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Social development

Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/135. It provides an overview of the discussions held by the Commission for Social Development at its fifty-second session, with a focus on the priority theme "Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all". The report highlights effective policies and strategies for an empowering approach to policymaking, namely, an approach aimed at creating an enabling environment for people to empower themselves through comprehensive strategies to enhance the capacities and abilities of individuals and groups, ensure inclusive institutions and governance processes and promote non-discrimination. It also addresses the special needs of Africa and the least developed countries, progress made in the implementation of programmes related to social groups and social integration, and means to strengthen the social dimension of sustainable development. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for the consideration of the General Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1.   In its resolution 68/135, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the Commission for Social Development has primary responsibility for the follow-up to and review of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the question to the Assembly at its sixty-ninth session.

2.   The present report summarizes the discussions at the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, held in February 2014, with a particular focus on the priority theme "Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all". In its resolution 2012/7, the Economic and Social Council selected this topic as the priority theme for the Commission's 2013-2014 review and policy cycle. Empowerment is a dynamic process that occurs over the long term and is affected by national and local circumstances. While empowerment is a building block in achieving the core objectives of social development, poverty eradication, full and productive employment and social integration, such objectives also enable its realization.

3.   The first part of the report reviews policies and strategies for the promotion of empowerment. It also addresses the special needs of Africa and the least developed countries, as well as progress made in the implementation of programmes related to social groups and social integration, highlighting the situations of young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, families and indigenous peoples. The second part of the report focuses on the social dimension of sustainable development. It examines policies and strategies that can influence the social conditions and factors, or social drivers, that shape processes of change across social, economic and environmental domains to achieve sustainable development. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for the consideration of the General Assembly.

II. Issues before the Commission for Social Development at its fifty-second session

A. Priority theme: Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all

4.   Empowerment is a long-term process towards the effective participation of all members of society in decision-making processes that affect their lives. It involves various actions and actors in multiple areas. Governments play an essential role in creating an enabling environment in which individuals and communities can empower themselves to move out of poverty, attain productive employment and decent work and achieve social integration. Once empowered, people can become agents of change and actively participate in finding sustainable solutions to existing and emerging challenges. Thus, the empowerment of people is important both as an end in itself and as a means to achieve inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.

5.   All public policies have an impact on people's empowerment to some degree, be it the result of explicit policies or through the indirect impact of policy measures. While there is no single or universal set of policies and strategies to promote the empowerment of people, Governments can adopt an empowering approach to policymaking and implementation that enables the effective participation of all members of society. Such an approach should have two tracks: one aimed at equalizing opportunities and eliminating barriers to participation through comprehensive and universal policies; and the other directed towards reaching those who face the greatest challenges in escaping poverty and exclusion through targeted measures. These two tracks are mutually reinforcing and must be integrated into a single policy framework.

6.   Policies and strategies that focus on empowerment invest in people's potential through building their capabilities and foster stakeholdership through promoting civic engagement. As such, the process of empowerment can accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and support a post-2015 development agenda in realizing more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.

1.   Key elements of an empowering approach to policy

7.   The key elements of an empowering approach are: strengthening the capacities and abilities of individuals and groups to participate; building supportive public institutions that are open, responsive, accountable and transparent; and eliminating discrimination. Such an approach goes beyond targeting social groups; it is also aimed at fostering inclusive institutions that can create a level playing field for all.

8.   The extent to which individuals are empowered can be gauged by their capacity to actively participate in and contribute to all spheres of life — economic, social and political. This capacity can be strengthened, first and foremost, through investing in essential social services and social protection. Healthy and educated individuals are more likely to secure better-paid jobs, thus increasing their chances of upward mobility and broader participation in society. Individual capacity can also be strengthened through improved access to financial services, job and entrepreneurial skills training, information and communication technologies and knowledge management, and training in social mobilization and the building of partnerships or alliances.

9.   Moreover, the formulation and implementation of policies and strategies for people's empowerment must be based on careful social analysis and assessment of the factors that reinforce their disempowerment and exclusion. Expanding an evidence base requires timely and reliable data on such factors that are made publicly available and disaggregated by gender, age and other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics and the identification of measurable indicators to assess progress in promoting the empowerment of individuals and groups. Doing so would also require solid statistical systems to be in place.

10.   Open and inclusive institutions, transparency and accountability, respect for human rights, and impartial justice systems are fundamental prerequisites for an empowering approach to take effect. In particular, national and local public institutions need to transform their internal structures and mechanisms so that they can be more effective in facilitating civic participation, consultation and social

dialogue, creating partnerships with multiple stakeholders and supporting inclusive grass-roots organizations that represent disadvantaged or marginalized groups.

11. Lastly, non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all are critical elements of empowerment. Discrimination, stereotyping and social exclusion are major obstacles to the participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and individuals.

