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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 Freann Financial Services, 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.



Statement

Empowerment is indeed a basic necessity to achieve poverty eradication, social integration, full employment and decent work for all. To be able to fully realize this objective, understanding the various parameters will be key.

Empowerment

Empowerment is closely related to the concept of participation, the definition of which also depends on different individual or organizational perspectives. Beyond the more narrow understanding of participation as a means (to increase efficiency and effectiveness of development action, for example), it can be seen as an end in itself. Thus, the process of participation is important and empowerment can be seen as both a process and an outcome of participation.

Empowerment has been much debated in relation to the grass-roots level and linked to the concepts of dignity, self-esteem and a sense of agency, in other words an individual's capacity to act freely and make his or her own free choices. It has increasingly been recognized, however, that there is also a need to consider the social and political context, as well as the structural inequalities that affect whole social groups. Empowerment therefore involves addressing underlying structures that lead to the marginalization of certain individuals or groups.

Empowerment also relates to power, but the operational implications of working towards empowerment depend on how power is interpreted.

Different types of power have been identified: "power over" refers to the ability to influence and coerce; "power to" refers to the ability to organize and change existing hierarchies; "power with" refers to the increase in power derived from collective action; and "power within" refers to an increase in individual consciousness.

Poverty eradication

Poverty is one of the most challenging and enduring problems of the world. If we are to take a critical look inside and around us, it is necessary to ask the question "How do we define poverty?" In official circles, the prevailing view is that poverty is an absolute concept.

Poverty is, however, a multifaceted phenomenon, defined (and explained) as a situation in which a person lacks the necessary capabilities and entitlements to satisfy his or her basic needs and aspirations.

Poverty is still widely misunderstood as simply a matter of material deprivation. But poverty is actually a human rights crisis because destitution is compounded by discrimination, State repression, corruption, insecurity and violence, which are defining features of poverty, much in the same way as the lack of material resources is. These are human rights problems and cannot simply be solved by raising income levels. That is why the solution to poverty lies not so much in enrichment as in the empowerment of people.

Social integration

Social integration stands for achieving a “society for all” in which every individual, each with his or her rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. A goal with broad societal appeal, it aims to provide equal opportunities for everyone irrespective of age, sex, race, ethnicity, caste, class, religious belief, cultural background or political affiliation. Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his or her choice, which ensures the right to equality. Also, no individual shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion or place of birth. Social integration is a process by which people build trust and relationships with political institutions, governmental actors and their community through participation. Social integration creates confidence, enabling widespread interaction, and increases equal opportunities along with social and economic mobility.

Employment and decent work

Employment is clearly influenced by global economics and policies, as well as local realities. The needs of communities and individuals can help or hinder people in accessing and fully exploiting employment opportunities. To achieve the goal of full employment and decent work for all, structural and attitudinal changes are required at the local, regional and international levels. Employment is a basic human right. It is more than merely being able to earn a wage to support oneself or one’s family. It becomes a door that opens up the chances to participate in and have some influence within one’s own society. Employment can open possibilities for social inclusion. Without decent work there is little chance of participating fully in society or of enjoying one’s rights and fulfilling one’s responsibilities. Central to the dignity of the human person is his or her ability to engage in work that reinforces that dignity and engage with others in shaping the life of their community and nation.

To promote the empowerment of people to achieve poverty eradication, social integration, full employment and decent work for all, there is the need to organize and raise critical consciousness through education and the provision of practical support to enable analyses of contexts, power relations and the denial or violation of rights, including analyses that challenge and change self-perceptions, and to mobilize with a view to engaging power structures and creating new spaces for engagement.

There is also a need to view people’s needs as rights that they can claim, to assist people in securing those rights (identified by themselves) from the State and to supplement the State only if and where necessary through service delivery.

The participation of poor and excluded people must be ensured so that project beneficiaries are not passive recipients but rights holders who take action in identifying their needs and the responses required to address them.

Attention must be paid to issues of power by analysing power relations, empowering poor and marginalized people and challenging those cultural, social, economic and political practices and structures that determine power relations.

In addition, it is necessary to deepen democracy at every level by popularizing democracy and promoting inclusive processes at all levels and by holding State and non-State actors accountable by supporting rights holders in understanding the

existing constitutional, legal and regulatory framework so that they can identify which rights are being fulfilled and which are not and use this knowledge to demand respect for those rights that are being denied or violated.

A key requirement for any escape from poverty and hunger is access to productive resources. For the rural poor, land and financial resources are of foremost importance, but technology, seeds and fertilizer, livestock and fisheries, irrigation, marketing opportunities and off-farm employment are also essential.

Enabling the rural poor to have access to land, whether through land redistribution, resettlement or changes in the nature of the rights and duties that underlies tenure, remains a crucial element in the quest to eliminate poverty and hunger.

With few exceptions, experience with providing credit to the rural poor has not been very successful. Most commercial banks do not lend to the rural poor, limiting themselves to dealing with the urban, formal sector. State-run development banks have typically been expensive, loss-making, bureaucratic and accessible only to the non-poor segments of rural society. Foreign-aid funded credit schemes targeted at the poor have suffered from the same risks of deviation to the not-so-poor and have usually collapsed after the departure of the foreign funds. State-run credit cooperatives have often left only bitter memories for the poor, as clientelism, corruption and outright theft diverted the promised money. In short, for the poor, access to credit has proved to be difficult, costly and often ineffective.

Facilitating access to productive resources (ranging from land and water to infrastructure) for the poor is not a one-time event but, rather, an institutional process requiring a permanent adaptation to the changing circumstances of power, economics and culture. Without the participation of individuals in the implementation of programmes and without the establishment of effective organizations of the rural poor that act as countervailing forces to vested interests, it is unlikely that much progress will be made in increasing access by the poor to productive resources. Throughout the world, organizations of civil society have initiated promising actions in this field (access to land, management of common property resources, provision of credit and savings facilities, access to markets, etc.). These organizations have clearly demonstrated that they have the potential to play a crucial and innovative role in ensuring that the poor gain access to productive resources. Often, however, their actions have remained limited in impact and unknown to other people struggling with the same problems. There is a need to learn from these experiences, to see if they can be replicated and scaled up to reach the hundreds of millions of poor and hungry people.

When this happens, the growth potential could be realized, thereby promoting empowerment to achieve poverty eradication, social integration, full employment and decent work.
