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Relevant to the Theme of the Commission

Social Integration

Statement Prepared and Submitted by the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation to the Commission for Social Development, non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and the Sisters of Mercy – Special Consultative status.

*“Poverty is more than inadequate income or human development. Poverty is also about lack of voice, power, and representation. One effective way to address these various dimensions of poverty is through the empowerment and participation of poor people in decision-making that affects their lives. .... We need a true partnership between all stakeholders in the development process. People living in poverty have the biggest stake in ensuring that this partnership works and that the development process is inclusive. That is why they should be involved at every stage of any project to reduce poverty –from planning, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation”- Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs.*

As we begin the Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, we are aware that the top down approach employed during the First UN Decade for Eradication of Poverty has brought about economic growth only for some. But this has not at all been the experience the masses of people living in poverty during these years. The gap between those who possess the wealth of the world and those who live in poverty has become deeper. It is time that a process is initiated that will enhance a balance between top down and bottom up approaches towards development, peace and security with the goal of bringing everyone to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being.

‘Placing people at the centre of our concerns for development’ was the new consensus established by the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. People living in poverty feel powerless and alienated because they do not have say in the decisions that affect their lives.

They do not have structures that provide opportunities to become active citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities. The electoral constituencies of the different levels in representative democracy are so big that the people living in poverty- the 'small people' - have no forum for their 'small voices' to be heard. Effective and sustained participation can take place only when people are ensured a viable forum to have a say in decision-making that affects their lives.

A tripartite initiative by government, UN System and Civil Society Organizations in India offers a good example of such participation. An enabling process for universal social inclusion which links the top down and the bottom up approaches and thus ensures effective results bringing about a life of dignity for all has been developed in India. People at the grassroots are organized into small groups of around 30 neighborhood families to facilitate participatory dialogue in a sustained manner. The government ensures 40% of the budget for planning, implementation and evaluation from below by these grassroots neighborhood groups and their federated structures at different levels. Social coherence, cohesion and inclusion take place in these grassroots neighborhood communities. Thus a process of partnership for development, peace and security is initiated creating a meaningful link between the top down and bottom up approaches ensuring effective results bringing about justice and dignity for all.

These neighborhood groups are federated at different levels and are guided at all levels by five principles: **smallness of size, numerical uniformity, subsidiarity, recall scope, and convergence.**

'**Smallness of size**' of the forums ensures that everyone gets attention and voice, that everyone is known for who one is. It ensures also accountability. Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi said: "One cannot go on fooling a face-to face community for long"

The principle of **numerical uniformity** as regards the size of the units at the various levels of federation is to ensure that everybody is at equal advantage in terms of distance from the decision-making centers.

The principle of **subsidiarity** enjoins that whatever can be done at a lower level is not taken to any level above it. This ensures that action, dynamism and importance are targeted at the lowest levels possible bringing a sense of worth to persons at the base.

**Recall scope** is to further underscore answerability. As the forums at each level are just face to face communities, elections need not be costly and people can always call back the representatives who do not measure up from any level of federated structures. The neighborhood group meeting can be convened at any time and the group can decide together to nominate another person to represent the concerns of the group in a more effective way.

**Convergence** is to ensure that whatever can be done through these structures is done through them, thus reinforcing the identities and importance of these structures.

One example of the effective practice is the tripartite initiative called Kudumbashree ([www.kudumbashree.org](http://www.kudumbashree.org)) in Kerala, India which includes neighborhood-based organization and territory-based federation of women living in poverty. Around 184,000 inclusive neighborhood forums are organized for focused attention and leadership, involving in small savings, credits, micro-enterprises, marketing and the like. The State government ensures that programmes and activities of almost all its departments converge and get implemented through these neighborhood structures and their federations. The same neighborhood-based inclusive organization lends itself also to inclusive action by children for child rights. This takes the form of nearly fifty thousand neighborhood parliaments of children, and their multi-tier federation up to the state level in two States of India.

Another example: *Damodaran*, the State Education Minister of the neighborhood parliaments of children from Tamilnadu, India writes: “Manayeripatti is a village in Thanjavur District of Tamilnadu, India. The transport buses passing that way would not stop by it in order to pick up passengers. The District Children’s Parliament discussed the issue and submitted an application to the Chairman of the Municipality. He however, did not follow up the petition. The Children’s Parliament then decided to send an application to the District Collector, the MLA and even to the Minister of Transport of the Government of Tamilnadu. Within a month the village got a bus stop. Now even the Fast Passenger Buses stop”. ([www.ncnworld.org](http://www.ncnworld.org) )

**Based on this effective practice, we make the following recommendations to the Governments:**

1. That they adopt similar neighborhood based smaller structures at grassroots level and their federation at different levels so that the people living in poverty, particularly in the developing countries have a participatory forum for dialogue and increased engagement which gives them a say in the decisions that affect their lives.
2. That they promote a partnership of different groups- women, children, youth, people with disabilities, indigenous people, older people, and migrants- through their networks based on this type of neighborhood forums so that all be involved in the process of becoming active citizens.
3. That they see this system as a means to promote coherence of government, the UN system and the Civil Society Organizations through more effectively
  - building capacity of the neighborhood groups on their rights and responsibilities
  - identifying people living in poverty in these groups and enabling them to be the real beneficiaries of the poverty reductions strategy programmes

➤ evolving need based decentralized planning , implementing, monitoring from below

4. That they utilize the process of smaller neighborhood groups and their federated structures to foster universal inclusion, the fulfillment of the principles of the Second United Nations Decade for Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017) by upholding the value of maximum participation of people living in poverty to achieve the Internationally Agreed Development Goals including the Millennium Development Goals.
5. That they ensure people at the grassroots be involved in the decision making process while implementing macroeconomic programmes to eliminate poverty and protect planet Earth while demanding accountability and transparency from the governments.
6. That they give importance to the human rights perspective being integrated in all policies, programmes and efforts taken to eradicate poverty; and that, consonant with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they recognize the intimate link between the abuse of human rights and extreme poverty.