

51st 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*



2013 Civil Society Declaration

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Civil Society Declaration 2013

Introduction

As direct service providers, development and grass-roots NGOs, we are living and working with people living in poverty on a daily basis. We seek to partner with them in overcoming inequality. We support their efforts to move out of poverty, have decent work and live in an inclusive society.

We have concern for all aspects of society, especially in the ways that our activities influence all our relationships. This includes close and immediate relationships between individuals as well as those impacted by politics, economics and the law. It extends from the relationships among communities and groups to relations between peoples and nations.

This demands integrity. Without integrity, there is no social conscience or responsibility. Social action, if there is any, serves only private interests and the logic of power. Social fragmentation follows.

In a globalized world often driven by economic and financial engines, one can sometimes lose sight of the people and the

planet that are to be assisted and protected. When wealth and power are sought as ends unto themselves there is a danger that society can be reduced to a collection of individuals, and that the common good is reduced to fit the outcomes achievable by private, for profit firms. This can legitimate forms of social indifference.

For some, the only way to achieve development is through the market. This has tended to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few. Many others have seen their economic and real power to influence decisions that affect their lives diminish. It has been noted: “Economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of *commercial logic*. This needs to be *directed towards the pursuit of the common good*, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution.”¹

Empowerment

Empowerment has emerged as a key tool in counteracting the pernicious effects of social and economic inequalities.

¹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 36.

Definitions of empowerment tend to revolve around a cluster of interrelated concepts including choice, freedom, agency, capacity, participation, control over one's own destiny, increased resources and capacity, and improved quality of life. None of these ideas are directly synonymous with empowerment, but all contribute to a holistic environment in which empowering conditions more readily emerge. Points of emphasis may differ from one definition to the next, but most focus on developing the latent capacity of individuals and groups for the purpose of furthering human well-being and fulfillment. The members of the NGO Committee on Social Development, in this declaration use the following definition of empowerment: *Empowerment is the expansion of the capacity, volition and vision necessary for people to become effective agents of human well-being.*

While real empowerment of people is often difficult to implement in many national circumstances, it is even more difficult in a globalized world where even more complex challenges exist.

Empowerment means effective participation of individuals and groups in decisions that affect the social, legal, political and economic dimensions of their lives. It is integrally linked to the eradication of poverty, decent work and social integration.

Participation

Participation continues to be the practical way by which empowerment is often measured and quantified.²

Participation is power. Distribution of power in a group is often associated with inequality especially with respect to gender bias and economic resources. However, a shared society is based on mutual respect and human dignity where each member is responsible and has a contribution to make that is needed by all other members. This distributes power equally among all its members. In a fully integrated national or local society where there is popular participation, most people contribute to the development of their society and share equally in the benefits of that development. Such ‘a society for all’ envisioned by the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen³ comes into being little by little. It requires time and understanding, resources and perseverance. It is rooted in relationships based on human dignity and mutual respect that flow from human rights

² cf. John Mathiason, *The imperatives of empowerment and participation: Concept Note for the Expert Group Meeting on the Priority Theme of the Commission for Social Development 2013-2014*, August 2012.

³ Club de Madrid, through their Shared Society Project, has begun to implement this concept of social inclusion.

and equality. In fact, seen through the lens of human rights, participation demands that we address the power asymmetries in a community and remove all of the economic, legal, cultural, political and physical obstacles that impede access to services and programmes by marginalized groups.

In most societies, there are varying degrees of participation which implies an unequal distribution of power. Full participation in making the decisions that affect one's life acknowledges the availability of choices and accords people the enabling environment to make those choices. Participation stimulates the full development of one's personality and capacities. It strengthens confidence, self-esteem and builds skills.

It is imperative that the barriers that impede participation in decision-making that affect people's lives be dismantled. Assumptions about others' potential must be examined and confronted. People become effective agents of human well-being when their vision is valued, their capacities are developed and they have the will to make their dreams a reality.

The structural elements of participation: individuals, communities, vulnerable groups, institutions, and governments raise the question of indirect or representative forms of participation and the role of subsidiarity in building societies and empowering people.

Social Protection Floors

Social Protection Floors are powerful and successful tools in reducing social vulnerabilities and making progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Social security is not only a human right but an economic and social necessity. Seventy five to eighty percent of the global population have no access to comprehensive social security systems and thus have no access to social protection when needed. Social protection programmes tackle multiple dimensions of poverty and deprivation (decent work, education, health care, food security, income security) and are a powerful tool in the battle against poverty and inequality. The establishment of national social protection floors assures that basic social security is accessible to all.

