
COMMISSION for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Contribution submitted by the Chair of the 57th Commission for Social Development to the 2019 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development *"Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality"*

Introduction

The contribution is submitted by **Mr. H.E. Mr. Cheikh Niang, the Chair of the 57th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD)**, held from 11 February to 21 February 2019 with the priority theme of “Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies”. The theme of the “Emerging Issues” agenda item was “The empowerment of people affected by natural and human-made disasters to reduce inequality: addressing the differential impact on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth”. The Commission also reviewed relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups and the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development.

The Commission was attended by representatives of Member States, UN entities, and ECOSOC accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from all regions. The Commission also heard, at the opening session, from the representative of the civil society and youth. The Civil Society Forum was held in parallel to the Commission.

The Commission adopted four draft resolutions that were recommended for adoption by the Economic and Social Council, on: (a) Future organization and methods of work of the Commission for Social Development; (b) Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies; (c) Social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development; and (d) Policies and programmes involving youth.

In reviewing its methods of work, the Commission re-affirmed Member States’ commitment to strengthening the Commission for Social Development as the principal United Nations forum for intensive global dialogue on social development issues and emerging issues that had a strong bearing on inclusive, equitable and sustainable development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission decided the priority theme for the 58th session in 2020 to be “Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness”. It also decided to biennialize the resolution on the methods of work and to adopt a decision at the 58th session to establish the priority theme for its 59th session and the 59th session will adopt a multi-year programme of work to adjust, as appropriate, to the work of the Council, in line with the outcome of the General Assembly review of the strengthening of the Council and the process of repositioning the United Nations development system.

This note contains key messages drawn from reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the annual session, statements by Member States during the general debate, presentations and interactive discussions at the four panel discussions organized during the session, and the draft resolutions adopted.

Addressing inequality and challenges to social inclusion to ensure inclusiveness and equality

Inequality is a defining challenge of the present time and it undermines inclusiveness and equality. High inequality hampers growth and weakens its impact on the eradication of poverty. Persistent inequality also undermines social cohesion and trust in public institutions. Such developments lead to heightened social tensions that further intensify social divisions and exclusion.

More than 20 years after the World Summit for Social Development, social progress remains slow and uneven and major gaps remain. Nearly 1 billion people still suffer from extreme poverty. Furthermore, income and non-income inequality continues to persist and has increased within many countries (for example in most industrialized countries and in a few very large middle-income developing countries), undermining poverty eradication efforts. To implement the 2030 Agenda, inequality and social exclusion must be addressed. The Commission for Social Development should continue to focus on all dimensions of poverty and inequality, as the United Nations principle forum responsible for the follow up to the Social Summit and the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda.

Member States shared their national experiences in tackling poverty and inequalities simultaneously, and underscored the importance of fiscal, wage and social protection policies in this endeavour.

Emphasis to be placed on the role of progressive taxation in favour of low-income households and public spending to support vulnerable populations. In particular, progressive taxation to finance basic services, especially health, education and social protection, and increased investment to create decent and sustainable work were identified as crucial.

Wage policies to promote decent work with fair wages for all are also important tools to improve income distribution and to promote gender equality. Investment in the labour policies and institutions on decent work, including in wage-determination mechanisms, are necessary. Further, addressing gender pay gaps is critical to reducing overall wage inequality.

Delegations also highlighted the need for broader social protection systems, including floors to reduce inequalities, enhance equal opportunities, and to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized members of society. Social protection systems should also support families, as they are the fundamental social unit of society and play an important role in the delivery of the 2030 Agenda. Policies to ensure equal opportunities and access to public services for all, and to invest in human capabilities, especially of the bottom of the income distributions were emphasized. In this context, sustained investments in education and health were also highlighted as important drivers behind the declining trend in income inequality and greater inclusion of marginalized social groups.

Better global governance and the alignment of the 2030 Agenda with national needs, priorities and strategies are also needed. International cooperation and renewed partnerships to support national efforts play an important role.

Through its draft resolution on the priority theme, the Commission stresses that the benefits of growth should be inclusive and distributed more equitably to combat income and non-income inequalities as well as to promote social inclusion. The resolution encourages Governments to combat discrimination and social exclusion by promoting social protection systems, including floors; promoting affordable and equitable access to basic services; use sound public spending policies to ensure universal health care; promote active labour policies that provide full employment and decent work for all and a fair share of productivity for workers.

