



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 November 2016

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-fifth session

1-10 February 2017

**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 Asociación Nacional de Estudiantes de Ingenierías Industrial, Administrativa y de Producción, 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

Empowering rural communities through education: A course of action for sustainable social development

Poverty is widespread, far more than we would ever want it to be. Our nations in all corners of the globe try to fight it in some way or another; some do it in the form of programs targeting a relatively minor group of their population, and others not so fortunate are overwhelmed in their efforts to fight against it, as there are few resources they can count on to bring aid to a vast disadvantaged population.

This is no secret, that's why the United Nations have made the fight against poverty a priority of their international policies. The United Nations Development Programme has worked with 177 developing countries and territories, bringing resources, knowledge and social assistance to said places. Their work is commendable and we think, it could be further strengthened, through massive education programs aimed at the poorest people and those with unequal access to opportunities: the rural society.

We firmly believe that a transformation through knowledge transfer for the rural areas of our world would not only benefit their inhabitants in the short term, but it will also help with another big challenge the world faces now and is expected to face in the future; the overconcentration of the population in the big cities, causing centralisation and scarcity of resources, underdevelopment of remote locations, and massive urban problems.

In most countries, the majority of the population is concentrated in urban centres — a direct consequence of a mass exodus from rural areas, whose uncontrolled growth has increased insecurity, social phenomena such as gentrification and community segregation, and poverty for a considerable part of our population.

If we focus on the reasons that drove people away from their rural homes and into big cities we will find out that the lack of employment opportunities, lack of appropriate healthcare, governmental abandonment, insecurity, lack of connectivity and lower access to education are some of the reasons; we cannot as a society expect our disadvantaged citizens to conform with a lesser quality of life most of us might enjoy.

But that brings us another challenge. People coming from rural areas to cities face a clear disadvantage compared with urban populations. Their education levels are usually lower and of a lesser quality, which lowers their possibilities to get access to good jobs and continue their higher studies. This raises their risk of falling into poverty, in an environment in which they might not be adequately prepared.

We know there have been exceptions to this rule. Great and hardworking country people who overcame their difficulties and have achieved success in society, seeing eye to eye with people from urban centres. These situations however cannot let us forget that there are far more challenges to adapt and succeed in urban society for a person coming from the rural areas, and those challenges are in itself proof that actions have to be taken. Not to mention, that we should not forget the

reasons that people might have for abandoning rural areas are also manifestations of inequality.

All of this, coupled with the global need for a strong food production to deal with the future needs of an ever growing population, which requires efficient, fair and sustainable agricultural practices being adopted by the highest number of rural workers and companies, big or small, makes the development of the rural areas a priority from the sustainability point of view.

We in ANEIAP, as a student association, believe in the transformative process of education. We have felt it ourselves, as members of developing communities. Every day we see how the tools given to us by a formative process can turn into aids for the betterment our social constructs through diverse new focus points: entrepreneurship, continuous commercial and industrial improvement and technological advances. However, we are the fortunate ones. In our country, Colombia, only 47% of people have access to higher education, meaning education cycles above the high school level, including technical, technological and college tiers. Unsurprisingly, we can see how the more educated regions are above the lesser educated ones in almost all social metrics.

We do not want to ensure a good life for only half of us; we, as a species and a society, must strive to improve the general quality of life of all us to minimum acceptable conditions that allow us to enjoy the full extent of our basic human rights.

To close the equality gap, rural education is a firm step in the right direction. If we work together at the international and national level to deliver knowledge in the form of science, promotion of critical thinking, technological advancement and transfer, arts and overall stimulus to the creative and social aspects of our communities. Development will begin to arise not only from a few privileged societies, but from those new and strengthened communities, giving them tools to better understand and face their own challenges and necessities, while requiring less — perhaps misguided — intervention from the outside, all while guaranteeing access to public services and policies like urban inhabitants.

If we can help to bring rural society into a more educated, more artistic, more technological level, the government will not need to be responsible for creating all the job opportunities, nor advance the education culture, or unite their voices to express their opinions.

All of that will be achieved by the same people we can help right now. It will be the father who teaches his children the importance of education and hard work. It will be the young man in the plantation who will find his own voice expressing his feelings with a song, a poem, or political discourse. It will be the grandmother who realizes she can take better care of her land through technology and with that she will lead her whole family into a new, more efficient methods of production to help them with their economic and social desires.

We must help them grow into their rural communities as much as we want to grow in our urban ones, without a need for them to abandon their lands and houses. Moreover, we can help them by giving them the educational and technical skills to painlessly integrate with the urban lifestyle, if they so desire. Together, our nations

can give them the chance to achieve freedom we all want for ourselves, with no distinction.

That is why I'm here with you today, as a student, a witness, a believer, a dreamer; I want you to think about how we can reach the less reachable places, how can we use our nation's infrastructure for the benefit of those whose work we benefit from all the time. I invite you to create a new kind of countryside; one that does not feel like the part of our world we are not in contact with, but one that belongs to our collective mind, and heart, through the work and life of the people that lives there. Perhaps in time we could move out of our cities again, and return to new territories of uncharted opportunities, created through the brilliant minds of those who have lived there. Our united work through the creation of social development programs can create the widespread change in inequality we all wish for.

For us, as people, living in this world can be one of the most beautiful feelings. We feel it is only ours, like it was put there for ourselves to enjoy, it is a gift that has been given to us. It is both our canvas and our road. That same feeling is shared by every other person on earth. If we can make the world better for everyone else, we are making it for ourselves too, it is the common thread that unites us as a society. And it is our time to build our road together, a road where all of us can walk. It is our time to face challenges together and help each other as brothers of the same Mother Earth. It is our time to look ahead and realise that we all want to reach the same goal, and that goal is happiness.
