Economic and Social Council

Commission for Social Development
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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: rethinking and strengthening social
development in the contemporary world**

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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.

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* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

Social development projects date back to the Colonial era when community-based projects emphasized social development. In India, Gandhi and Tagore were among the first social activists to launch rural reconstruction projects which aimed to address the problem of rural poverty at the grassroots level. One example of such a social development initiative was the Khadi movement launched by Gandhi. The Khadi movement had clear goals; it promoted rural self-employment and self-reliance, thereby improving India's economy. Though the Khadi movement was coined in the 1920s and was nationalistic in nature, the relevance of a social project of such stature inspires thousands of social projects in the contemporary world.

Currently, most social development initiatives in the contemporary world are initiated and executed as projects or programmes. Theoretically social development approaches have been debated for a long time, and success of social development projects have often been attributed to several factors including stakeholder involvement in project design and consistent monitoring and corrective actions taken as and when necessary. Today there are a lot of government and non-government agencies who are executing social development projects in different spheres of social development across all countries. But with a project-based framework for social development there are a number of problematic areas that need resolution for such projects to be really successful, and for their impact to have a long lasting effect.

The largest problem with project-based social development initiatives is that most of these projects are undertaken by different agencies, and they are scattered across different geographic regions (even within the same country). Project executives rarely interact with one another to share ideas. Within the current framework of social development, most social development projects work as silos and there is no integration across different development efforts by different agencies.

Social development projects are dependent on resources for successful planning and execution. Resources could be varied and may include funding, facilities, personnel, services, information and client referrals. This results in the project approach being driven by the amount of resources available, rather than a needs-based approach, with fundraising driven by the objectives of the social development agenda.

Since social development projects are usually initiated with the greater good of mankind in mind, the objective measurement of the efficacy of these projects is often not well defined. One way to measure outcomes of social development projects are to implement indicators for measurement of outcomes. For example, social development projects aimed at providing employment to unemployed single mothers can use employment rate, average wages, and statistics related to the 'quality' of employment as an effective measurement criteria.

However, over the long term, even if the impact of an initiative or project has been measured, the impact may not be long lasting, and therefore there is a need for a holistic framework in coordinating the efforts of development agencies around the world. Continuous monitoring, even after social development projects have been implemented, needs to be in place to assess the long term benefits of such initiatives. Hence, this framework for coordinated planning and implementation of a

social development agenda needs to be carefully designed to create an effective platform to attain the maximum impact by all social development initiatives.

Suggested Framework

The suggested framework to achieve maximum successful impact by social development projects should include:

a. **Statement of vision**

A vision statement needs to be created to formulate uplifting goals the subjects of development. A five-year vision including achievable indicators would be the ideal starting point.

b. **Guiding principles to direct decision-making**

The core values of the social development agenda should be clearly elaborated to guide, reinforce and support the preferred ways of developing the community.

c. **Implementation framework**

The development effort should lay out a framework for implementation that channels individual and organizational involvement, with continued focus on the objectives and goals.

d. **Resource Planning**

The development agenda should start with a cause and subsequently, funding resources should be identified to start with the planning of the actual design and execution of the project. The proposed model is different from the existing model that identifies funds first, and then provides an implementation framework based on the funds provided.

e. **Continuous development**

A holistic process of continuous development should be put in place with the active participation of the community. Guidelines and principles for continuous development must be put in place to garner long lasting benefits from a successful project.

f. **Community involvement**

A very important element of development is to choose champions from within the community to get buy-in from the community network. A generic community assessment tool or methodology with custom built capabilities can help to clearly understand not only needs and resources, but the underlying culture and social structure which helps the social organization in understanding how to address the community's needs and utilize its resources effectively.

g. **Resource Pooling**

Often the biggest hurdle faced by a social development project is funding. The need therefore is to create a holistic integrated framework for all social development projects to be executed under an umbrella wherein they are equipped with the

required support to function effectively. With an integrated system running coordinated social development initiatives, different projects can share and exchange resources, enabling them to attain faster progress in their projects, and avoid rework.

h. Continuous Monitoring

The development of a generic monitoring tool could be an answer to a lack of effective monitoring thereby reducing the impact of the overall project. Periodic collection of data, starting at the beginning of the project, is a crucial step in monitoring progress and assessing measurement indicators and overall effectiveness of programs. The continuous monitoring process is crucial in ensuring that the project stays focussed on its goals and effectively assesses progress and achievements.

Summary

Strengthening social development in the contemporary world may require revisiting certain current practices that may be hampering the efficacy of such projects. The whole project-based approach to implementing social development may need to be revisited, and a more holistic approach to executing social development initiatives may be required. In addition to setting up an integrated social development framework, a step based approach may be a more plausible answer to the success of social development initiatives. Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle[1] can be used to identify the goal (putting down the statement of vision), formulating an ideology, defining success metrics, and putting a plan into action. The Deming's PDSA cycle is just one theory that can be used for developing a more integrated framework or platform for social development projects. However there could be other approaches which take into consideration the importance of having a built-in framework that will support new and existing social development projects and programs to reach their full potential — without having to be shut down as yet another failed initiative due to resource constraints or community support constraints. Enabling fundraising groups to closely monitor and check the progress of such initiatives, and enable new ventures to replicate processes already learnt and practiced across boards will help to strengthen development in the contemporary world.

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[1] The W. Edwards Deming Institute, (2015), The Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle, www.deming.org/theman/theories/pdsacycle.