Economic and Social Council

Topic C: Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, full employment, and decent work for all, and social integration

“The key to ending extreme poverty is to enable the poorest of the poor to get their foot on the ladder of development. The ladder of development hovers overhead, and the poorest of the poor are stuck beneath it. They lack the minimum amount of capital necessary to get a foothold, and therefore need a boost up the first rung.” –Jeffrey D. Sachs

The most recently released data from the World Bank continues to demonstrate the need for more forms of empowerment within various populations to help them achieve the end goal of eradicating poverty. Currently, the numbers indicate that there are some gains on the overall efforts to reduce poverty; specifically, the international community followed through on one of its promises by fulfilling the Millennium Development Goal to cut the 1990 poverty rate in half by the year 2015.1 In 2012, 12.7% of the global population live at or below $1.90 per day. Progress remains relatively slower within the more advanced poverty lines. The report concludes that more work is needed in order to fully eradicate poverty. Presently, there is a growing concern about how to reach those persons who live in poverty that reside in remote areas with an often volatile context of insecurity. Education, healthcare, clean water, and other vital services continue to be of critical shortage areas because of the individual’s socioeconomic status, gender, and geographical location.2

Background

United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs Report

The meeting for the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs took place on 10-12 of September 2012 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. The purpose of the meeting was to debate the report known as Resolution 1 that was submitted by the Commission for Social Development (E/2012/26), which promoted the theme for the 2013-2014 conference as, “Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all.” At the meeting, the Expert Group on empowerment came up with a series of topics that would be discussed throughout the preceding days of the meeting. The first topic considered whether or not a practical definition of empowerment was relevant or a necessary prerequisite to achieve the three objectives of social development. Second, there was a review of all of the current progress that the international community made in promoting economic, social, and political empowerment of people and

2 Ibid.
social groups. Finally, there is a need for an evidence-based series of policy recommendations to promote the empowerment of people.3

**Defining Empowerment**

The United Nations dedicated a significant amount of time to consider the definition of empowerment and what it should consist of. Based on the relevant research available in the literature on the subject as well as the United Nations’ own usage of the term to classify different groups of people, the Expert Group Meeting decided to go beyond the group-specific terminology.4 Taking a holistic approach to the term, the group decided to have it people-centered for the purposes of their meeting. The Group determined that the concept of empowerment has several components to its conceptualization.

The EGM defines empowerment as, “effective participation by members of society, as individuals and groups, in decisions about their lives, that is conditioned by a supportive enabling environment, and leads to the solution of economic and social problems confronting them.”5 In addition to defining the term, the Group assembled the components that make up the term as well. Specifically, empowerment requires an enabling environment that is conducive to supporting policies and attitude changes to allow people of all abilities and across the lifecycle and to participate in decision-making about their lives. In addition to an enabling environment, participation serves as the critical component to empowerment; participation enable people to change and or achieve various objectives within their daily lives.6

**Enabling Environment**

In order for empowerment to take shape, an enabling environment must be present. This environment consists of several some form of institutional structure that allows meaningful participation and encourages its citizens to engage in it. Attention to an enabling environment must include the human rights framework that is already in place as well as a rights-based approach to make sure that rights can be enjoyed. There should also be attention given to the environment that enables and creates space as well as meaning for an individual to participate. Knowledge, information, and communications technologies all help to produce such an enabling environment.

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
Known as political efficacy, it is widely known that positive participation will be an effective end result in the sense that it allows problems to be defined, exploration of potential solutions, and affirmation that actions will be effective.

Participation

In order to fully gauge how empowerment helps citizens’ sense of belonging is through participation analysis. In 1975, the United Nations made it a top priority in its analysis of empowerment. In their evaluation of participation, the U.N. noted three different forms of participation: end-state goal, passive process, and active process participation. The first form of participation, end-of state or goal signifies the sharing of material outputs concerning development and improves social relations vis-à-vis receiving equal opportunity, and an end to discrimination. Second, passive process helps to contribute to production by investing/saving of money; this in turn contributes to the social relations of being a good neighbor as well as a productive citizen. Lastly, active process signifies a direct participation in relevant decisions to allocate factors of production, this leads directly to the determination of societal values and roles with an enhanced potential for these values to be evenly distributed. Participation takes place throughout the different levels of various societies. It takes place locally, nationally, or at the international level.  

Outcomes of Empowerment and its Indicators

Populations who are fully empowered (at the individual level, groups, or society as a whole), have the greatest capacity to fully address problems that exist within their own society or other problems outside of their own borders. Social integration, poverty, and sustainable development are adequately reviewed if these preconditions of empowerment within the society are met. To fully begin the process of empowerment and power given to the poorest members of a society, it should be made abundantly clear what outcomes are expected from power relationships. Additionally, the costs of achieving objectives is not factored in to much of the efforts to understand the effects of power. Power should be assessed by success with regard to the costs that it took to gain success (absolute or relative).  

Furthermore, the Group determined that additional work would be needed to effectively measure the level of empowerment by creating cost-effective indicators. Specific requirements for these

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
indicators must be observable and have some indication of empowerment; specifically with participation, which is gathered based on different locations of where the participation is taking place. An example of this that the Group determined could take the form of voting in elections or the numerical percentage of women who are involved in decision-making. There still remains no single measurement criteria for empowerment that is established by the United Nations. Without such a list of indicators, the concept will not fulfill its potential to achieve efforts at successful development.

**Current Issue**

**Decent Work**

The present situation around the globe is that there are not enough good paying jobs for the world’s citizens. Gainful employment promotes a sense of empowerment because it allows citizens to connect to both its society and economy. Whenever a society faces a lack of secure employment for its people, there is less growth which devolves into less security; with less security there is less social integration. The recent ILO report indicates that there are several challenges that the global labor market is still experiencing; jobseekers are on the rise with an estimated 202 million unemployed, chronic underemployment, informal work, and large numbers of the working poor. Women, youth, minorities, and persons with disabilities are the main ones at risk.