2. Policies to strengthen the capacity of people to participate

Investments in social services and social protection

12. Access to universal quality education and basic health care can serve as a pathway for vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals to move out of poverty. Social protection provides guarantees of minimum income support and essential services, which improve the health and education outcomes of poor households and enable families to mitigate risks. Such measures build human capital and can be a springboard for empowerment.

13. In the past decade, much progress has been made in improving enrolment in primary education. However, there remain significant gaps in retention and completion rates and in the quality of education students receive. Furthermore, access to secondary and tertiary education continues to be a challenge in many countries. Additional efforts should be made to enhance the quality of learning and improve retention and completion rates through such measures as increasing the number of qualified teachers; strengthening school management; standardizing curricula; reducing direct and indirect costs related to education (namely, fees for textbooks, school uniforms, lunch and transportation); providing financial or in-kind support for vulnerable families; improving safety during students' travel to and from schools; and providing informal and vocational education and distance learning at affordable costs.

14. Civic education is crucial for enhancing people's capabilities, since it builds awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities and enables informed decision-making through the provision of key information on public policies and priorities, including budget allocations and spending. Civic education can be provided through formal and informal education and in partnership with civil society organizations.

15. Investments in public health not only improve access to basic health-care facilities, but also reduce future financial and human costs such as malnutrition, maternal and child mortality, the incidence of communicable and non-communicable diseases and endemics, and absenteeism or leaving school or jobs owing to ill health. Such investments enable people to lead more healthy and productive lives. Poor health during early childhood negatively affects learning outcomes, which decreases the chances of obtaining decent work and, therefore, of moving out of poverty later in life. Recognizing the importance of basic health care for inclusive and sustainable development, a growing number of countries are undertaking comprehensive health reform to achieve universal health coverage.[1]

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[1] See the statement of the President of the World Bank at the Global Conference on Universal Health Coverage for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, held in Tokyo in December 2013; available from http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/12/06/political-leadership-universal-health-coverage-world-bank-japan.

Knowledge-sharing on successful policies and approaches should be promoted to assist Governments that seek to design universal health-care systems.

16.   Social protection mitigates the negative impact of economic and social shocks and disasters and prevents citizens from falling into poverty with the provision of temporary or long-term support, in some cases, to sustain livelihoods. In some countries, social protection includes conditional or non-conditional social transfers to targeted populations aimed at addressing the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion. Realizing the potential benefits, many developing countries have been building or strengthening their social protection systems or programmes. Many social transfer programmes have a built-in component for investing in human capabilities; such programmes are conditioned on school attendance and regular health check-ups or on participation in vocational or skills training. The success of these schemes in breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and promoting empowerment depends significantly on the availability of quality social services and on their capacity to cope with increasing demand.

Improving access to decent work and other productive assets

17.   Decent jobs not only generate income; they also provide a space for social interaction and recognition and serve as a source of dignity. As such, they are a key means to the empowerment of people. Merely engaging in work does not necessarily result in improved quality of life. In fact, the majority of people living in poverty are engaged in subsistence agriculture or low-skilled and low-wage jobs with poor working conditions. In order to promote empowerment through work, it is not enough to create more and better jobs;, various interventions are needed to improve access to decent work, including: reviewing and amending labour laws and regulations; revising labour market policies, for example, to support a minimum wage, collective bargaining, or financial and tax incentives for productive investment in small and microenterprises; better aligning labour market policies with macroeconomic and social policies; promoting social dialogue; incentivizing actors in the informal sector to improve working conditions; and supporting member-based organizations, such as cooperatives.

18.   Other productive and material assets, such as land, housing and financial services, are essential in enabling people to withstand shocks, expand their options and emerge from poverty. In particular, there is a need for policies to provide and secure access to and tenure over land and related resources, especially for smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples. Financial inclusion is another important strategy for empowering people. The majority of people living in poverty are outside the reach of the formal banking system and therefore do not have easy and affordable access to credit. World Bank data show that close to 60 per cent of adults in developing countries, including 77 per cent of adults living on less than $2 a day, are unbanked.[2] Greater efforts must be made to expand access to a broad range of financial services, including community-based savings, credit, micro-insurance, rural finance and mobile banking, and to improve financial literacy and management for more productive use of such services. At the same time, more attention should be focused on improving financial governance and accessibility, including through the promotion of responsible and sustainable lending practices by a range of financial

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[2] See the World Bank Global Financial Inclusion (Global Findex) Database available from http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/global-findex (accessed on 30 June 2014).

service providers, such as commercial banks, financial cooperatives, microfinance institutions or community-based organizations, in support of productive enterprises and the development of human capital.