A social protection floor enhances social cohesion, helps eradicate poverty, facilitates people's participation, contributes to improved human capital development and stimulates greater productive activity. Additionally, it has helped to stabilize aggregate demand in times of crisis and to increase resilience against economic shocks, contributing to accelerate recovery

towards more inclusive and sustainable development paths.⁴
“Extending social protection is a ‘win-win’ investment that pays off both in the short term, given its effects as a macroeconomic stabilizer but also in the long term, due to the impacts on human development and productivity.”⁵

A new coalition for Social Protection Floors comprising NGO’s from the Global South and North in support of the ILO Recommendation 202 has formed to advocate for the advancement of social protection based on human rights for all people in all parts of the world.⁶

Men and women must benefit equally from social protection systems. For this to happen the needs of women throughout the life-cycle, their responsibility for caregiving, as well as the differences in access to services, work, and productive activities between women and men must be addressed. The role of women as caregivers must be explicitly addressed by a social protection program.

As noted by the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Dr. Magdalena Sepulveda, “Under international

⁴“Social Protection for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization”,
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/secsoc/downloads/bachelet.pdf>

⁵ http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_166292/lang--en/index.htm

⁶ cf. ILO Recommendation 202

human rights law, States have an obligation to immediately meet minimum essential levels of the rights of food, health, housing, education, and social security, The enjoyment of these rights by all individuals is not conditional on the performance of certain actions or the meeting of requirements.”⁷ Given the consensus on basic human rights, the concept of the “deserving poor” needs to be abolished.

Those countries that have initiated a social protection floor, e.g. Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Nepal, and South Africa, have found that the program ultimately pays for itself. It enhances the productivity of the labor force because the workers’ health and hopes are secure.

Recommendation No. 202 of the International Labour Conference emphasizes the human right to social security while recognizing that each country is responsible for the design, implementation and evaluation of the social protection floor program it initiates.

Poverty Eradication in a Post 2015 World

The global economy driven by consumption already uses natural resources equivalent to 1.5 planet earths, which is unsustainable. The 1.4 billion people in the richest 20th percentile of the

⁷ The Human Rights Approach to Social Protection, Magdalena Sepulveda and Carly Nyst, Ministry. Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2012, p. 49.

world's population consume over 80% of global output – 60 times more than those in the poorest 20th percentile.⁸ Poverty, resource scarcities, conflict and climate change have all been exacerbated by unsustainable patterns of consumption, production and resource exploitation. This threatens the very future of humanity. And while the Millennium Development Goals sought to enhance the consumption power of 2 billion people living in poverty, the time has come for the adoption of Millennium Consumption Goals to provide consumption targets designed to motivate the world's rich to consume more sustainably and equitably. Restraint and mindfulness of the impact of our individual and corporate consumption will lead to the empowerment of peoples and help them to live free from want and free from fear of an unpredictable and undesirable future.

It is imperative that the linkage between environment (climate change and global warming) and poverty be clearly articulated. And above all it must be acknowledged that respect for, protection of, and the promotion and fulfillment of all human rights is the *sine qua non* of Sustainable Development.

We applaud the work of Rio+20, and concur with the decision that the articulation of the Sustainable Development Goals, as the successor to the Millennium Development Goals, should be holistic, inclusive, equitable, and universally applicable.

⁸ cf. Global Footprint Network

We strongly encourage the UN member states to collaboratively work with civil society in developing a post 2015 global development framework that has fully elaborated goals encompassing the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development, with targets and support structure.

Education

Education, a basic and universal human right, empowers people and enhances society through contributions to the common good, sustainability and the economy.

Both formal and non-formal education are essential constitutive elements of a society from early childhood, through youth and adulthood, the entire lifespan.

The aim of education is for people to reach satisfying levels of personal and professional potential. Additionally, education enables people to recognize the relationship between the lack of education and poverty. The special educational needs of vulnerable groups must be addressed: gender, disability, economic inequities, and special needs.

Specialized educational opportunities are required for persons with particular needs or specialized professions. We strongly support increased technology transfer, greater sharing of information and capacity building in the use and development of information and communications technology (ICTs).

Teacher training is essential for quality education. Teachers who are culturally sensitive and utilize and respect the knowledge and resources of the learner are the midwives of true education and the transformers of societies.

Resources for Human Development

The most important resources for development are the human and natural resources present in any given community. Holistic development that is socially beneficial for all is predicated on a commitment to the common good and a deep respect for the earth and its resources. Each member of the community has a role to play. Each member contributes and each member benefits. All members have what they need.

