

54th Session of the Commission for Social Development

Contribution to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

11 to 20 July 2016

Drawing upon the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development at its fifty-fourth session that was held 3-12 February 2016 under the priority theme of “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”, this note highlights areas that are under the Commission’s mandate as contribution to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development scheduled to take place from 11 to 20 July 2016. The theme of the 2016 session is “Ensuring that no one is left behind”. The note also includes key relevant messages from three panel discussions that the Commission convened at its fifty-fourth session on: (a) the priority theme; (b) the emerging issues: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: moving from commitments to results for achieving social development, and (c) the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda in the light of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The note synthesizes key messages that came out of the Commission’s deliberations. The Commission for Social Development is the primary UN body in charge of the follow up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the World Programme of Action on Youth, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. Its work also focuses on strengthening the social pillar of sustainable development by ensuring that the implementation of these action plans and the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action contributes to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, through its normative work, the Commission seeks to enhance policy coherence among international, regional and national development initiatives and plans, greater system-wide coherence, and the imperative to pay particular attention to all members of society, including those who are vulnerable or marginalized.

(a) An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level

One of the key strengths of the Commission for Social Development is that it is the only Functional Commission that has in its annual programme of work, an agenda item that is specifically dedicated to assessing/highlighting the progress made as well as the challenges faced by social groups, viz; older persons, youth and persons with disabilities. The Commission also examines the topical thematic issues on the family.

During its deliberations at the fifty-fourth session, the Commission expressed deep concern that, while the extraordinary growth and progress the world has seen over the last decades has resulted in significant reductions in extreme poverty and other forms of deprivation, economic growth has not been inclusive enough. Consequently this has led to growing vulnerability among persons living in poverty and

other social groups that were already vulnerable or marginalized. Overall, growth has been accompanied by widening inequalities within and among countries, a situation that undermines the principle of ensuring that no one is left behind. Of great concern is that growth has left behind youth in all regions, resulting in high levels of unemployment and under-employment. To reverse these trends, the Commission reaffirmed its commitment to continue to prioritize and give prominence to the review and follow-up of the World Summit for Social Development, and to pay special attention to social groups such as youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, as well as the family. For example, the Commission has recognized how the role of and interlinkages between policies and programmes in the areas of poverty eradication, work-family balance, social protection programmes and the promotion of intergenerational solidarity , are closely linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

(b) The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges

The Commission deliberated on the critical role that it has to play as a forum for contributing to the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including fostering the exchange of new ideas and innovative strategies that can advance inclusive development objectives. In that regard, the Commission strongly affirmed its commitment to contribute to the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda by supporting the HLPF Thematic Reviews.

The panel discussion on “Implementation of the Post-2015 development agenda in light of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” recognised the urgency of including disability in international development frameworks that is reflected in the 2030 Agenda. A key message from this panel discussion is that the international community should make every attempt to place the rights, perspectives and wellbeing of persons with disabilities at the centre of all international, regional and national development efforts. A second key message is that persons with disabilities and their representative organizations must be involved in all stages of policy and programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. To ensure that these issues are taken on board during the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, there was significant support for the establishment of an annual multi-stakeholder panel under the Commission. Such a panel could discuss, share experiences and review progress in the implementation of the SDGs for persons with disabilities. Stressing that any other mechanism or entity should not duplicate the work done by existing mechanisms within the UN system that already address the social development component of disabilities, other proposals were also made for the creation of a standing forum on disability and development within the Commission, ECOSOC or under the General Assembly, creating a permanent space in which United Nations agencies, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other relevant mandate holders can analyse progress in the implementation of the SDGs, coordinate efforts to ensure coherence of approaches and support States in their reporting to the ECOSOC HLPF. It was also suggested that a high-level technical panel be established to discuss the implementation of the SDGs, ensuring the participation of all stakeholders, including persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.

(c) Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle

Social inclusion underpins sustainable development. Therefore, it is essential for all countries and the international community to pursue social, economic and environmental policies that support the social, economic and political inclusion of all members of society and promote inclusive sustainable development, in particular through universal social policies and redistributive programs addressing social injustice, systematic exclusion, poverty and inequality and sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth that contributes to the creation of full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The realization of the principle of leaving no one behind heavily hinges on whether inclusive institutions exist at the local, national, regional and global levels. Institutions can either perpetuate exclusion or they can play a critical role in promoting and achieving inclusion and hence ensure that no one is left behind. Therefore, it is imperative to promote institutions that are inclusive in order to level the playing field and provide all citizens with opportunities to participate in public life on equal terms.

(d) Areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required

As the Commission proactively aligns its work more closely with that of HLPF and ECOSOC, political guidance by the HLPF, particularly through decisions on thematic focus of its sessions, is welcome.

Another area where political guidance by the HLPF would be useful is a renewed emphasis on the need for integrated policy approach to implement the 2030 Agenda. The HLPF may wish to provide guidance on if and how the UN inter-governmental bodies should examine their agendas with a view to facilitate such an integration of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

(e) Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind

The Commission highlighted the fact that the three dimensions of sustainable development were inextricably linked and called for coherent policies in the social, economic and environmental domains. It also called for the creation of broad policy coalitions and meaningful partnerships, including the active engagement of a broad range of stakeholders.

The innovative policies and strategies that countries have implemented to achieve the objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action — eradicating poverty, generating full and productive employment and decent work for all, fostering social integration—have yielded positive results on sustainable development and are therefore very relevant to the ongoing work on policy innovation and integration in support of the countries' implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, the Commission recognized that meeting these objectives requires broadening equality of opportunity to promote inclusive, sustained, sustainable and equitable development, as well as reducing inequalities and tackling structural constraints to inclusion. To accomplish this, countries must promote a universal approach to social policy, including social protection floors, that is complemented by targeted measures

to address the special needs of those left far behind and must assure the provision of public goods and services such as health care and education. Countries should also pursue economic policies that affect both the pattern and outcomes of growth, and ensure that all members of society are able to participate in the formal labour market where full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, fair wages, including minimum living wages as well as equal pay for work of equal value, social protection for all, including social protection floors, social dialogue and a safe and secure working environment are the norm. Therefore, States must respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work in accordance with the International Labour Organization Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. They must also take measures to ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of growth to address inequalities and disparities, in particular through modernized, progressive tax systems, improved tax policy and more efficient tax collection, and protect the planet.