



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

#### Fifty-second session

11-21 February 2014

**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 Treasureland Health Builders, 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**

### **Introduction, objective and purpose**

There is a need to progressively sustain effective and efficient systems that will reduce the level of poverty among vulnerable groups, paying special attention to the full integration of persons with disabilities into all poverty alleviation programmes. Programmes for economic, social and political empowerment must be promoted. When the capacity of persons with disabilities is built, they will seek to further their rights and benefits, just as other groups in society.

It is therefore expected that, after the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, there will be positive benefits and effective, practical policies that will change the lives of persons with disabilities so that they will be able to confront the appalling economic situations that they face. They will have an alternative to begging on the streets as a means of subsistence and will be able to engage professionally in different skills that will improve their economic situation.

At the moment, however, persons with disabilities face socioeconomic exclusion and are completely excluded from virtually all poverty reduction programmes.

How can we promote empowerment and decent work for all in an unfriendly environment where there are negative attitudes, isolation, exclusion and stigmatization and where public infrastructure and learning institutions are hostile to persons with disabilities?

Obviously, for any country to achieve the Millennium Development Goals no stone must be left unturned and no call for exclusion must be made. If we want to achieve our goal, especially as regards the promotion of empowerment for all, then we must include the excluded.

Put succinctly, poverty reduction programmes have over the years been centred on and misconstrued as the exclusive rights of able-bodied people. Any move to marginalize a group because of its physical challenges, however, implies a deliberate attempt to arrest the progress of societal development, thereby killing the goal and vision of the United Nations set out in the Millennium Development Goals.

It is argued that excluded groups will continue to subsist and depend on the little fortunes of others, restricting the standard of living of everyone. That is not the case. Most disabilities can be managed and persons with disabilities can be rehabilitated or empowered to function independently, productively and progressively in society. We should not forget that some negative practices and trends in society tend to aggravate the impact of disability and worsen the conditions of persons with disabilities.

Therefore, it must be emphasized at this juncture that a paradigm shift from much-biased or narrow-minded programmes to holistic and all-inclusive programmes is expedient. The only option available to break the vicious circle is to integrate all humans or groups into all empowerment programmes intended to reduce poverty. Fair treatment must be given to all so that they are able to participate effectively as productive members of the nation or region.

**Overview of the issue as it relates to the work of the organization**

Treasureland Health Builders is a non-governmental organization working to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in Nigeria through the empowerment of families and the strengthening of communities as a way of improving socioeconomic capacity to gain access to better health care. It advocates and supports policies that enhance the well-being of young people and women in rural communities, including persons with disabilities.

Policies and services in the public and private sectors exclude persons with disabilities. Sections 15 and 42 of the Constitution of Nigeria, for example, do not function effectively to protect persons with disabilities from all manner of deprivation. Persons with disabilities have not been given opportunities equal to those of others in any social activities that will enhance their capacity to be productive and live above the poverty level. Rather, they have been cast aside, increasing their vulnerability to disease.

Nigeria does not have nationwide legislation that protects the rights of persons with disabilities. Lagos State is the only state in Nigeria that has enacted such a law. However, 65 per cent of persons with disabilities have not yet taken action to identify their status under the law. They have heard that the law has been enacted, but do not know what it actually entails.

However, Treasureland Health Builders is undertaking advocacy with the relevant stakeholders and raising the awareness of persons with disabilities so that they can rediscover and avail themselves of the opportunities given to them by the authorities of Lagos State through that law. Our work consists of mainstreaming the socioeconomic model of disability in the implementation of the law in the health, education and employment fields. We are also operating in collaboration with other disability organizations that are working with stakeholders in other states of south-west Nigeria to share best practices so that those states can follow the example of Lagos State in addressing disability issues and pass a disability law.

We at Treasureland Health Builders would like to see persons with disabilities being involved fully in the processes of drafting and implementing governmental policies that concern them, having been conspicuously excluded from the process of formulating and implementing strategies and policies aimed at creating public awareness and positive orientation and attitudes with regard to the realities and challenges of disability and the need to develop and sustain environmentally friendly behaviour.

**Specific examples of accomplishments by the organization and remaining challenges**

Treasureland Health Builders, among other international organizations, was competitively selected for the Empower Partnerships for Inclusive Communities Program, which is administered by Mobility International USA and sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State of the United States of America. It brings emerging leaders from around the world to the United States for an intensive programme designed to broaden their professional expertise to create disability-inclusive communities and advance disability rights.

Recently, we visited tertiary, secondary and primary health-care institutions to ascertain the current accessibility of their facilities. We advocated and facilitated

some changes that led to the employment of sign language interpreters in those institutions. When reviewing the facilities, we sought to identify system gaps, looking at what was already on ground in the hospitals, reviewing the physical accessibility, the network of departments, the level of independence within departments and how the entire system worked. We also looked at the role of social workers and at what more those hospitals could do.

### **A way forward: expectations**

At the end of the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, it is expected that there will be a paradigm shift in a way that will positively benefit and change the lives of persons with disabilities.

Treasureland Health Builders uses the platform of the Empower Partnership for Inclusive Communities Program to replicate and scale up activities emanating from that exchange programme in at least two other states in south-western Nigeria. We have already begun to engage in sharing knowledge with those states to advocate the enactment of disability laws.

Apart from constant advocacy, we would like to continue to raise awareness of socioeconomic issues arising from the legislation passed in Lagos State, using that platform to mobilize resources to sustain our activities.

Treasureland Health Builders will celebrate its tenth anniversary in October 2016. That anniversary will offer an opportunity to conduct a national evaluation and analysis of persons with disabilities in Nigeria.

### **Role of the media**

The media should create designated desks for the coverage and reporting of disability issues and activities. It should also sufficiently and effectively mainstream disability issues in programmes and adequately support enlightenment and awareness campaigns through documentaries and articles, among other things. It should also foster disability-friendly and inclusive employment policies and workplace practices.

### **Role of civil society organizations**

Civil society organizations should step up their advocacy activities with regard to disability-friendly and inclusive policies at all levels of government. They should develop strong and sustainable partnerships on disability issues among themselves and with the Government, the private sector and the media, in addition to deepening their activities on public awareness and enlightenment regarding disability issues.

### **Conclusions**

All stakeholders — the Government, the private sector and the media, among others — must take the action necessary to reduce and/or remove all attitudinal, institutional, environmental and social barriers that aggravate the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. These actions must seek to rehabilitate, re-empower and reintegrate persons with disabilities into mainstream society so that they can live independently, just as other citizens. They must support disability-friendly and inclusive policies.