Emerging issues -- The empowerment of people affected by natural and human-made disasters to reduce inequality: Addressing the differential impact on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth

International frameworks, to various degrees, put the needs of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, older persons and youth at the center of disaster response and mitigation plans. However, many gaps still exist, including policy shortfalls that limit adequate response to crises caused by natural and human-made disasters. The poorest, oldest, youngest and most vulnerable citizens are the most exposed to risk. In practice, some strategies worked to meet their special needs.

Delegations shared national experiences in responding to natural and human-made disasters, ranging from storms to earthquakes and to war. Some delegates also outlined broader policies, including development and humanitarian assistance, aimed at boosting countries' abilities to develop inclusive risk reduction plans. An inclusive approach by national plans in the preparedness, response and recovery stages of emergencies is important. A paradigm shift is needed to develop holistic, coordinated and multi-sectoral approaches to empower older persons, youth and persons with disabilities to mitigate and lessen the impact of natural and human-made disasters on them.

Social protection for inclusiveness and equality

The Commission held a ministerial forum on social protection to facilitate the exchange of national and regional experiences. Social protection is a powerful policy tool for empowerment and to address inequality and challenges to social inclusion. Member States identified good practices, lessons learned, common challenges and effective policies and measures for building and strengthening nationally-appropriate social protection systems, including floors. National Ministers and UN system representatives shared their respective experiences and policy initiatives in strengthening social protection systems to promote poverty eradication, inequality reduction and social inclusion. Delegations highlighted the positive impact of social protection on economic growth and social development. Social protection systems also play a critical role in fighting against exclusion and promoting access to education and health for all. Member States emphasized that the sustainability of social protection systems depends critically on financing.

UN system support for inclusive development and equality

The Commission held an interactive dialogue with senior officials of the United Nations system on the priority theme "*Addressing Inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies*". Equality is placed at the centre of the 2030 Agenda, with a call for "leaving no one behind" and an explicit focus on SDG 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries. Equality is a foundational value of development and the UN system is committed to supporting Member States in pursuing their national strategies to implement the 2030 Agenda.

The regional context and priorities in addressing inequality and challenges for social inclusion as well as corresponding policy frameworks and measures are critical. Despite progress in reducing inequality between 2002 and 2014, Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be the most unequal region in the world. Global disruptions including slower growth with higher interest rates and fiscal uncertainty, trade tensions and weakening multilateralism, climate change, erosion of the social contract and trust were singled out as particular concern to this region. Conflict and related forced migration, health and social burdens, family fragmentation and infrastructure destruction posed additional challenges in the Arab region. Strong economic growth without evenly-shared benefits that resulted in rising inequality of income and opportunity and access to basic services marked the record of Asia Pacific.

Universal social policies to expand access to social services, in particular quality education and healthcare services, boost good-quality basic infrastructure, strengthen labour institutions, promote decent work, and strengthen social protection systems have been proven effective. Social protection is a key to achieve many of the SDGs and should be seen, not as a cost, but as an investment. National fiscal space should be expanded. It is equally important to consider broader macroeconomic policies that can tackle inequality at its core and prevent market failures. Addressing inequality in a comprehensive and integrated manner and in a way that promotes social mobility is a must.

Through its draft resolution on the social dimensions of NEPAD, the Commission for Social Development should continue to give prominence to, and raise awareness of, the social dimensions of the New Partnership and give due consideration to Agenda 2063 of the African Union at its fifty-eighth session. It also called for action-oriented recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of the work of United Nations bodies in regard to the social dimensions of the New Partnership, Agenda 2063 and its links with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, taking into account current processes related to social development in Africa.

Youth participation

Through the draft resolution “Policies and programmes involving youth”, the Commission recognizes the importance of promoting the full and effective participation of young people, youth-led and youth-focused organizations and urges Member States to ensure that youth issues are adequately addressed in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Member States should protect, promote and fulfil the realization of and full enjoyment by all young people of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Member States should consider including youth representatives in their delegations at all relevant discussions in the General Assembly, in the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies and at relevant United Nations conferences, as appropriate, and, to consider establishing a national youth delegate programme.