While each country has the primary responsibility for its own social and economic development, developing countries have need of additional resources to assure a development that is sustainable. Significant mobilization of financial and technical resources from a variety of sources is essential. Official development assistance (ODA) commitments of a minimum 0.7% of GNP on the part of developed countries must be honored and additional new sources of financing for development must be tapped.

A financial transaction tax (FTT) specifically directed toward a social protection floor puts money into the real economy. Because it is a very small tax, investors feel almost no impact. The revenue obtained from such a tax would, however, have a very significant impact on development. A FTT is already being used in some countries and support for a FTT for development is

becoming more widespread. By a wide majority in January 2013, European Finance Ministers approved moving ahead on the implementation of a FTT.⁹

We also support the establishment of a Global Fund for Social Protection as recently outlined by the Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food and Human Rights and Extreme Poverty.¹⁰ This fund would not replace national obligations to provide for the needs of its citizens.

Another effective national resource for development is the redirection of a portion of the national budget dedicated to military spending. These funds could become available immediately. Its implementation is dependent on the political will of government officials.

Other Measures: Alternates to GDP

While a consensus has not been reached on how to best measure societal goods, at the political level it has been recognized that there is a need to go beyond GDP when assessing the health of a society.¹¹ Over the last twenty years, several studies have been

⁹ 11 countries, including Germany, France, Italy and Spain will now implement the FTT with the potential of raising nearly 40 billion euros each year.

¹⁰ www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Food/20121009_GFSP_en.pdf

¹¹ cf The Istanbul Declaration, signed in June 2007, by the European Commission, the OECD, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the

published on alternative measures of well-being/quality of life/ sustainable development/ societal progress that underscore the fact that all these terms are closely related to each other.

International organisations, academic researchers and official statisticians have all proposed alternative measures to more accurately reflect societal wealth and care for its less fortunate members.

Alternative indicators of wealth, prosperity and development stress self-sufficiency, equity, health status and social cohesion¹², which lead to empowerment. Among them are: the Human Development Index (HDI) as proposed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the Genuine Progress Indicator; the Gross National Happiness Index; the World Bank's Adjusted Net Savings Index; and, the Better Life Index. All of these measures are useful to inform decision making at all levels and to contribute to a self-regulating sustainability of integrated environment and development systems.

Conclusion

United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank at the end of the II OECD World Forum on “Statistics, Knowledge and Policy”. cf also www.oecd.org/oecdworldforum

¹² These measures are proposed by the OECD and while subjective, are more inclusive and are more readily available for cross-country analysis.

Empowerment means effective participation of individuals and groups in decisions that affect the social, legal, political and economic dimensions of their lives. It is integrally linked to the eradication of poverty, decent work and social integration.

In a socially integrated society whose core values are human rights, equality and sustainability, people are at the center, the common good is honored and citizens are empowered. Citizens contribute to constructing a society that respects the dignity and worth of all. Poverty eradication is seriously addressed, decent work is provided for all citizens, funding is made available to provide basic services for all, especially the most vulnerable.

Recommendations

As concrete means of empowering their citizens, we recommend that governments:

- Work to promote the common good through mechanisms that allow for the participation of all its citizens at the local and national levels to engage in the social, political and economic life of their societies.
- Implement ILO Recommendation 202 to establish a national Social Protection Floor as an effective means of empowering people and reducing poverty and inequality.

- Work to implement the newly adopted Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.
- Promote the legal empowerment of all people especially those living in extreme poverty by insuring that they have access to justice, property rights and labor protections. Birth registrations and providing identity documents are essential.
- Implement the ILO's decent work agenda and its Global Jobs Pact to encourage and ensure full employment and income security.
- Vigorously address the unsustainable patterns of production, consumption and resource exploitation in their societies.
- Initiate the transition to low-carbon energy sources linked with greener consumption and the promotion of energy-efficient technologies.
- Provide formal and non-formal education for all across the lifespan empowering people to become agents of change in their societies while exercising their rights. Additionally, citizens be guaranteed choice and control over the decisions that affect their rights and well-being.
- Develop public policies that focus on the use and development of information and communications technologies (ICTs). Technology infrastructure and

inclusive public access must be enhanced as a concrete means to empower societies.

- Work to expand the innovative sources of financing for development particularly through the implementation of a Financial Transaction Tax, the Global Fund for Social Protection and the reduction of military spending.