Enhancing access to information and communication technologies

19.   Information and communication technologies have been recognized as a powerful tool to empower people, promote participation, eradicate poverty and achieve people-centred, inclusive and sustainable development. According to the International Telecommunication Union , at the end of 2014, there will be almost 3 billion Internet users worldwide (two thirds of whom will be in developing countries) and almost 7 billion mobile cellular subscriptions (3.6 billion of which will be in the Asia-Pacific region).[3] Many innovative development initiatives at both the national and grass-roots levels have successfully tapped into the potential of information and communication technologies, ranging from cash transfer programmes to monitoring and early warning systems for disasters. However, there remains a significant and multidimensional digital divide, with gaps in both connectivity and use between, for example, the haves and have-nots, rural and urban areas, and men and women. In addition to the need for increased investment in information and communications technology infrastructure and skills development, Governments should ensure universal coverage of information and communications technology broadband and formulate information and communications technology policies that pay particular attention to the needs of specific social groups (namely, young persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, women, people living in poverty and migrant workers).

3.   Building inclusive public institutions to facilitate the participation of people

20.   The degree to which empowerment strategies can be effectively implemented depends on the existence of inclusive and effective institutions. Inclusive public institutions uphold their values and commitments to serve all people, regardless of their background, and facilitate their participation. Active participation and civic engagement, in turn, enhance the legitimacy of institutions and build trust in them, which serves as a foundation for a cohesive society.

21.   Participation is critical for empowerment for various compelling reasons. Through participation, people become better citizens by gaining civic and political knowledge, developing greater awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and assuming ownership and control over the betterment of their own lives. Over time, people gain confidence and skills, which act as a catalyst for further participation, in turn leading to broader and more structural change. Lastly, participation brings new perspectives and innovative ideas and approaches into policymaking and implementation processes, while providing a sense of belonging, recognition, social identity and dignity.[4]

22.   Broad-based participation, however, is unlikely to take root in the absence of inclusive and effective institutions. Bureaucracies or institutional resistance to

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[3] See http://www.itu.int/net/pressoffice/press_releases/2014/23.aspx#.U5h9SPl5PQI.

[4] See the presentation prepared by John Gaventa for the high-level panel discussion on promoting the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all at the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development. Available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csocd/2014/JohnGaventa.pdf.

change may discourage grass-roots participation. Similarly, when active participation does not produce timely and tangible results, people may lose trust, confidence or resources in the process, leading to disenchantment and, ultimately, disempowerment. It is therefore important to understand how institutions behave and function. Many existing institutions may not be equipped with adequate mechanisms and capacities to facilitate participation. To promote people's empowerment, it is necessary to transform the culture of institutions and strengthen their capacities, as appropriate.

23. Institutional capacities can be strengthened in such areas as organizing and facilitating broad-based civic participation through, for example, periodic consultations, public hearings, town hall meetings and social dialogue; alliance- and partnership-building; evidence-based policymaking; information- and knowledge-sharing; and building the capacity of vulnerable groups and communities to enable their effective participation. Further, it is important to engage various stakeholders and institutions across sectors in promoting inclusive and sustainable visions, goals and processes and in developing their social capital capacities.

24. Social mobilization efforts, often initiated at the grass-roots level, have had success in changing mindsets and behaviour and creating a greater sense of responsibility among citizens. It should be noted that, when supporting grass-roots initiatives, it is generally more effective to foster, strengthen and build links with existing collective associations and social movements than to create new spaces and mechanisms for participation. Modern technologies such as broadband and mobile technologies and social media networks have great potential to enhance the ability of public institutions to reach out to a wider public.

25. Lastly, strong institutional transparency and accountability mechanisms are also critical in building the support and engagement of various stakeholders. Accountability can take a number of different forms, such as answerability (the right to a response and the obligation to provide one) and enforceability (the capacity to ensure that an action is taken, and access to mechanisms for redress when accountability fails). Accountability mechanisms include clear administrative rules and procedures, legal frameworks, oversight institutions, auditing and other checks and balances, including citizen engagement, to ensure that public institutions are responsive, that policies are implemented effectively and that resources are available for the adequate provision of quality services.

26. Public institutions are accountable for making available relevant information that affects people's lives, such as that related to public policy, planning, budgeting or statistical data. Such information should be disseminated via information and communication technologies, to the extent possible, to ensure its timely reach and enable citizens to make informed decisions. Increased participation and civic engagement will, in turn, enhance the transparency and accountability of institutions. To guarantee the right to information, some Governments have enacted legislation and regulations (for example, India's Right to Information Act, 2005) and set up institutional frameworks to support them. People's empowerment through access to information, in turn, is supportive of monitoring mechanisms that hold institutions accountable.

4. Eliminating discrimination and exclusion

27. Another aim of an empowering approach is to eliminate barriers to participation. Concerted efforts should be made to combat discrimination in all its forms, including through harmonizing international human rights norms and standards with national policy and legal frameworks, including through amending and/or eliminating discriminatory laws and practices both in formal and informal justice systems; improving coverage of civil registration systems; enhancing legal awareness and literacy among vulnerable and marginalized groups and individuals regarding their rights (namely, access to justice, land and financial services; property rights; and rights to inheritance) and responsibilities as citizens; undertaking targeted or special measures, such as quota systems, to reach excluded or disadvantaged groups, in addition to universal measures; providing guidance and training to public service providers to effectively tackle discrimination; and identifying social norms, attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes that create asymmetries of power and result in discrimination, and strengthening advocacy aimed at transforming them.

