it; the particular culture will then be in a position to adopt the innovation and promote its dissemination.

For any culture, innovations and scientific and technological breakthroughs will tend to be suspicious until proven trustworthy. A given culture will mostly trust evidence transmitted through word of mouth from other cultural collectives, rather than through the media. Where information is readily accessible, people are less vulnerable to believing that which comes from unknown sources.

In 1955, John Rock and Gregory Pincus visited Puerto Rico, and deemed it perfect for carrying out human trials of contraceptive pills. The subjects of the trials were poor women who were told that the pills would allow them to prevent pregnancies but who were never informed of the risks involved, or of the fact that they were participating in a trial. Today, such a thing would not readily happen owing to the availability of information and the existence of strict policies for such trials.

Innovations, such as infrastructure for the provision of clean water or alternative energy sources, require information to be transmitted so that the population is aware of the advantages and risks.

A shantytown was destroyed and the uninformed population was relocated to what was expected to be decent housing with adequate infrastructure. In the end, the people were not happy in their new homes; they preferred their previous shack, which had a small piece of land where they could grow plants and have a few chickens. Now, they had only rented cement and maybe a planter for flowers. They were not convinced of the advantages because the disadvantages were, for their culture, dire. The people abandoned the new town and squatted at a new site.

The Global Women's Water Initiative, a programme of the Women's Earth Alliance, works in 13 African nations to improve water supply through training and by funding for African women leaders to become water and sanitation technicians. The empowerment of these women empowers their communities. This initiative has been accepted and is promoted by the African nations where it has been implemented.

In these examples, culture becomes either an obstacle to or an enabler of sustainable development efforts. This proves that the psychological and sociological makeup of a group in a given culture must be taken into account, or else the effort is doomed to fail. On the contrary, if the community approves and accepts the innovation, that innovation will foster growth.
