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Re-thinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world — the statement of ICSW at the 54th session of the Commission for Social Development.

*This issue of the Global Cooperation Newsletter is devoted to the 54th session of the **Commission for Social Development (CSocD)**. The CSocD is one of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, with activities aimed at the consideration of policy options and strategies to further implement the internationally-agreed social development goals. Every year ICSW actively participates in the work of the Commission, making both written and oral policy statements, as well as organizing side-events with various partners.*

In addressing the delegates of the 54th session, Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that the Commission's work affected 1.2 billion young people, more than 900 million older persons and 1 billion persons with disabilities around the world. Indeed, he said, the Commission has shed light on the role of proactive social policies in

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securing economic and environmental stability, with "enormous" progress in lifting people out of extreme poverty, boosting food security, advancing universal primary education, promoting women's empowerment and reducing maternal and child mortality. The full inclusion of persons with disabilities had critical importance in ensuring social protection for all.

*Apart from the ICSW written statement published below, we are also publishing the outcome document of the annual **Civil Society Forum** preceding the Commission. The NGOs participating in the Forum traditionally use this opportunity to explore more effective ways and means to strengthen social development. ICSW plays a leading role in the Forum preparation and takes active part in its work. The Editor*



Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations

The adoption of the aspirational and action-oriented 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development creates a window of opportunity for all stakeholders — Member States, civil society and the private sector to join forces in finding new solutions to the most pressing development challenges, including leading social policy issues. The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), one of the oldest international non-governmental organizations promoting



ICSW Executive Director and Special Representative to the United Nations in New York Sergei Zelenev delivers statement to the Commission.

social justice, social welfare and social development and dating back to 1928, fully supports the forward-looking efforts of the Commission for Social Development, aimed at highlighting new approaches to social development and its quest for new ways and means that facilitate the transformative steps required for shifting the world onto a sustainable footing.

The new policy space created for social development with the adoption of the Agenda and the shared understanding of the key concerns has to be explored and used at all levels, taking into account specific regional and country-level circumstances and variations between and within countries. While different approaches and tools are at the disposal of each country, in accordance with national priorities, the new forms of economic and social risks as well as poverty, growing vulnerability and insecurity, must be addressed in a consistent manner to ensure that the shared dream expressed by the international community that "no one is left behind" does not remain simply wishful thinking.

We believe that one of the best policy approaches for ending poverty, insecurity and exclusion, and building up resilience is to establish or strengthen social protection systems. In our advocacy efforts aimed at promoting social protection and in the technical assistance projects that we carry out at the country level, helping with the design of national systems of social protection, the ICSW approaches social protection schemes as investments rather than costs. We believe that social protection systems contribute to the eradication of poverty, enhance human capital and productivity, and help reduce inequalities. We firmly support the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors for social protection, and together with our partners in the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, which comprises more than 80 civil society organizations, we strive to increase awareness of the positive impacts of social protection floors around the world, engaging in dialogue at both the government and the civil society levels.

Recognizing the right to social protection as a human right has become an important part of the international development discourse. In this context we would like to draw the attention of the Commission to the recent Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights ([A/HRC/29/31](#)), where it is stated as follows (see para. 51): "It is difficult to accept that a State that has no basic social protection floor in place, whether so called or not, is meeting its most basic obligations in relation to the economic, social and cultural rights of its citizens and others". We completely share this position of the Special Rapporteur and appreciate his vision and efforts.

In its approach to social protection ICSW strongly supports the universalism that

has since the 2000s re-entered the development agenda. The preceding neo-liberal sway in policy-making and the package of market-led liberalization reforms with its emphasis on means-testing and selectivity in access to welfare assistance and social services, resulted in numerous hurdles in the administration of targeted schemes, with higher costs for social services. At the national level, particularly in the case of low-income countries, targeting was mostly ineffective in addressing the issues of rampant poverty and social exclusion.

A holistic approach to social protection financing should be considered, taking into account a financing mix that includes contributory and non-contributory programmes. Universal social protection includes adequate cash transfers for all those who need them, especially families with children; benefits and support for people of working age in the event of maternity, disability, work injury or for those without jobs; and pensions for older persons. This protection can be delivered through social insurance, tax-funded social benefits, social assistance services, public-work programmes and other schemes guaranteeing basic income security. ICSW believes that access to social protection, including basic income security and essential health care, should be guaranteed to anyone who needs such protection, taking into account specific national priorities and constraints. In this light, universal goals such as "social protection for all" are definitely following in the footsteps of already recognized international goals such as "education for all" and "primary health care for all". Achievement of these lofty social objectives is within reach if a national consensus on spending priorities has been established and if political will of the government is supported by society at large.

The ICSW takes note and applauds the joint statement issued in June 2015 by the heads of the two global agencies — the President of the World Bank Group and the ILO Director General — in launching a joint programme of action to increase the number of countries adopting universal social protection, and wholeheartedly supports such a bold initiative. We hope that these commitments help both organizations in shaping effective country-specific policy advice, facilitating national efforts to find the most appropriate and effective ways and means of social protection, while at the same time providing a tangible boost to interagency cooperation in this area. As noted in the above statement, the new 2030 Development Agenda “provides an unparalleled opportunity for our two institutions to join forces to make universal social protection a reality, for every one, everywhere”.