28. Registration of citizenship is particularly important as an entry point to the elimination of discrimination and exclusion. Effective civil registration systems that provide legal identity and enable people to claim their rights should be established. Every effort should be made to identify and remove barriers to civil registration, including through information campaigns and registration drives.

B. Special needs of Africa and the least developed countries

1. Special needs of Africa

29. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) continues to play a pivotal role in guiding the development priorities of Africa and its people. Substantial progress is being made to improve social development outcomes across the continent and to enhance the performance of the agricultural sector and investment in infrastructure and energy. NEPAD also continues to play a pivotal role in improving governance on the continent. Combined, improvements in all of these priority areas of NEPAD are strengthening Africa's pursuit of inclusive and transformative development and the promotion of durable peace. Looking ahead, these efforts will be reinforced by the proposed Africa Union Agenda 2063, the goal of which is to guide continental transformation for the next 50 years by boosting economic growth and advancing social development, citizen empowerment and African integration.

30. Although Africa's economic growth has declined from its 2012 rate of 5.7 per cent, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2014* of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat projects that the continent's economy is expected to grow by 4.2 per cent in 2014 and 5.1 per cent in 2015. This means that Africa's growth rate is still almost twice as high as the global average. This growth has been underpinned by strong demand for African commodities, a supportive macroeconomic policy environment, and increasing consumption and investment. However, many African countries have not been able to make the growth inclusive. Gender disparities in employment persist along with widespread unemployment, as well as underemployment and low wages. Inequality within and across countries also continues to worsen.

31.   Some progress has been made in reducing poverty. The proportion of people in sub-Saharan Africa living on less than $1.25 a day stood at 48.5 per cent in 2010, down from 56.5 per cent in 1990.[5] To further reduce poverty and create opportunities for all to have decent livelihoods, growth in Africa needs to be translated into job-rich growth. For growth to be equitable, sustained and inclusive, it must, for example, curtail the rise in the number of educated young people, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, as well as women, who are either unemployed or underemployed. In addition to national efforts, international cooperation and support are also necessary to make Africa's development more sustainable and inclusive, in particular through reducing Africa's debt burden and the transaction costs of sending remittances and through curtailing the loss of investment capital and revenue through illicit financial flows.

32.   Greater efforts need to be undertaken to bring people, in particular young people and other vulnerable social groups, into gainful and productive employment on a large scale. The International Labour Organization estimates that three out of four workers in sub-Saharan Africa are engaged in vulnerable forms of employment.[6] Addressing this situation requires sustained investments in labour-intensive sectors, increasing the productivity and growth of the agricultural sector, and scaling up industrialization, intra-African trade and strategic participation in global value chains in manufacturing and services. African countries also need to continue to consolidate and further invest in an educated and healthy labour force. This entails investing in technical and vocational skills development and lifelong learning, strengthening education systems at all levels, improving health outcomes, in particular with respect to maternal and child health, and ensuring the provision of basic social protection.

33.   To redouble their efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger and to ensure that poverty eradication remains the top concern of African countries, African Heads of State declared 2014 the Year of Agriculture and Food Security in Africa, marking the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme. The purpose of the programme is to transform agriculture in the continent by harnessing opportunities for inclusive growth and sustainable development in order to ensure shared prosperity and improved livelihoods for all. Since its adoption, the imperative of investment in African agriculture has remained high on policy agendas at the national, regional, continental and global levels. More importantly, agricultural performance has improved. Over the past decade, annual agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaged nearly 4 per cent, well above growth rates for the previous decades.

34.   This improved performance, however, has not made a major dent in levels of poverty and food insecurity on the continent. Many countries, in particular in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, still face major challenges in feeding their citizens. In fact, sub-Saharan Africa will not meet the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015. Despite modest progress in reducing levels of undernourishment in recent years, the subregion still

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[5] See the PovcalNet online poverty analysis tool of the World Bank Development Research Group (2014). Available from http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/index.htm?1,0 (accessed June 2014).