Effective Practices for Empowerment

1) **REDS (Ragpickers Education & Development Scheme)** is a far reaching intervention and rehabilitation program that rescues street children from a life of hopeless poverty. The children are abandoned by their parents or are the children of single mothers. With no education and little hope for anything better in their lives, these children, some as young as six, begin to live, eat and sleep on the streets. To forge a bare subsistence, they scavenge through waste dumps collecting recyclables to earn less than a dollar a day. Without the REDS program, their lot would be sickness, physical and sexual abuse, malnutrition, illiteracy and a life of unspeakable poverty. The Marianists gather these children at REDS centers strategically located in the slums of Bangalore and Ranchi, India. At these centers, the children are taught reading and writing, fundamental math, basic health education and personal hygiene. The children also receive healthcare and a daily meal without which, on most days, they would have nothing to eat. From 22 REDS centers, more than a thousand children are placed in formal education or skills training each year. Education and training provide their way out of an appalling cycle of poverty. For more information go to http://www.marianist.com/?page_id=3530

2) In 2005, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur initiated a Solar Energy Program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria: **the Power of the Sun: an African Photovoltaic**

Project to improve the lives of sisters and the people they serve. With solar powered energy now operative at six sites, many gains have been experienced. All sites have access to power and clean water. Health Centers explore up-to-date medical procedures, and students and teachers broaden their scope of learning through solar powered satellite internet.

<http://www.sndden.org/en/news-and-events/photovoltaic-project/>

3) **The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)** offers experiential workshops empowering individuals to liberate themselves from the pain of conflict and violence. The program provides three levels of intensive two/ three day learning experiences. Participatory exercises and discussion address , *inter alia*, the following: self-confidence , internal transforming power, thinking before reacting, listening, communication with an adversary, understanding the other/empathy, seeking common ground, looking for a win-win solution, negotiating agreement/commitment, cooperation. AVP is rooted in the belief that a power for peace and good exists in everyone. This power has the ability to transform conflict situations. AVP builds on a base of caring for self and others, working both with groups in the community and in prisons.

AVP was initiated in 1975 at Greenhaven Prison, a maximum security facility in New York State, USA. The program is now utilized in 50 countries. <http://avpinternational.org/index>

4) The **Nonthaburi Skills Development Center for the Blind** in Bangkok has been training people who are blind with the skills they need to earn a living and have healthy and productive lives. Begun thirty years ago by the Salesians of Don Bosco, the facility has worked to assist the marginalized. When the Center opened, the blind were shunned and the common perception was that they could only do two things: sell lottery tickets or be telephone operators. The first courses offered were in carpentry and woodwork, but the realities of insurance, malpractice and fear of on the job injuries made employment difficult. Given the resistance to blind carpenters, the program was changed in 1983 to prepare massage therapists. The Ministry of Public Health now grants licenses to graduates of the Center as Doctors of Thai Traditional Massage, an acknowledgement of the high quality of training being offered. Most graduates find work right away and continue to hone their skills for many years. The Center sees about 150 customers each day.

All the traditional learning tools are there -- mannequins, nerve and muscle charts, maps of the body labeled with organ names and acupuncture points. But all the names are in Braille. The charts, maps and mannequins are all covered in different textures of sandpaper, cloth, rope and wood to help the students navigate by touch alone. The two-year course accepts 40 first year students each year.

The Center has also worked to develop other skills with the blind and assists them to assist others. One such event is the *Tour de Thailande* in which blind cyclists join a tour that raises money

for people suffering from leukemia. In 2010, they opened the Don Bosco Sports Center for the Blind.

<http://travel.cnn.com/bangkok/life/giving-thailand%E2%80%99s-blind-tools-succeed-708092>

5) ***Kudumbashree***, part of Kerala, India State Government's anti-poverty programme is a network of 4 million women, most living in poverty. *Kudumbashree* is a social space where marginalized women can collectively pursue their needs and aspirations. The primary unit of *Kudumbashree* is the Neighbourhood Group (NHG). NHGs, consist of not more than 20 women. NHGs are federated into Area Development Societies (ADSs), and these are in turn federated into Community Development Societies (CDSs) at the *panchayat* (local governance) level. Today, there are 213,000 NHGs in Kerala. *Kudumbashree* office-bearers are elected from the community by the community. These elections bring women into leadership and politics. The NHG is structurally linked to the State through the institution of local self-government. This ensures that local development reflects the needs and aspirations of communities and reduces poverty.

www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article2848305.ece,
www.kudumbashree.org