A new Opportunity

The World Social Summit, 30 years after

1 March 2024

On 10 September 2021, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres unveiled the report Our Common Agenda, which presents his recommendations on how to take forward the commitments expressed by the UN General Assembly in the 75th Anniversary Declaration. It offers concrete ideas on a politically bold strategy for change, with a premium on accelerating the implementation of existing agreements, beginning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Among other proposals to build momentum towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Secretary-General called for a World Social Summit in 2025, to revisit essential building blocks of the social contract upon foundations of trust; inclusion, protection and participation; and what matters to people and the planet. The outcome of the Summit is meant to be an update of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, covering issues such as universal social protection, universal health coverage, adequate housing, education for all and decent work.

Club de Madrid, the world's largest forum of democratic former Presidents and Prime Ministers, issued the following statement about the Social Summit under the title 'A post pandemic Social Contract.'

A short report about the recent high-level panel discussion on the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family during the Commission for Social Development is also included. The panel showed the importance of family issues in social development, around the four megatrends proposed by the General Assembly for this anniversary: new technologies, demographic shifts, urbanization and migration, and climate change.

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Panel discussion on family at the UN *

The United Nations Commission for Social Development held a high-level panel discussion on the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, moderated by John Wilmoth, Officer-in-Charge, Division for Inclusive Social Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Panelists included: Linton Mchunu, Acting Director-General of the National Department of Social Development of South Africa; Bahira Trask, Professor of Human Development & Family Sciences, University of Delaware; Zitha Mokomane, Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology, University of Pretoria; and Susan Walker, Associate Professor Emeritus, University of Minnesota.

Ms. Trask said that by mid-century, two thirds of the world's population will be living in urban areas, with 90 per cent of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa. Urbanization is defined differently in different parts of the world, she acknowledged, noting that it can be defined by population density, built areas, commuting density or simply by the number of people not working in the agricultural economy. Highlighting Sustainable Development Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities, she said it focuses on making cities inclusive, safe, and resilient. If well-planned, cities can lead to greater equity, social inclusion, and quality of life.

Urbanization is also closely linked with migration, she added, noting that the ability to decide where to live is a key element of human freedom. In order to maximize the opportunities provided by urbanization, States must invest in affordable and safe housing, reliable transportation, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and green spaces. Further, urban infrastructure must prepare for climate change-driven migration, she said.

Ms. Mokomane said that on 15 November last year, the world population reportedly reached 8 billion people. This was due to a universal decline in the mortality rate as well as declines in fertility rates. "All demographic events occur in families," she said, stressing that having a child, losing a parent or spouse, and moving to new locations are all family experiences. Individuals rely on family members to care for them if they become ill and people move into and out of the labor force to fulfil family responsibilities.

A post pandemic Social Contract

COVID-19 has evidenced and widened existing obstacles in access to health, education, decent work and social protection all over the world. There is a need for a stronger commitment to the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations and its Member States, international financial institutions, regional organizations and other actors, including the civil society

There is no better or more inclusive forum than the United Nations to evoke such a commitment and to elevate social development in the international agenda. The United Nations Secretary-General's report Our Common Agenda recommends that consideration should be given to holding a World Social Summit in 2025, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration.

We fully support this call as a matter of urgency and responsibility towards the millions of citizens around the world whose social needs have slipped further from being met.

A World Social Summit at the highest political level will provide an opportunity for the international community to strengthen United Nations' framework for effective social development and to save the 2030 Agenda from unravelling.

It will also represent a step forward in building a networked and inclusive multilateralism, and help the United Nations system keep pace with the evolving challenges and opportunities of sustainable development.

An opportunity for shared decision making

- The celebration of a World Social Summit in 2025 represents a unique opportunity for inclusion. The Summit's agenda and definition of final outcomes should engage and include a wide range of voices including civil society organizations, local governments, the private sector, financial institutions and other key actors.

- Civil Society should play a relevant role. This will require a significant effort in terms of mobilization and coordination of civil society organizations at local, national and regional levels. Special attention should be given to the participation of the Global

South when it comes to defining the Summit's agenda and engaging in political negotiations.

- Most marginalized groups must be represented in the discussions. The voices of minorities and migrants should be heard along all stages of the Summit. They should all have a say in envisioning their lives and futures.

- Regional organizations should also play a significant role in the preparations and political negotiations of the Summit. This will ensure policy alignment and increase regional political ownership in a time when regional organizations are increasing their response to social development challenges.

Agenda Setting

People need to see results reflected in their daily lives. The Summit should be built upon clear objectives in terms of what should be achieved. It should be able to deliver practical solutions anchored in human rights.

- The Copenhagen Declaration should be the starting point for discussions. It should be updated and improved so it better responds to the standards of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda and the increasing social needs as a consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the impact of conflict.