Projections for the future are not very encouraging; long-term prospects for creating a good number of quality jobs is at severe levels. Due to a global economy that is still experiencing stagnation, volatile financial markets, technological change, and demographic shifts will cause strains on the employment rates for future years ahead. Moreover, the concept of underemployment/informality threaten efforts at reducing poverty in most developing countries. Levels of underemployment remain unreasonably high, in 2013, some 375 million workers lived with their families on less that $1.25 per day, whereas 600 million people faced this problem in the 2000s. In parts of the world in Central and South-Eastern Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States, South-East Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean

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11 Ibid.

experience a reduction in working poverty since 2007. Areas of sub-Saharan Africa is where this number increased the most for the working poor.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Informality}

Employment that is at risk as a result of informality are the core components of working poverty. It is estimated that in 2013, the number of people in vulnerable employment rose to 1\%, well above the .2\% growth rates before the years of the financial crisis. Informality remains a huge risk in developing countries and the ability to solve these problems are sluggish at best, which continues to leave people in a state of poverty.\textsuperscript{14} Being able to provide measures for people to overcome poverty is the crucial stage to improving working conditions as well as create taxable revenues that Member States need to add strength to their social welfare systems. Workers must be taken out of vulnerable working conditions and ensuring them that they have a level of work that is conducive to their well-being.

\textit{Youth Unemployment}

Another portion of the international community that are largely at risk as a result of the effects of unemployment are young persons. In 2013 alone, unemployed youth consisted of approximately 74.5 million people; this is 1 million more than in 2012. With an overall rate of 13\%, youth unemployment is double the total global unemployment rate as well as three times higher than adult unemployment. Every geographical region of the world is currently experiencing low employment prospects for its young people. The Middle East has the highest youth unemployment with 27.2\%, while other areas of the world such as Central and Eastern Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States, South-East Asia, North Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, and southern Europe experienced dramatic rises in youth unemployment. The major developing economies and members of the European Union experience ongoing increases in their unemployed youth rates as well with a combined 18.3\%.\textsuperscript{15}

A lot of young people have a difficult time acquiring decent work because there is an education gap between their levels of education and the different requirements for the labor market. These requirements often-times force many youth to drop out of the labor market entirely. They are reduced to searching for jobs that are far below their abilities and skills; they are forced to accept employment that has low wages, with no opportunity for advancement within the job itself. Market recovery continues to suffer if no progress is made to address youth unemployment, therefore undermining the reduction progress made in reducing global poverty rates.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
**Inequality**

The growing threat of income inequality puts a hindrance on the efforts to eradicate poverty; high levels of inequality undermines the efforts at economic development. High growth rates become unsustainable and compromises the impact of economic growth on efforts to reduce poverty. Income inequality that is not addressed will create social and economic injustices throughout that particular Member States’ society. Unchecked injustices have effects that reverberate throughout various segments of society for generations. In countries (Brazil, China, and Peru) where levels of income inequality are at their highest levels, a child’s parents determines more than half of his or her income. Whereas in states such as Denmark, Finland, and Norway, incomes are evenly distributed with parents that are estimated to influence the income of children by less than 20%.\(^{16}\)

The overall inequality in education poses a challenge to poverty eradication. As a cornerstone of human development, education helps by empowering citizens to take an active part in social and economic life. Economically, the lack of a formal education impacts a person’s future economic capacity; the lack of education also impacts health and other aspects of individual well-being and other prominent life opportunities. Having the basic reading skills has the capacity to reduce global poverty by nearly 12%.\(^{16}\)

**Climate Change**

Studies continue to demonstrate that there is a link between climate change and poverty rates. In the event of ecosystem degradation, extreme weather events are more likely to occur: floods, droughts, coastal storms, and the loss of agricultural outputs are major threats to those Member States who are poor as well as communities who are not economically stable. The effects of climate change are already readily visible, droughts cost many people their livelihoods for a decent crop yield; salinity costs farmers a good crop yield because much of the land lies in low-lying areas. Major weather events such as typhoons, hurricanes, and flash floods cause damage to individual family sources of income. Being able to respond to such events requires people to cope with the event that has occurred; people who have been afflicted with poverty have the least capacity to cope with such crises. Further risks can include ill-health from various things such as air and water pollution, food insecurity, hunger from crop failures, death or severe injury as a result of major weather events.\(^{17}\) All of these things associate with the ill-effects of climate change and can further hinder the efforts to eradicate poverty.

**Future Outlook**

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
Although there are numerous challenges to eradicating poverty to garner more empowerment and decent work for all, several Member States demonstrate that there is a distinct policy mix necessary to achieving poverty eradication. Growth alone is not enough to combat poverty; economic growth must be maintained, equitably distributed, and inclusive for all. With such growth in place, work will be created for all areas of that state’s society. Methods such as promoting inclusive job-rich growth, providing social protection which has the potential to floor investment in human development, implementation of more strengthened investments of education and training, and addressing unsustainable production/consumption patterns can all lead to the eradication of poverty on certain levels.  

\[\text{18} \text{ Ibid.}\]
Focus Questions

1.) What conventions, treaties, or agreements has your state signed or ratified to enhance empowerment amongst your citizens?
2.) Does your state adhere to the standards of empowerment as defined by the Expert Group Meeting?
3.) Does your state have an enabling environment conducive for participation amongst your States’ citizens?
4.) Has your state been affected by lack of adequate work, informality, unemployed youth, inequality, or climate change?
5.) What efforts has your state made to address these issues if they are a problem for your country?
Works Cited

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