

## Commission for Social Development, 47<sup>th</sup> Session Chairperson's Summary

Social integration is a process that strengthens the cohesion of societies through the inclusion of all people in society and its decision making. Cohesion increases security in its comprehensive meaning. At the same time, inclusion of all population groups strengthens the development potential of societies.

Social integration is thus a prerequisite for fostering stable, safe, harmonious, peaceful and just societies to create an optimal basis for dynamic development and progress. Integration policies promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Social integration and the cohesion of societies can only be achieved if development is just and sustainable economically, socially and environmentally.

### The current global crises and their impact on social development and social integration

The global financial and economic crisis, volatile food and energy prices as well as climate change pose a serious threat to hard earned advances made in social development in recent years. They will undoubtedly have major negative implications for social development in general and societal cohesion in particular, unless the international community takes a comprehensive approach to finding a joint solution to the current crises.

The second half of 2008 saw the start of the worse financial crisis since the great depression of the 1930s. The impact of the crisis on the real economy seriously diminishes economic prospects for 2009. Despite the announcement of several large scale stimulus plans, short term contractions are inevitable. The confluence of crises on multiple fronts has created a global environment of diminished growth prospects with high degree of uncertainty. Economic recovery may take months or even years to occur. This situation threatens to reverse progress towards internationally agreed development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals.

Contractions in economic activities are expected to lead to significantly higher levels of unemployment and worsen labour market conditions for workers, who have been facing increasing economic insecurity even during the period of robust economic growth. Slowing or even negative economic growth with volatile commodity prices will put great downward pressure on worker's real wages.

Unemployment and lower wages in combination with volatile food and energy prices are adding tens of millions to the ranks of people living in poverty worldwide.

Increases in global food and energy prices in the first half of 2008 led to food protests in many developing countries and caused some countries to impose export restrictions. Many poor countries are net importers of food and energy and have seen their import bills balloon in 2008. People living in poverty will suffer most from the global crises due to high food prices, falling incomes and unemployment. The number of people suffering from hunger is increasing.

These crises are unfolding against the background of the longer-term predicament of climate change. Climate change and its economic, environmental and social impacts will pose an unprecedented challenge to the cohesion of societies and the stability of international relations unless mitigation and adaptation measures are implemented in an equitable manner. Climate change, manifested in increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather patterns and natural disasters, is impacting agriculture and food production and exacerbating the food crisis. It is also likely to increase the risk of infectious disease outbreaks, new diseases due to ecosystem changes and changes in vector born diseases such as malaria posing additional challenges to health systems .

Mediating the impact of the crises on social development will require creating short and long term policies that are comprehensive and consistent, recognizing that social ,economic and environmental policies must be coordinated and complement each other. Reducing social spending may be tempting in the short run, but the long term implications would likely be counter productive. Indiscriminate reductions in social spending should be avoided as they very probably lead to irreversible losses of human and social capital and compromise also long term, economic development.

## Challenges to social integration

In the current phase of globalization, labour markets may create greater economic insecurity and inequity, which have a direct adverse effect on social cohesion in many societies. Unemployment, underemployment and poverty lead to social exclusion. Moreover, socio-demographic changes such as rapid urbanization, population ageing, increased migration, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the break-up of family structures pose particular challenges to social integration.

Social exclusion has multiple dimensions. Economic aspects of exclusion encompass exclusion from the labour market and access to assets. Social and cultural aspects refer to exclusion from access to basic social security and services including education, health and housing, means of communication, and the lack of access to justice. Such economic, social and cultural exclusion leads to political exclusion, where individuals are prevented from exercising their rights as citizens, including participation in decision-making. Besides poverty, other major causes of exclusion include income inequalities, unequal rural-urban development, unequal distribution of assets, such as land, and direct or indirect discrimination based on gender, race, disability and ethnicity.

Gender discrimination is one of the most pervasive and prevalent forms of institutionalized inequality. Gender cuts across all other social categories and is a marker of identity and inequalities between men and women in all societies. Just as gender discrimination is a grave obstacle to social integration, advancing gender equality should be considered a key measure towards social integration.

It is necessary to take concrete steps to prevent social exclusion and combat all forms of discrimination. For instance, adequate education can empower the impoverished and other vulnerable social groups to participate in political, economic and social activities. It can expand the range of their life choices and can aid them in breaking free of the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Similarly, it is critical to improve health systems around the world, particularly those that serve infants, pregnant women, older persons and persons with disabilities. In developing countries, 9.6 million children under the age of five lose their lives every year from avoidable causes, such as infectious diseases and malnutrition. Vaccine supplies should be increased and sanitary conditions should be improved. The provision of medical care for the increasing numbers of older persons is likewise a growing concern.

