

52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on Social Development

*Promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration, and full employment
and decent work for all.*



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The NGO Committee for Social Development Civil Society Declaration 2014

Introduction

The NGO Committee for Social Development and its Subcommittee for the Eradication of Poverty at the United Nations, New York, is a network of more than 60 member organizations accredited by ECOSOC and representing vast constituencies in over 160 countries. Some of our member organizations have been in existence for over 300 years and continue to deliver services all over the world, with a focus on education, health, social problems, and social services, especially among the most vulnerable.

As direct service providers, NGOs and other grassroots organizations live and work on a daily basis with people living in poverty. They seek to partner with them in overcoming inequality, and support their efforts to move out of poverty, acquire decent work and create/ live in an inclusive society.

We have listened, participated, and contributed to the many consultations and conversations among UN Member States, UN Agencies, Major Groups, and other stakeholders seeking to put in place a transformative post-2015 development agenda, and to

assure that such an agenda is seen as a moral imperative, based on core principles of justice and equity for people and planet. It is in that spirit that we offer these recommendations:

Recommendations

The NGO community recognizes the primary responsibility of governments to provide for their people. However, the NGO community and other sectors of civil society are eager to partner with governments at all levels—local, regional, and national—to assist in achieving the goals recommended here:

- Promotion of the common good through mechanisms that allow for the participation of all citizens for self-determination at the local, regional, national and international levels in the social, political and economic life of their societies. Their contributions to policy creation and the design, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of development programs will help create a real partnership for development.
- Implementation of the ILO Recommendation No. 202 concerning the establishment of national social protection floors, as adopted by the global community at the International Labour Conference in 2012, and the decent work for all agenda (including the “Global Jobs Pact”) as an effective means of enabling people to secure full employment and income security.
- Implementation of the recently adopted *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*.

- Promotion of the legal empowerment of all people, especially those living in areas of conflict, war, and/or extreme poverty, by ensuring the protection of their human right to justice, property, labor protections, and essential identity registrations and documents.
- Focus on ways to address unsustainable patterns of production, consumption, and resource/ worker exploitation, in order to promote sustainable social and economic development and environmental protection.
- Provision of formal and informal quality education for everyone, regardless of gender, across the lifespan—empowering people to become agents of change in their societies, while exercising their rights and responsibilities. Parents, particularly those living in poverty, should be recognized as *partners in their children’s education*.
- Implementation of public policies that focus on the use and development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) through the development of technology infrastructures and inclusive public access.
- Expansion of innovative sources of financing for development that prioritize public financing over public-private partnerships, e.g. the Financial Transition Tax, the Global Fund for Social Protection, the reduction of military spending, and the promotion of progressive taxation.

Empowerment

The theme of this 52nd session of the Commission for Social Development, *Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all*, resonates strongly with our constituencies.

Empowerment is acquired through effective participation of individuals and groups in decision-making processes affecting the social, legal, political, and economic dimensions of their lives. It is a key tool for the elimination of social and economic inequalities, as it is integrally linked to the protection of human rights of all people, the eradication of poverty, the promotion of social integration, and productive employment and decent work.

Empowerment gives people the ability to transform social systems themselves. In a socially integrated society whose core values are based on respect for human rights, equality, social justice, and sustainability, the common good is honored and people are empowered. The human person must be at the center of the development agenda, primarily through participation.

However, in the words of Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, “Lack of power is a universal and basic characteristic of poverty.” In its report to the Secretary General, ***Realizing the Future We Want for All***, the UN Task Force urges us to make globalization a positive force for present and future generations. However, its benefits at present are very unevenly shared. Moreover, the report states that persistent inequalities and struggles over scarce resources are among the key determinants of situations of conflict, hunger, insecurity and violence—key factors in impeding human development and the achievement of a sustainable development that benefits all of society.

Poverty and Inequality

Poverty is one of the most significant barriers to the empowerment of people, the achievement of universal participation, and the assurance of human rights. It impedes access to education, health care, proper nutrition and other essential services, thereby inhibiting people's capacity to utilize other resources to lift themselves out of poverty. As a multidimensional phenomenon, poverty can no longer be measured solely in monetary terms. Rather, there has been growing consensus regarding the link between these multidimensional aspects and extreme poverty, social exclusion and environmental degradation.

A concrete tool to reduce poverty and inequality is the implementation of national social protection floors that guarantee a minimum level of income security. A social protection floor is a critical investment in the ability of people to participate in the shaping of their societies and economies. Many national examples from developing countries have shown in recent decades that some level of social protection is affordable and feasible, with measurable positive impact.

While inequality is one of the greatest driving forces in keeping much of the world's population in poverty, poverty is exacerbated by resource scarcity, conflict, and climate change. Contributing factors to global poverty include the unsustainable patterns of consumption and production and resource/worker exploitation which threaten the very future of humanity. The time has come to clearly define the link between poverty, human rights, and environmental destruction — direct consequences of the over-use of global resources by the developed world.

Post-2015 Development Agenda

The NGO Committee for Social Development applauds the ongoing follow-up to Rio +20, and supports the movement towards establishing Sustainable Development Goals as the successor to the Millennium Development Goals. As agreed, these SDGs should be holistic, inclusive, participative, equitable and universally applicable. Progress toward their achievement should be measurable and monitored by inclusive societal processes, and all Member States must be held accountable for their appropriate implementation.

We welcome the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family observed this year. We note the opportunity it provides to revisit family-oriented policies as part of overall Post-2015 development efforts, and call on Member States to reaffirm the vital role that the family plays in social development. Governments should ensure that families are afforded the “widest possible protection and assistance,” as noted in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. A social climate supportive of parenting, which includes a focus on work/life balance, maternity care, and family related benefits, is essential for sustainable eradication of poverty and the development of flourishing societies.

We, as civil society, will take our place as key agents in fostering the global partnerships which will help to realize the often-repeated phrase, “**Leave no one behind;**” to overcome inequality within and between countries in the areas of gender, income, ethnicity and power; to ensure a life of dignity and well-being for all; and to treasure a sustainable Planet Earth as home for present and future generations.

Conclusion

As representatives of civil society worldwide, we believe that our recommendations and their appropriate means of implementation are a step in the right direction toward securing a “Life of dignity for all,” and safeguarding the integrity of the planet. However, all is dependent upon the *political will* to empower and invest in people. The question posed by Ambassador Macharia Kamau (Republic of Kenya) at the 4th Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals bears repeating – ***what would be the price of inaction?*** From the perspective of civil society, the price of inaction would be the continued irresponsible exploitation of people and natural resources, persistent inequality, poverty, injustice and ongoing conflict.

But it is not civil society alone which bears responsibility for the answer. Rather, it is a question that goes to the very heart of global governance, and the integrity of world leaders. All the weaponry in the world will not make our planet a more peaceful, secure place in which humanity can thrive without fear or want. While no one government can bring about the transformative change that is so desperately needed in our world today, all governments bear a measure of responsibility to seriously consider the options that we know are available to us—and this consideration must be done in light of the overall common good of People and Planet.

NGO Committee for Social Development

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