



**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Social Policy and Development**

**Expert Group Meeting on Policies and Strategies to Promote Empowerment of People in Achieving
Poverty Eradication, Social Integration and Full Employment and Decent Work for All**

United Nations Headquarters, New York, 10-11 September 2013

Recommendations

As an input to the preparations for the 52nd session of the Commission for Social Development (to be held in February 2014) and the post-2015 development agenda, we, the expert participants, note that, while it is neither possible nor desirable to formulate a single/universal set of policies and strategies to promote empowerment across all countries or contexts, all Governments can adopt an approach to enable more holistic, coherent and integrated policymaking and implementation that empowers women and men of all ages to lead a better life/life with dignity.

Such an “empowering approach” should:

Create an enabling environment for individuals and groups to empower themselves by:

- I. Strengthening policy frameworks to align the incentives and activities of state and non-state actors, including the private sector, labour unions, and civil society organizations, and women and men in communities, towards the realization of an adequate standard of living, decent work and equal rights of all people across the life course, based on constitutional commitments and binding obligations of international law.
- II. Enhancing the capacity of public institutions to be transparent, accountable, participatory and responsive to the demands, needs and aspirations of all people. This will require strengthening state level institutional structures and policy mechanisms that can foster long-term transformation; enhancing social dialogue and the capacity of local public institutions; and supporting inclusive grassroots rural or urban organizations representing disadvantaged or marginalized groups. These efforts would promote and institutionalize participatory governance processes.
- III. Advancing evidence-based policymaking. The formulation and implementation of empowerment policies and strategies must be based on careful social analysis/assessment of the factors creating and reinforcing people’s vulnerabilities. Expanding an evidence base requires timely and reliable data that are made publicly available (open data) and disaggregated (by gender, age, and other socio-economic and demographic characteristics), and the identification of measurable indicators to assess progress as well as processes in promoting the empowerment of individuals and groups.

To empower vulnerable/marginalized/disadvantaged groups, individuals and communities, including women and men living in poverty and rural areas, we make specific recommendations as follows:

Promote meaningful and effective participation in policy and governance processes

1. Adopt a legal and policy framework that supports the right of all stakeholders to participate in decision-making. This would include their participation in formulation, elaboration, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and budgets.
2. Promote awareness campaigns that inform all people of their rights and the available mechanisms by which they could defend them. This will increase the participation of people in the establishment of such inclusive engagement.
3. Recognizing that some forms/mechanisms of participation tend to exclude some groups, or not effectively reflect the needs of the participants, design participatory mechanisms taking into account cultural barriers and the asymmetries of power in each given context (for example, discrimination based on gender, race, disability or other factors). Participatory processes should aim to build upon existing community structures and to counteract existing inequalities.
4. Strengthen institutional capacity, in particular at the local level, by actively engaging multiple stakeholders and beneficiaries to bring their perspectives, knowledge and experience of disadvantaged groups and individuals into governance processes. This will not only be an effective means to empower people, but also to enhance institutional accountability, build trust, and curb abuse of power, including corruption.
5. Provide adequate opportunities for involving organizations that represent disadvantaged or marginalized groups, including people living in poverty, in governance/ decision-making processes; Give value to the findings of such participatory processes, and allow the necessary resources and time for their effective participation; Ensure full access to public data and information to bring citizens closer to public administration and service delivery.

Eliminate discrimination and promote equality

6. Ensure that national legislation reflects the prohibition of all forms of discrimination established in domestic constitutions and international and regional human rights treaties. Domestic institutions, such as parliamentary committees, national human rights institutions and courts can play an effective role in fostering legislative and policy measures to promote empowerment and non-discrimination. They also offer an appropriate framework for affirming the indivisibility of social, political, cultural and economic rights.
7. Establish effective, affordable and accessible procedures, including non-formal dispute resolution mechanisms, in accordance with human rights standards, to support the most

disadvantaged seeking justice, taking into account the specific barriers that they face in gaining access to justice.

8. Establish independent, well-resourced, gender-sensitive complaint mechanisms in public policies to ensure that all people, particularly those living in poverty, can bring complaints about abuse of power and authority, corruption and discrimination.

9. Identify and remove barriers that impede access to civil registration: Allocate the resources necessary for the establishment of registration systems that are accessible to and adequate for even the most disadvantaged. Carry out registration drives, including awareness-raising campaigns, for unregistered adults and children, and ensure issuance of identify documents for persons living in poverty when necessary for effective access to public services and enjoyment of all rights.

10. In view of existing gaps between de jure and de facto discrimination, strengthen advocacy to transform public norms, attitudes, behaviours, or overcome stereotypes. In addition, public service providers should receive guidance and/or training that would decrease discriminatory behaviour.

Invest in people's capabilities and enhancing their access to productive resources

11. Invest in people's capabilities and resilience through, inter alia, improving their human capital, as well as ensuring access to basic services and putting employment and social protection at the heart of national development strategies.

12. Put the creation of productive employment and decent work for women and men at the centre of national policies. This will require, *inter alia*, reorienting macroeconomic policies towards the creation of more and better jobs, and investing in skills development and labour market policies, in particular for youth.

13. Provide/extend adequate social protection, including income transfers and social services, to all groups, and across geographic contexts (urban and rural). Where applicable, operationalize ILO recommendation 202 on National Floors of Social Protection (which enables policy coherence in the pursuit of social goals).

14. Ensure universal access to and affordability of basic services, in particular, quality education and health services, and water, sanitation and public transportation to meet the basic needs of all people. Particular attention should be paid to social investments in the human capital of young people, particularly through good quality health care and education, in order to reduce the inter-generational transmission of poverty and deprivation.

15. Strengthen access to or control over productive resources for marginalized individuals and groups. This will entail, *inter alia*, securing land tenure rights and other rights related to natural resource use (water, forests, fisheries, biodiversity); supporting the adaptation

capacities of vulnerable and marginalized groups in a changing climate; promoting financial inclusion (ensuring access to a broad range of financial services, including community-based savings, credit, remittances, micro-insurance, rural finance, and mobile banking); reducing transaction fees for remittances; and promoting responsible and sustainable lending practices by a range of financial services providers, including commercial banks, financial cooperatives, microfinance institutions or community based organizations.

16. Expand access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). Access should bridge the rural-urban and gender gaps in connectivity and use, and strengthen the digital skills of all groups through access to training or information.

Recommendations for international development cooperation/donor agencies

17. Create synergies between the normative (inter-governmental) and operational functions of the UN system. In order to promote empowerment and achieve internationally-agreed goals and priorities, the UN system should continue enhancing its coordination and information sharing.

18. Ensure that international development assistance is in line with the State's own obligations to respect and ensure human rights or ensure observance of international human rights standards, as well as the principles of non-discrimination and equality, including gender equality, transparency, and accountability in their international development assistance and cooperation.

19. Ensure that the findings of evaluation/impact assessments are widely shared, including with national governments and civil society organizations, and effectively incorporated into the design and implementation of institutional policies, programmes and activities.

20. Ensure the ongoing assessment of the impact of current participatory approaches on the most disadvantaged groups, communities, and individuals. Such review should be based on available data and should capture elements necessary for successful participation and identify structural factors blocking full participation.

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Note:

Evidence-based policymaking entails formulating public policy informed by rigorously established objective evidence – “facts” such as reliable data, analysis, impact assessment, evaluation, testimonies, citizen's assessment, etc., and beyond “what works and what does not” approach. This will enable a holistic understanding of the context in which the policy is to be implemented.