[6] International Labour Organization, *World of Work Report 2014: Developing with jobs* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2014).

has the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the world.[7] The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that 24.8 per cent of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa (or 222.7 million people) was undernourished during the period 2011-2013.[8] Moreover, the absolute number of food insecure people in the subregion is projected to increase from 357 million in 2012 to 411 million in 2022.[9]

2. Special needs of the least developed countries

35. The least developed countries have maintained a moderate recovery from the global economic crisis, with an aggregate growth rate of 5.6 per cent in 2013. Although growth increased 1.3 per cent from the previous year, just 11 countries met or exceeded the annual aggregate growth level from the period 2001-2010 of nearly 7 per cent. Extreme poverty continues to be pervasive. Based on data for the period 2001-2010, the proportion of people in the least developed countries living below the $1.25 poverty line was 50.8 per cent (see A/69/95-E/2014/81, annex, table 1). The progress that was made towards realizing poverty and other development objectives occurred where high growth rates were sustained. It will therefore be important to maintain the rates of economic growth achieved to date and to generate more productive and decent jobs in order to facilitate substantial advances in human and social development. As a group, the least developed countries face unique economic challenges on multiple fronts. In particular, they are disproportionately vulnerable to shocks and volatility in advanced economies and to the effects of climate and natural disasters.

36. Across social indicators, progress continues to be mixed. This is in large part owing to the fact that the least developed countries have much longer paths to navigate in order to achieve global development goals than other groups of countries and fewer resources with which to do so. At the same time, the populations of the least developed countries are rapidly increasing and straining the capacity of land, housing and infrastructure to support them. Moreover, there remains a great need for comprehensive and ongoing social protection systems to provide essential goods and services and foster resilience throughout people's life cycle. Although most least developed countries have in place some social safety net programmes and many have made efforts to broaden and strengthen the institutional frameworks of such programmes, the majority of schemes operate on an ad hoc basis and lack sustainability.

37. In the area of education, school enrolment rates are increasing and important progress is being made towards gender parity at the primary school level in many of the least developed countries. However, notwithstanding major successes in a few countries, there has been slower progress in improving completion rates. Moreover, advancements in enrolment have been shown to narrow at each higher level of education, including vocational and technical education. Despite improvements in

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[7] United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013* (New York, 2013).

[8] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development and World Food Programme, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2013: The multiple dimensions of food security* (Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2013).

[9] Stacey Rosen and others, "International Food Security Assessment, 2012-22", Outlook No. GFA-23 (Washington, D.C., United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, July 2012).

access to primary as well as secondary education and in youth literacy, many young people lack adequate job-related skills and are either unemployed or unable to find decent jobs.

38. While the proportion of undernourished people in the least developed countries has declined in recent years, success has been marginal. In the 2011-2013 period, approximately 252 million people experienced hunger. Nevertheless, five countries, namely, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal, the Niger and Rwanda, have reduced hunger among their populations both in relative and in absolute terms. Although steady progress has been made in most least developed countries in improving child and maternal health, few have achieved the Millennium Development Goal targets of reducing child mortality rates by two thirds and maternal mortality rates by three quarters. The incidence of malaria and tuberculosis, although high, continues to decline. HIV rates have also declined slightly, with greater progress having been achieved in reducing AIDS-related mortality.

C. Implementation of programmes related to social groups and social integration

39. The ranks of those who live in poverty or are perpetually vulnerable to it, who are unable to find employment or working in precarious and vulnerable jobs, and who are excluded from full participation in society, continue to disproportionately comprise members of historically marginalized social groups. In addition to comprehensive strategies to advance social development, measures that target specific social groups are also needed to address their distinct disadvantages and thereby help to level the playing field. An integral part of the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development is carried out through programmes focused on specific social groups.

40. Empowered, well-functioning families whose members all enjoy respect for their human rights are drivers of development. The year 2014 marks the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The preparations for its observance have centred on the themes of poverty, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity. Preparatory activities for the anniversary have been carried out at the national, regional and international levels, in particular, by non-governmental and community-based organizations. Research and regional and international reviews carried out under the preparatory process shed light on the significant contributions of family-focused policies towards poverty reduction, positive outcomes for children, better work-family balance and stronger intergenerational bonds. By comprehensively addressing intergenerational challenges, a family-centred approach to policymaking has the potential to advance sustainable development efforts.

41. The twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family has fuelled reflection on the current status and priority areas of family policy development. Family-oriented policies are largely concentrated in health, education, housing and care arrangements, with intergenerational focus gaining ground as well. Government policies have provided support and protection to vulnerable families through legislative measures and social protection systems, with a special focus on families with young children and households headed by women. Several have also prioritized

partnerships with family-focused organizations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders. Some States have adopted national family plans to guide cohesive family policy development, with some also taking steps to decentralize family services and programmes, such as those relating to cash transfers and child-care provision. However, the development of family policy continues to be hindered by insufficient research and sound statistics. In addition to improved data and indicators, the advancement of family policy calls for greater integration of a family perspective into overall policymaking, systematic long-term policy evaluation, and the development of a life-course approach, taking into account the contributions and needs of all generations.

