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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 International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 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

We, the members of the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, engage on a daily basis with the most vulnerable people living in poverty in 22 countries. We seek to partner with them towards a life of dignity for all and support their efforts to move out of poverty, have decent work and live in an inclusive society.

Power within, power with and power to

We concur with the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights that “lack of power is a universal and basic characteristic of poverty” and that “poverty is not solely a lack of income, but rather is characterized by a vicious cycle of powerlessness, stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation, which all mutually reinforce each other” (see [A/HRC/23/36](#), para. 12).

Following a conversation with our constituents on the priority theme of the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, we present here a few of the many good practices on empowerment of people, implemented and narrated by our constituents.

Nangubo smallholder irrigation scheme, Kalomo district, Zambia

Nangubo dam, the only source of water in the area, was constructed to serve 18 villages and to try to alleviate the problem of water shortages. The dam was also stocked with fish to supplement the protein requirements of the community. Integrating fish farming with cropping and animal husbandry maximizes the use of resources and empowers rural households economically, enhancing household food security and improving nutrition. A specific objective of the scheme is to stimulate self-reliance and management projects at the community level. There are 72 farmers practising irrigation on a 12-hectare scheme and various crops are grown for consumption and for sale. The dam and the irrigation scheme have helped to increase agricultural yield, support the livelihoods of the community and improve food security, family nutrition and household income, increasing the ability of families to send children to school.

Clann Credo social finance scheme, Ireland

The social finance scheme delivers resources to communities and enterprises overlooked by conventional outlets and ensures that all investments produce a social gain or benefit. All funding recipients are assessed, first on their capacity to deliver meaningful benefit to either the people or the community that they serve and then on their ability to repay the loans. There must be a tangible social benefit for any community in which the enterprise is based: this could be, for example, improved childcare services, the creation of jobs in disadvantaged areas or the provision of transport for persons with disabilities.

Land tenure improvement and paralegal training for community empowerment, Kilusang Magbubukid, Philippines

The project helps the community to pursue its struggles for land and aims to develop skills for some of the people as local community organizers and others as paralegals of their own organization. This requires continuous paralegal clinics to

train the people as local leaders capable of serving and training their members and neighbouring communities to mobilize people in different activities that would directly or indirectly complement their efforts to regain their land. It also includes advocacy, media work, forging of alliances and networking.

Clemente Course in the Humanities, Campbelltown, New South Wales, Australia

This is an innovative university education programme that aims to break the cycle of poverty, inequity and social injustice for people facing multiple disadvantages and social isolation. Education in the humanities is seen as providing opportunities for the adult students who join the programme to reflect on the world in which they live and on their future life choices. It promotes broad re-engagement with society on the part of disaffected and marginalized adults by empowering them to realize their own strengths and abilities to reach their individual goals. It offers a community-based learning environment that is supportive of each student's personal, social and educational environment.

These good practices illustrate the three powers model (power within, power with and power to) referred to by Duncan Green in his background paper prepared for the expert group meeting on policies and strategies to promote empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all, held in New York on 10 and 11 September 2013, entitled "The role of the State in empowering poor and excluded groups and individuals" (see www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2013/EmpowermentPolicies/Background%20Paper.pdf). Mr. Green also notes that "power is best seen as an invisible force linking individuals and actors, in a state of constant flux and renegotiation" and that "empowerment of excluded groups and individuals involves the redistribution of that power".

However, our constituents have expressed a number of challenges, as follows:

- (a) People who are directly affected also have the passion and commitment to deliver effective outcomes. However, they are often not supported by those who hold the resources and the power to make their task easier and more effective;
- (b) Working in silos has not proved successful. Effective strategies are not in place for greater collaboration among local agencies, government departments and charities, among others. Networking among all those involved in local communities can deliver real change;
- (c) Cutbacks in government spending in times of recession must not view only those agencies working with the vulnerable in society as priority targets. Too much emphasis is placed on developing the economy of the country to the detriment of creating a fair and just society;
- (d) Having programmes available is of no benefit if people are unable to gain access to them owing to inadequate transport or childcare, for example. Eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape will enable access to services;
- (e) The use of short-term programmes or "the pilot mentality" in the provision of services, stemming from a fear among funders that they will not be able to sustain support, militates against achieving long-term goals;

(f) People who avail themselves of social services often suffer from poor self-image and low levels of confidence flowing from constant dependence, denial and rejection;

(g) The provision of social welfare “handouts” for able-bodied adults, without having in place a local government structure that allows recipients to give something back to society, can perpetuate feelings of being “charitable cases”, damaging one’s sense of personal dignity and worth.

Arising from the experience of members, the following are our recommendations:

(a) **Frame the development of policy from the perspective of human rights.** Human rights need to be at the centre of all policy development. The implementation of Recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors of social protection of the International Labour Organization will be instrumental as a rights-based approach to promoting the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration, full employment and decent work for all;

(b) **Ensure consistency with international instruments.** The policies to be adopted at the current session must be informed by the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights adopted by the Human Rights Council in its resolution [21/11](#);

(c) **Consider the action or programme from all angles relevant to the user, especially ancillary issues.** Too often, policy leads to the provision of programmes, but the ancillary issues of transportation, childcare and materials, among others, are not taken into account, meaning that uptake is poorer, which is particularly unhelpful in relation to programmes designed to empower women;

(d) **Begin from the perspective of the user.** Every initiative intended to effect real change must engage users from the beginning, given that user-led policy development is more effective and efficient;

(e) **Include education and skills development to enable opportunities to be taken up.** Any policy on empowerment of peoples must also include the development of personal and community skills so that the people concerned can make the most of the opportunities and resources available. Improvements in skills must be appropriate to the needs of the person or the community;

(f) **Ensure that finance or investment brings social benefit.** To be genuinely beneficial, investment and finance must be monitored and assessed in the light of the social benefit outcome;

(g) **Use the concept of multiple benefits from a single action.** Coordination, coherence and collaboration among agencies and departments to use a major action as a platform to produce benefit across several strands of need in the community is commendable;

(h) **Ensure equal treatment for everybody, without discrimination.** It is vital to promote a change in the mindsets that presume that a two-tier system is acceptable. Strategies and policies worked out behind closed doors without consultation with and involvement of the user often prove to be less effective and a waste of valuable resources.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, International Federation on Ageing, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, Passionists International, Pax Christi International, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Salesian Missions, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, UNANIMA International and VIVAT International.