## Need for a comprehensive approach to social development

Poverty eradication, full employment and decent work and social integration are interrelated, and mutually reinforcing, and therefore an enabling environment needs to be created so as to pursue all three objectives simultaneously. Governments must adopt social, economic and employment policies that are coordinated and mutually strengthening. Such policies must promote social justice, economic recovery and growth, and be economically and environmentally sustainable. Economic growth needs to be accompanied by redistributive social policies in order to close the gap of inequality.

### *Poverty eradication*

Poverty can be both the cause and consequence of social exclusion. Poverty reduction and the eradication of absolute poverty are core issues of social integration. Furthermore, focus should be sharpened on poverty prevention through more equitable societal policies that effectively protect the vulnerable population groups from falling into poverty.

As poverty has multiple and interlinked causes, there is a need for more comprehensive social policies to create coherence to targeted programmes. It is also crucial to uphold social protection and high-quality social and health services even in times of economic crisis. Social integration of people living in poverty should address and meet their basic human needs, including nutrition, health, water and sanitation, housing and access to education and employment, through integrated development strategies. At the same time, empowerment of people living in poverty is critical. Channels must be designed to involve poor and vulnerable people in the planning, design, and implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies and programmes. Involvement must be promoted

which respect to their dignity and culture, use their skills, knowledge and creativity, and assist them in getting organized and educated about their rights. Special attention should be devoted to addressing the feminization of poverty, a factor leading to social exclusion and the intergenerational transmission of vulnerability, poverty and exclusion.

### *Full employment and decent work*

Employment and decent work are key to social integration and enable individuals and families to work their way out of poverty. It is necessary for a society to support the provision of jobs and equal opportunities for all. It is equally important to ensure that the benefits of economic growth and job creation reach everyone in society.

Full employment and decent work is a pathway out of poverty and a channel to social inclusion of marginalized groups and will thus lead to stronger social cohesion. Right to work, rights at work, access to social protection and social dialogue are the basic elements of decent work. The promotion of enterprise and entrepreneurship is of key importance. It encourages economic growth, investment and wealth creation and it is also essential for sufficient job creation.

Labour policies that promote social inclusion should be based on non-discriminatory practices for employment and training. The inclusion in the labor markets of young people, women, indigenous peoples, migrants, persons with disabilities should be a priority. Increasing labour market flexibility and modernizing social protection systems are ways to assist people to seize the opportunities as well as to face challenges created by international competition, technological advances and changing population patterns.

To counter the negative impact of the current global financial and economic crisis, preservation of employment and decent work opportunities should be a priority. Jobs once lost are extremely difficult to regain. Skills training appropriate to the labor market should be expanded. Combining working time flexibility with training is one strategy to achieve skill development and labor market consistency while retaining stable employment contracts.

### Promoting social integration

It has to be recognized that there is no “one size fits all” solution for social integration at the national level, as most countries have developed their own policies and programmes for social integration. This multidimensional concept needs to be well understood and addressed.

### Social groups

Since Copenhagen in 1995, international efforts to advance social integration have addressed the special needs of certain social groups, which led to the adoption of new mandates and instruments, such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

These instruments have proved to be pivotal in building important foundations for minimizing exclusion, and guaranteeing equal access to opportunities for all social groups, particularly when they are being translated into domestic laws and legislations and national policies and programmes. The emphasis on the social groups is meant to redress inequalities between and among groups, promote intergenerational perspective as well as to counter such ills as racism, sexism and ageism.

However, addressing the special needs of social groups, while critical, is not sufficient to achieve a broad social integration paradigm endorsed by the World Summit for Social Development. Beyond helping all groups and individuals to gain access to society, social integration requires the transformation of those social norms and principles that underpin unequal relations. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that not all social groups are necessarily looking to be mainstreamed or integrated into the larger society. Rather, they wish to be included, but

in a way that enables them to maintain their ethnic and cultural identities. In this regard, respecting diversity and accommodating people with different backgrounds is key to achieving social integration.

### *More ambitious social development strategies*

Advancing sustainable social integration requires comprehensive national strategies for promoting growth with equity through macroeconomic stability and sound public financial management, accompanied by fair and progressive tax systems and social protection mechanisms. The responsibility of advancing social integration does not lie solely with government, but should be shared by all sectors of the economy and society at large, including the private sector and civil society. Only through such cooperation can real progress be made towards eradicating discrimination, and injustice, while paving the way for true participation.