We believe that, in their turn the Members States working within the remit of the Commission for Social Development may wish to consider elaborating a draft ECOSOC resolution on national floors of social protection as a necessary step towards universal and comprehensive social protection for all. They should also take into account that, once social protection floors are established and become operational at the national level, the achievement of the core targets of SDG 1 (“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”) as well as SDG 3 (“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”) comes within reach. In such a resolution the governments could be urged, *inter alia*, in accordance with national circumstances, to establish social protection floors as quickly as possible and/or to maintain existing social protection floors comprising basic social security guarantees. These would be a nationally defined set of essential goods and services consisting of:

- a) essential health care, including maternity care, that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality;
- b) basic income security for children, assuring access to nutrition, education and care;
- c) basic income security for persons of active age, with particular attention to sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and
- d) basic income security for older persons, as adopted by ILO Recommendation No. 202.

Such a resolution would fit well with the



Photo: UNDESA-DSPD/Olga A. Siokou - Siova

Follow -Up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, and would be essential in embedding the social protection problematic on the agenda of the Commission for Social Development, thereby facilitating national implementation and monitoring

Civil Society Forum 2016: the outcome Declaration

“... we strive for a world that is just, equitable,
and inclusive...”

~ Rio+20 Outcome Document, *The Future We want*



Photo: UNDESA-DSPD/Olga A. Siokou - Siova

Eradicating poverty has been recognized as “the greatest global challenge facing the world today.”¹ With constituencies spanning the globe, the NGO Committee for Social Development is well aware of the magnitude of this challenge. Our task is to give voice to those facing hardship. One report calculated that the world’s richest 62 individuals control as much wealth as half of humanity.² On average, each of these individuals has as much wealth as 56 million people from the ‘bottom’ 3.5 billion. Only 23 *countries* have a population that big. Additionally, low-income countries have mortality rates 17 times higher than those of high-income countries.³

The exclusion faced on a daily basis highlights a reality that none can afford to forget: if poverty is to be alleviated in any lasting way, inequality in all its dimensions – from education to opportunity and from discrimination to dignity – must be addressed. Once a taboo subject, inequality and its detriments, including its link to wealth

accumulation and consumption, are now being highlighted in public discourse. The lottery of birth cannot remain the strongest indicator of the quality of life in a global society characterized by justice, equality and a strong social fabric.

While aggregate global productive output has grown significantly over the past century,⁴ the benefits of that production have not “trickled down” to large segments of humanity in any systematic or equitable manner. Not only has the gap between the wealthy and persons living in poverty widened on numerous fronts, but the effects on those living in poverty have, in many instances, become even more pronounced in absolute terms.

Thus, it becomes clear that, in many segments of contemporary development discourse, a significant gap remains between theory and reality. A rising tide does not necessarily lift all boats, as had been fondly imagined and frequently argued. Often, it leaves many behind to drown. We must, therefore, address the root causes of the inequalities we see.

The Defining Challenge of Our Time

“The defining challenge of our time,” the Secretary-General declared with particular clarity and emphasis, “is to close the gap between our determination to ensure a life of dignity for all on the one hand, and the reality of persisting poverty and deepening inequality on the other.”⁵

The international community has taken up this challenge in Agenda 2030. Goal 10 of the SDGs focuses on reducing inequality within and among countries, giving expression to a powerful sense of universalism and global interconnectedness. Its targets must become the object of committed effort and sustained action. Relevant and meaningful indicators must also be developed to guide efforts to

build societies of justice and equity.

In pursuing these ambitious goals, the tools that are already at hand to address inequality must be embraced and employed without delay:

1. Leave no one behind. As Agenda 2030 emphasizes, true sustainable development cannot afford to leave any population behind, and this includes the focus populations for this Commission: the ageing, people with disabilities, youth, indigenous people, women, etc.

2. Long-term planning and goal-setting helps prioritize lasting objectives related to people and planet, and put in proper perspective the more transitory imperatives of financial profit.

3. Education provides an indispensable means for not simply rectifying the detriments of inequality, but proactively building a global culture of solidarity, universality, and equality - without undermining our all-important diversity. Education is a fundamental tool for social mobility and promoting universal values and global citizenship.

4. Gender equality in decision-making and leadership positions has been shown to improve outcomes in peace-building, health, education and a range of other areas.

5. Social protection floors reduce inequality across multiple fronts and support broad-based development through increased capacity and increased social capital.

6. Participatory economics operates at more than just the level of finance, it provides a means to dramatically expand the pool of those providing input on decisions that affect their development.

7. Financial transaction taxes hold the

promise of being able to both reduce volatility in global financial markets and generate a stable stream of revenue to support development efforts.

