



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 November 2013

Original: English

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 International Movement ATD Fourth World, 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

Eradicating extreme poverty through empowerment and participation

Introduction

Despite real progress in eradicating poverty in some regions in recent years, the 2013 multidimensional poverty index shows that 1.6 billion people in the 104 countries analysed are still living in multidimensional poverty, defined as multiple and simultaneous deprivations, at the individual level, in the areas of health, education and living standards. The evidence shows that we are failing to reach the most vulnerable populations, who are most affected by both environmental degradation and social and economic exclusion. Furthermore, development policies and projects have not had the desired impact on the target populations and many of them have even helped to isolate and displace the most vulnerable.

In this context, we welcome the focus of the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development on the theme “promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”. Empowerment, when it leads to effective and meaningful participation, is an affirmation of the right of every individual and group to take part in the conduct of public affairs. According to the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights adopted by the Human Rights Council in its resolution [21/11](#), empowerment is also a means of promoting social inclusion and is an essential element in combating poverty, and ensuring that public policies are designed to meet the expressed needs of the poorest segments of society and are sustainable.

Allowing people living in extreme poverty to contribute to the definition and measurement of poverty

A woman living in extreme poverty in Peru described her situation as follows: “The worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt; that they treat you like you are worthless, that they look at you with disgust and fear and that they even treat you like an enemy. We and our children experience this every day, and it hurts us, humiliates us and makes us live in fear and shame.”

While there has been considerable progress in the understanding of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon, there has been an overemphasis on traditional measures of poverty based on income or consumption. These economic dimensions of poverty are important and certainly easy to quantify, but they have produced only a partial understanding of poverty as they ignore elements such as discrimination, isolation, insecurity, violence and lack of a voice and of control, and fail to reflect the impact of combined deprivations on people’s lives. Consequently, policies and programmes designed to eradicate poverty lack coherence and coordination and are ill-adapted to the needs and realities of those living in extreme poverty.

In order to better capture the different dimensions of poverty, it is necessary to combine quantitative and qualitative measures; listen to the views of people living in poverty; and develop new measures and combine indicators. It is also important to gather (and for countries to report) disaggregated data that make it possible to measure and monitor success based on the lowest quintile in every country.

An enabling environment for empowerment and participation

All forms of discrimination, including stigmatization and prejudice, marginalize people living in extreme poverty from decision-making processes that affect their lives. Other barriers, including a lack of trust and different priorities among stakeholders and a lack of identity documents among the poor, discourage active participation by people living in poverty. These barriers also prevent people living in poverty from accessing vital public services in the areas of health and education.

In order to enable the most marginalized populations to participate meaningfully, it is essential to create an enabling environment that respects and protects fundamental human rights. And in order to design programmes and projects that mitigate the effects of extreme poverty, stakeholders must incorporate the knowledge of people who face different aspects of poverty on a daily basis.

Empowerment also requires a commitment on the part of those in power or authority. In this regard, the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, based on international human rights norms and values, are a practical tool for States to use in designing their poverty eradication programmes.

Promoting decent work and implementing International Labour Organization Recommendation No. 202

With advanced technology and rapidly expanding commercialism, the world has seen mass consumption of limited natural resources and decreasing labour protections. The international community must shift the focus of the globalized economic system to one based on human rights and that promotes decent work. Both public and private funding should be invested with a view to ensuring a fair income and a safe working environment for all, providing social protection for workers and their families and supporting workers in the informal economy. Labour laws and regulations should protect decent jobs and encourage a socially and environmentally responsible economy.

The implementation of Recommendation No. 202 concerning National Floors for Social Protection, 2012 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) would ensure that all individuals, including the most excluded, receive a basic level of social protection that would enable them to better cope with unemployment and shocks in the formal and informal labour markets.

A rights-based approach to social security and social protection seems to be the most effective way to ensure fulfilment of the right to an adequate standard of living; to eliminate marginalization and exclusion; and to create the necessary conditions for the provision of decent work for all.

Quality education for all based on cooperation among stakeholders

Quality education and training are crucial to helping people in extreme poverty gain the skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to society. Together with international, national and local partners, States should strive to remove all barriers hindering students' access to quality education.

At the local level, educational programmes should direct resources to reaching students living in socially excluded and impoverished communities by curbing the

secondary financial costs of education (transportation, uniforms, etc.) and providing financial support when required to offset these costs.

Schools should create safe and conducive environments in which all stakeholders — students, parents, education personnel and members of the community — can partner for the development of context-appropriate curricula which recognize that alternative pathways to quality education (i.e., apprenticeships and internships) are legitimate sources of knowledge. Every child should complete secondary education with the knowledge, including technical and vocational skills, needed for work.

Schools should introduce measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and stigma in the school environment. They should train teachers and school staff to understand the effects of extreme poverty and other manifestations of social exclusion and equip them with the knowledge to provide meaningful support to students who are struggling.

Promoting participatory good governance

As the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights emphasize, “States must ensure the active, free, informed and meaningful participation of persons living in poverty at all stages of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of decisions and policies affecting them ... Particular care should be taken to fully include the poorest and most socially excluded persons.” It is extremely important to ensure such participation so that people living in extreme poverty can contribute their knowledge and experience to governance processes. Political processes should enhance the meaningful participation of the most excluded through dialogues conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration.

Civil society organizations can play an important role in assisting people living in extreme poverty to take an active role in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and political processes. States and international institutions should ensure transparency at all levels of governance by means of appropriate accountability mechanisms, including independent inspectors general and judicial processes.