### *Social protection*

Social protection is an investment in people and in long-term social and economic development. It makes a critical contribution to meeting the development goals towards poverty eradication and to making a positive impact on economic growth, social cohesion and social development. The State has the responsibility to ensure equal access to well-functioning and sustainable social protection on equal grounds to enable people to manage economic and social risks they encounter. Appropriate social protection systems, including social and health services and income security, help people to cope with crises and to avoid irreversible losses in their productive assets and human capital, especially in a period of economic slowdown and great uncertainty. A well-functioning social protection system will enhance the opportunities of women to fully and equally participate in society, including working life. Social protection systems are necessary for the maintenance and enhancement of social cohesion. Social protection systems must be based on the principle of universal coverage. They must be designed so as to be adequate, adaptable, efficient, accessible and financially sustainable. There also need to be proper financial incentives in place that encourage people to actively seek employment. At the same time there must be support to those who are unable to work. This includes support to older people.

The on-going demographic trends and the increasingly globalized economy are bringing major challenges to national economies and societies. Social protection systems in both developed and developing countries must be based on general principles of equal rights and dignity but designed to meet country-specific conditions. International community may assist States to respond to the current challenges, especially in this time of global crisis. Special effort should be made to extend social protection for all, including workers in the informal economy and in rural areas.

ILO calculations have shown that an essential set of social protection, including income transfers, is affordable in practically all developing countries. Almost thirty low-income countries around the world have already realized elements of essential transfers and access to basic services. Evidence shows that social transfers create also many kinds of economically beneficial externalities. Sound financial planning, good governance and political determination are necessary in the implementation of such basic guarantees. The efforts of the ILO and others to develop guidance with respect to the definitions, the financing and implementation patterns of essential transfers and service provision should be supported.

### *Family policy*

Families are a catalyst for social integration and social cohesion. Family policies are long-term measures that promote and reinforce social integration. Child-centered and family-friendly policies, financial support, and community-based services should be designed to strengthen capabilities of families and to promote women's equal rights.

Efforts and initiatives should be made to ensure further promotion, actual realization and continuous implementation of the mandated objectives of the International Year of Family, in tandem with the preparation for the upcoming 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the International Year of Family in 2014.

## *Volunteerism and involvement of the civil society*

Opening opportunities for volunteerism is increasingly seen as a means to promoting social integration. Volunteerism has contributed to developing social capital for social groups, including those that have traditionally found themselves marginalized from mainstream participation in development activities. It also enables excluded persons to enhance their participation and inclusion, enables young people to acquire skills and experience that facilitate their entry into the job market and allows older persons to continue to be actively involved in their communities and live healthier and more rewarding lives.

## *Media and communications*

The power of the free media and communications technology to convey messages and information to increase social integration should not be underestimated. In light of recent advancements in communications technology, it is possible to target specific groups within the wider community. The media should participate in combating negative stereotyping, xenophobia and discrimination.

## Commitment, policy direction and action

Realizing the objectives of “a society for all” requires commitment and social solidarity on the part of all members and sectors of society. There is a need for strong political leadership, transparent decision making, social innovation and timely action.

However, political commitment must be translated into concrete actions to operationalize social integration, and to keep it high on the list of priorities, even during times of crisis. The current crises will not only pose challenges to our societies, but also an opportunity to underscore the importance of social integration and to further focus on advancing equal and all-inclusive social development. There is a need for action-oriented policies and programmes that produce concrete outcomes. These policies and programmes should be evidence-based, supported by policy-relevant research, and followed up with systematic evaluation of results.

Each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development. National policies and development strategies should include the promotion of social integration and cohesion. The dialogue on the feasibility of “a global social floor” should be continued and options further elaborated and assessed.

Encouraging progress is being made. For instance, the African Common Position on Social Integration along with Social Policy Framework for Africa and a Declaration on Social Development, were recently endorsed by the African Union in 2009.

The Council of Europe is organizing the First Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion in February 2009 in Moscow, Russian Federation, on the theme “Investing in social cohesion – Investing in stability and the well-being of society”.

A conducive international environment, in particular, enhanced international cooperation, including fulfillment of commitments of internationally agreed official development assistance (0.7 per cent of GDP), debt relief, market access and technical support, are crucial to support national efforts in promoting social integration.

Cooperation and coordination at the international level is imperative to combat the effects of the global crises. Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments should not be neglected. Global social justice should be seen as a global public good that is beneficial to all. The international community should take a comprehensive approach to finding a solution to the crises. At the same time, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

The international community and development partners, especially the development financing institutions and donors, are encouraged to increase international cooperation for development and effectively support national efforts to implement social development agendas. South-South cooperation, international cooperation in capacity development and general exchange of good practices are essential to promote social integration. Regional cooperation in this respect is often cost effective and results in appropriate policy models and applications.