42. Growing attention is being given to the need to promote and protect the rights of older persons. At its fifty-second session, the Commission for Social Development adopted a draft resolution entitled "Further implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002", in which it addressed ageism for the first time. The resolution recognizes ageism as a widespread prejudicial attitude that is both rooted in, as well as a driver of, age discrimination. In a parallel development, the Human Rights Council appointed a new Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons in May 2014. The Independent Expert is mandated to work in coordination with the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing and other United Nations bodies and processes and to examine the human rights implications of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action.

43. At the fourth session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, held in August 2013, Member States stressed the need to intensify efforts to implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. Agreement on how to approach such implementation, however, has not yet been reached. Whereas the Madrid Plan of Action envisioned the mainstreaming of ageing and the concerns of older persons into national and global agendas as a fundamental starting point to its implementation, progress towards such mainstreaming has been minimal or absent. Ageing issues therefore continue to be addressed in a fragmented way. This is underpinned by approaches to ageing and older persons in general that differ markedly by country and region, rooted, for example, in religion, the social welfare model or, increasingly, human rights. A human rights-based approach to ageing may provide a common platform around which old-age issues can be discussed and addressed and may also broaden the often narrow and entrenched perspectives on ageing.

44. Young people have dominated the global development agenda in recent times. In the wake of youth-led protests and demonstrations across the world, young people have been asserting their presence and are powerfully demanding more just, equitable and progressive societies. They are calling for a greater say in the governance structures of their nations and for more opportunities in employment and economic life. While young men and women are increasingly becoming powerful agents of change, staggering rates of global youth unemployment and underemployment continue to cripple their talent and drive. Against this reality, fully unleashing the potential of young people and engaging them in deciding the fate of their communities and countries is an urgent imperative. With one half of the global population under age 25, 1.2 billion of whom are aged 15 to 24 years, the "youth bulge" represents an unprecedented opportunity to tap into the talents and skills of young people in order to advance global and national development.

45.   In response to these developments, several initiatives have been undertaken to increase youth engagement at the United Nations. In 2012, following requests by Member States to enhance inter-agency arrangements on youth policies and programmes, the Secretary-General made working with and for young people a priority under his Five-Year Action Agenda. A direct outcome of this initiative was the development of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Youth. Grounded in the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth, the System-wide Action Plan on Youth is a blueprint that identifies key priorities of the United Nations system related to youth development and offers a strategy for enhancing collaboration among United Nations entities at the global, regional and national levels. With a focus on the thematic areas of employment and entrepreneurship, protection of rights and civic engagement, political inclusion, health and education, including comprehensive education on sexuality, the System-Wide Action Plan on Youth was formulated in consultation with young people worldwide, who will continue to be engaged in its implementation and monitoring. The first annual report on the Action Plan identified and evaluated progress, gaps and lessons learned. Also under the Action Agenda, the United Nations Volunteers programme collaborated with a range of partners to develop the United Nations Youth Volunteers modality, and the first-ever Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth has been calling for greater commitment to the development needs and rights of young people and engaging youth in the work of the United Nations. Since his appointment in 2013, the Envoy has focused on enhancing youth participation at the national, regional and international levels and on advocacy for and with youth, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, and harmonizing youth programming within the United Nations. In addition, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Division for Social Policy and Development, has undertaken efforts to further examine the topic of youth participation. In that connection, the Division convened two expert group meetings that explored youth participation in the midst of wider discussions on how best to ensure young people's active engagement in the development of the post-2015 development agenda.

46.   The High-level Meeting on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities, called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/124, was held on 23 September 2013 under the theme "The way forward: a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond". The meeting and its preparatory process included the participation of multiple stakeholders, especially persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. Recognizing that efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals have largely left persons with disabilities behind, the participants stressed the importance of ensuring that internationally agreed development goals are realized for persons with disabilities in order to achieve their full and equal participation in society. Also highlighted was the critical role of persons with disabilities, who are the world's largest minority, as equal and essential partners in achieving poverty eradication and other sustainable development aims.

47.   The outcome document of the High-level Meeting recommended that action be taken to ensure that national development strategies and efforts are disability-inclusive and contain disability-targeted actions. It also noted that the extent, quality and availability of data, statistics and indicators related to disability, although improving, remain inadequate, and stressed that greater efforts are needed in this

area to formulate a clear assessment of the situation of persons with disabilities and to track the degree to which they are benefiting from overall progress towards international development goals. Many Member States have undertaken efforts to strengthen the knowledge base on disabilities, including disability-specific surveys and the incorporation of the Washington Group short set of questions in censuses.

48. Accessibility as a cross-cutting issue is both a means and a goal of inclusive development. As such, the outcome document emphasized the importance of removing barriers of any kind to ensure that persons with disabilities can reach their maximum potential and achieve full and equal participation in society. In that regard, during the 2013 observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), the United Nations Secretariat inaugurated its Accessibility Centre to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in its work. The outcome document also underscored the important role of international cooperation and the mobilization of resources on a sustainable basis to mainstream disability in development at all levels.