8. Goal 16 aims to promote peace and the rule of law, key elements in reducing inequalities, as illegal means, such as illicit financial flows and tax evasion, are leeches on the development process.

A Lens for Action



Photo: UNDESA-DSPD/Olga A. Siokou - Siova

Inequality is a highly multidimensional phenomenon. Its effects are seen not only in the economic and financial spheres, but in numerous aspects of daily life.

Inequality can be understood not only as a problem in itself, but also as a context framing virtually all of humanity's most pressing challenges. For example:

- SDG 2 addresses inequalities in food security and the availability of and access to nutrition.

- SDG 3 aims to address inequalities of mortality, morbidity, access to medical care, health facilities, and the like.

- Even the impact of climate change, addressed in SDG 13, varies both by location and by vulnerability to shocks and risk, introducing yet another dimension of inequality.

- SDG 16 speaks to inequalities of political representation voice, access to justice, and the rule of law as well as good governance and transparent administration.

Inequality therefore encapsulates a range of challenges, but its inverse, *equality*, holds the potential for a range of solutions. In this sense, the establishment of equality can be seen as a lens for framing action on a variety of fronts, bringing coherence and integration to endeavors that might otherwise seem isolated or unrelated. Increasing equitable access to and participation in the goods and services of the global community should become a central focus of development efforts of all kinds.

A Present Emphasis, a Long-standing Commitment

Concern for equality is by no means a recent phenomenon. The 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development noted that, "We are witnessing in countries throughout the world the expansion of prosperity for some, unfortunately accompanied by an expansion of unspeakable poverty for others. This glaring contradiction is unacceptable and needs to be corrected through urgent actions."

The concrete commitments contained in that document, which civil society will continue to call on our governments to honor, address a range of inequalities in areas such as poverty, gender, health and education. The Commission for Social Development has been working to advance equality for decades and therefore stands as an indispensable mechanism for addressing this most pressing challenge.

We call on the Commission to become a vibrant and dynamic learning community, focused on the generation, application, and diffusion of best practices regarding the addressing of inequalities of all kinds. In this

way, it can become an indispensable platform supporting transformative progress and the construction of a more just and equal world.

The Primacy of Relationships

Laying the foundations for a more equitable future will require new models of development, prosperity and economics. To be effective, these models must be shaped by a keen appreciation of the central role that relationships play in sustaining human society, whether between humanity and nature, among individuals and communities, within the family, or between individuals and social institutions, including both the public and private sector.

The injustices evident in the current global system will require more than skillful methodologies and technocratic solutions. Well-intentioned as they have been, such "solutions" have so far failed to alter basic inequities in the way the benefits of human endeavor have been distributed. No longer can people of good-will be content with the goal of simply providing for basic needs. Only as all individuals are invited to make their contribution to the betterment of society and only as resources are distributed in a way that permits each to do so, will progress against the age-old spectre of inequality and inequity be possible.

References:

- 1 Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- 2 Oxfam, *An Economy For the 1%*, 2016
- 3 World Bank 2010
- 4 It should be noted that extreme poverty fell significantly over the 15 years of the MDGs.
- 5 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming all Lives and Protecting the Planet*, 4 December 2014

and that they should be seen as actors in the fight against poverty, not as passive observers. In this context, the Guiding Principles recognize “that the empowerment of persons living in poverty should be both a means of realizing the rights of the poor and an end in itself”. The Principles also spell out States’ main obligations towards those living in poverty, as well as steps that can be taken by international organizations, businesses, and civil society organizations to respect, protect and fulfill their rights.

The booklet is conceived as a practical tool for a broad range of stakeholders — policy makers, civil servants, teachers, health-care providers, social workers, human rights advocates and so on — to ensure that public policies reach the poorest members of society and that they are not overlooked in policy decisions.

The authors also underscore that this Handbook is not a list of every action that can and should be taken. Instead it presents a guide to what can be done depending on the situation of the people concerned, and the issues that matter the most to them.

For more details:

http://franciscansinternational.org/fileadmin/docs/2015/ATD_FI_Handbook_English.pdf

The useful resources and links – the find of the month

Financing Democracy. *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns and the Risk of Policy Capture*, OECD, Paris, 2016

Political finance needs tighter regulation and enforcement, says the OECD in this recently released publication. The report strives to address some key issues: What are the risks associated with the funding of political

parties and election campaigns? Why are existing regulatory models still insufficient to tack those risks?

For more information please go to:

http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/ocd/governance/financing-democracy_9789264249455-en#page1

Why ageing should be a concern for the World Humanitarian Summit, HelpAge International, London, 2015

The humanitarian system has been slow to recognize and respond to the consequences of global ageing, says HelpAge in its submission to the Summit. It is critical for humanitarian donors to replicate the current good practices, while at the same time taking a lead role in ensuring partners are held accountable to the delivery of age inclusion commitments.

For more details:

<http://www.helpage.org/silo/files/why-ageing-should-be-a-concern-for-the-world-humanitarian-summit.pdf>

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