- The concept of Human Dignity should the anchored in all discussions. The process needs to be human-centered and make sure it contributes to the 2030 Agenda's commitment to leaving no one behind.

- It should have a strong implementing focus so it contributes to building trust in our societies. With no trust, there is no cohesion. Implementation and a comprehensive approach to accountability, not only national but among countries, will be determinant factors for the success of the Summit's outcomes.

- The World Social Summit will help the international community to take stock of the problems we face and find practical

High fertility can strain family budgets while lower fertility is linked to increased women's labor market participation. At the same time, high fertility can be a form of safety net and enable old-age support, while lower fertility can weaken emotional and physical support, she said.

The international community must consider human-right-based fertility policies, put in place interventions to address high levels of adolescent fertility in affected regions and strengthen publicly funded reproductive health and social care, she stressed.

Ms. Walker, identifying different functions of today's smartphones — including communication, entertainment and navigation — said "daily life can be done with the phone, on demand." Humankind is in the tertiary phase of the Information Age, she said, highlighting the importance of technology in family life. In the last 25 years, nearly ubiquitous Internet use and smartphone ownership in most continents has impacted individuals, families and wider structures. Information and communications technology (ICT) has reduced space and time barriers and offered efficiencies and additional tools for communication, productivity and learning.

Research to date supports the value of ICT to family life and human development. Yet, it also identifies threats through exposure, security and privacy breaches, heightening challenges especially to those living in high-risk conditions. Further research avenues will identify processes and actual impacts and strategies to best support families. In this context, she stressed the importance of equity, noting that not all people have access to the same technology.

Time shapes people's understanding of technology, she said, noting that the phones used in 2004 were talking devices, providing mobility. Today, people can do everything on their phone. Spotlighting areas of concern, she said ICT can impact sleep, lead to distraction from learning and socialization, obesity, bullying as well as exposure to harmful images and online predators. However, such technologies also offer opportunities for learning and engagement, boosting creativity, collaboration, connectivity and identity development. ICT is a topic that many parents feel insecure about, she pointed out, noting that, for many, use escalated after they were adults.

And while technology helps families be cohesive through communication and the maintenance of intergenerational relationships, it is also a potential source of conflict. Technology is also crucial for families during migration, she observed, adding the successful integration of migrants requires that their technological integration is as important as the social, political and economic integration.

Mr. Mchunu recalled that this year, South Africa commemorates 30 years of democracy, following the end of Apartheid. The country's democratic Government institutionalized various policies aimed to transform the society, primarily family institutions. In its efforts to create a fair and equal society, South Africa continues to take stock of the social and economic context when developing social policies and progress. Detailing the demographic trends in his country, he said that the extended family household prevails and life expectancy is on the rise. South Africa is among countries with the highest level of inequality in the world, including in terms of income distribution and regional disparities. Family institutions have gone through significant challenges, including poverty due to unemployment and landlessness, HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, absentee fathers, crime and substance abuse. Poverty and unemployment continue to place enormous stress on families.

The care-burden is carried predominantly by women, significantly affecting their ability to engage in paid work on a full-time basis, he pointed out. Further, he voiced concern over high rates of gender-based and sexual violence in the country. South Africa's Government is putting families at the center of development through access to shelters, clean water, sanitation, energy and housing. The public health-care sector is State-funded, servicing the majority of the population. In terms of food security, the Government has established more than 200 community nutritional centers to allow poor families to access nutritious food. He also spotlighted the national climate change response policy which is essential to climate change mitigation.

* Source: UN News.

solutions for poverty, malnutrition, inequality, mistrust and marginalization among many others. A Human Security approach would offer policymakers a new conceptual framework and improved methodologies to respond to these challenges. It would help to understand the relationship between human development and human security.

- The Summit will allow us to review long-pursued social inclusion and social justice objectives such as:

    o Universal Social Protection as an integrated set of policies designed to ensure income security and support to all, especially the poor and the most vulnerable.

    o Standards of living for people to live a decent life.

    o Tackling income and wealth inequality.

    o Equality, inclusiveness and access of women, minorities, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

    o Decent Work Agenda able to provide decent earnings, ensure safe working conditions, provide social protection, and safeguard workers' rights.

    o Agenda for the Youth able to deliver better education and jobs, and to give them a greater voice in designing their own futures.

    o Financing for social development, including tax and debt issues and the rethinking of the global financial architecture.

We commit to advancing the dialogues advocating for UN action for inclusive social development and supporting the UNSG's call for a World Social Summit in 2025. We see this specific call as an opportunity for global leaders to give social development a relevant place in policymaking and keep Agenda 2030 from further unravelling.

International Federation for Family Development