49. Many indigenous peoples around the world do not enjoy recognition of their cultural identity, collective rights or traditional knowledge and experience persistent social exclusion, discrimination and human rights violations. The special theme of the thirteenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was "Principles of good governance consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: articles 3 to 6 and 46". From an indigenous perspective, good governance has at its root the right to self-determination in the political, economic, social and cultural realms, without which all other human rights cannot be fulfilled. Good governance fosters equality and the right of indigenous peoples to full participation in decision-making about issues that affect them and their communities as well as lands, territories and natural resources, including through the recognition of indigenous forms of self-governance and autonomy. With a regional focus on Asia, where two thirds of the global indigenous population live, the Permanent Forum highlighted the persistent marginalization of indigenous peoples through inadequate education and health-care services and encroachment on traditional livelihoods, including through involuntary displacement from and dispossession of their lands and resources. Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, poor sexual and reproductive health care and gender-based violence, especially in conflict areas. However, the region has also seen some gains in respect of indigenous people's rights and well-being in the form of legal recognition of indigenous status and culture in addition to ancestral land and natural resources.

50. In September 2014, the General Assembly will hold a high-level plenary meeting, known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to share perspectives and best practices on the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, with a particular focus on pursuing the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The World Conference is to result in a concise, action-oriented outcome document.

51. In order to fully realize a society for all, greater efforts are needed to establish a comprehensive evidence base for effective social policies. More and improved data and statistics disaggregated by sex, age, disability status and indigenous status are essential in order to devise responsive policies to foster sustainable development as well as to accurately assess the impact of such policies on all segments of the population. Sound data and statistics must be integrated into the post-2015

development framework to ensure that development is truly inclusive and equitable. Continued and strengthened efforts must also be undertaken to enable the voices, needs and concerns of all social groups, in particular those most marginalized, to be heard and responded to in the post-2015 agenda.

III. Creating pathways to inclusive and sustainable development

52. Further to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012, global attention has been sharply focused on how to achieve effective and balanced integration of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Broad agreement exists that sustainable development will underpin the post-2015 development agenda, with poverty eradication as its overarching goal and a more prominent place for environmental issues. However, to date, economic and environmental concerns have largely overshadowed the social dimension.

53. Strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development requires a focus on social conditions and factors that shape processes of change as a means to achieve socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development. These factors can be described as the "social drivers" of sustainable development. Understanding the social factors that drive or sustain development outcomes would allow policymakers to find sustainable solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges. This shift of focus, in fact, broadens the scope of social policy, which is necessary to tackle complex sustainability challenges such as those related to climate change, water and food security, energy, land use and disasters and to lead to more effective, durable, equitable and just solutions.

54. Social drivers involve three core elements, namely, social structures, institutions and agency, which are grounded in social norms and values. In making the transition to sustainable patterns of development, social drivers play a critical role. Social structures and institutions shape people's preferences, behaviour and possibilities and include forms of socioeconomic stratification (class, ethnicity, gender and location). Institutions include the informal and formal "rules of the game" that pattern the behaviour of people and organizations. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals and groups to influence change or respond and adapt to circumstances, including how they cope, innovate, organize and mobilize in defence of their interests, identity and rights.[10] Social drivers can either fuel or frustrate sustainable development, depending on the behaviours and norms that they uphold.

55. In formulating policies for inclusive and sustainable development that intend to transform the pattern of development, it is therefore important to address the structural causes, or social drivers, of development challenges. This involves greater involvement of social partners in decision-making processes, and the promotion of people's empowerment.

56. The imperative is for social policies to steer social drivers towards social justice as well as economic growth and environmental stewardship. They can influence transformative change through, for example, strengthening human capital,

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[10] United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, "Social drivers of sustainable development", Beyond 2015 Brief No. 4 (Geneva, 2013).

curbing inequalities and contributing to productive growth. It is in this way that social policies can enable more sustainable development outcomes.

Key policy areas

57. Several important policy areas in particular can influence the social drivers of sustainable development. These areas entail strategies to foster employment-focused macroeconomic policies, universal social protection and redistribution, equality both of opportunity and outcome, a green as well as socially fair economy, social and solidarity economy, and participation and empowerment (see E/CN.5/2014/8).

58. A singular focus on economic growth is unlikely to be inclusive or to result in a commensurate expansion of the labour market and opportunities for decent work for all. Wage or own-account employment continues to generate the bulk of income for the majority of the global population. In order to achieve people-centred development, macroeconomic policy must therefore have as its primary objective full and productive employment and decent work. In addition to strategies such as those that promote active labour market policies, infrastructure development, industrial policies and public works, greater attention must be paid to addressing the risks associated with informal and vulnerable employment and to promoting and investing in green jobs.

59. In order to be transformative, social policies cannot be limited to targeting vulnerable groups, but should serve multiple functions for people throughout the life cycle and incorporate redistributive measures to address inequalities. In particular, universal access to comprehensive social infrastructure, services and social security provides protection in the event of multiple contingencies, from unemployment to disability and old age, stabilizes aggregate demand following economic shocks, and strengthens capacities to transition to a green economy. In some cases, "eco-social policies" are striving to enhance the sustainability of environmental management and natural resource use through, for example, cash transfer and employment programmes and innovative resource mobilization strategies.[11]

60. In addressing the cross-cutting issue of inequality, which is rapidly gaining prominence on the global agenda, it is important to promote equality of both opportunity and outcome. Attention is most often directed at expanding opportunities — or example, through access to health care or skills development — which, in turn, impact livelihoods. Yet, inequality in outcomes also helps to define opportunities open to individuals, thereby perpetuating harmful disparities that can persist across generations, and requires that structural and discriminatory forces be addressed. Cohesive policies are essential to address both types of inequality.

61. Meeting environmental challenges such as climate change and land degradation requires a transition to a green as well as a fair economy. Some efforts to promote a green economy, such as through payments for environmental services or market-based allocation of environmental assets, have not consistently produced intended results, often favouring those who are better-off and disadvantaging certain social groups.[11] Comprehensive social policies are required to help to reconcile environmental sustainability with economic development with a view to enabling a fair and equitable green economy. More attention should be paid to addressing

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[11] United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, "Social dimensions of green economy", Research and Policy Brief No. 12 (Geneva, 2012).

factors such as institutional capacity, political will and power relations, as well as people's awareness and behaviour. In addition to facilitating the creation of green and decent jobs, social policy can, for example, reduce vulnerability to environmental shifts, encourage green production and consumption, invest in eco-social public works, and leverage the community-based livelihood and natural resource management systems developed by indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, forest dwellers and small-scale farmers, many of which are already aligned with green and fair economy.[12]

62.   Participation and empowerment are fundamental social drivers of inclusive development. Empowered people and groups can become agents of sustainable development. Participatory processes give people a voice and the ability to impact decision-making processes. Strategies to promote the empowerment of people are discussed in section II.A above.

63.   Social and solidarity economy provides an important means of empowering people through engagement in productive livelihoods and social organizing. It refers to forms of production and exchange of goods and services by businesses and organizations with cooperative and associative relations and forms of democratic management — such as cooperatives, associations and mutual benefit societies — that are driven by social and environmental aims as well as profit and that promote solidarity. This collective approach to economic activity serves as a viable means to achieve decent work, meet demand, improve environmental protection and broaden capabilities through skills, organizing and opportunities, all of which further development. At the same time, social and solidarity economy has demonstrated significant resilience during economic downturns, thereby reducing the vulnerability of individuals and groups.

64.   Under the agenda item on emerging issues, the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development addressed the social drivers of sustainable development. The Commission discussed the need to examine sustainable development through a social lens in the formulation and realization of an integrated and inclusive post-2015 framework. Equality and social justice issues must be embedded in future development agendas. In order to meet the complex challenges to the achievement of a sustainable and equitable future, a paradigm shift that broadens the scope of social policy is required. This calls for transformative and structural changes at the national, regional and international levels and greater involvement of social partners in decision-making processes.

IV. Recommendations

65.   Policies and measures designed to reduce poverty, expand decent work and achieve social integration and those directed at promoting the empowerment of people are mutually reinforcing. An empowering approach to policymaking requires both comprehensive strategies and group-specific approaches. Once empowered, individuals and communities will become agents of change in advancing inclusive and sustainable development.

66.   In order to accelerate progress towards the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and other social development goals and

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[12] See www.unrisd.org/social-drivers-note.

to strengthen the social pillar of sustainable development, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations:

- **Governments should consider adopting a policy approach that will empower individuals through investing in, inter alia, education, vocational skills and health; enhancing institutional accountability, transparency, responsiveness and capacity to facilitate effective participation; and eliminating discrimination. To that end, Governments should:**

  - **Invest in social protection and essential social services and improve access to decent work and to information and productive resources, such as information and communication technologies, financial services, land and property, as a means of empowering people**

  - **Eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices and other barriers to participation, including through the establishment of effective civil registration systems, to enable equal access to justice and public services and equitable access to assets and opportunities**

  - **Enhance institutional transparency and accountability mechanisms to garner the support of various stakeholders and strengthen institutional capacity to facilitate broad-based civic participation through periodic consultations, public hearings, town hall meetings and social dialogue**

  - **Strengthen capacities to gather, and analyse and make widely available, high-quality, timely and reliable data, disaggregated by, to the extent possible, sex, age, rural/urban location, ability/disability, income, race/ethnicity and indigenous status, in order to enable social analysis and impact assessments as well as inclusive policymaking and monitoring processes**

  - **Enhance policy coherence and coordination across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, with poverty eradication and the promotion of decent work as central objectives; give priority to employment creation and the expansion of social protection in national policymaking.**

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