

INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD

CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Assessment of progress in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development

Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Programme of Implementation emphasize poverty eradication as a requisite for sustainable development. Nevertheless, in spite of progress in some countries in the ECE region over the last two decades, poverty levels remain relatively high: nearly 1 in 7 people are at risk of poverty within the EU and the USA. According to the 2010 report of the European Commission's Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, 8% of Europeans live in conditions of severe material deprivation and cannot afford a number of necessities considered essential in order to live a decent life in Europe.¹

The recent economic crisis has further exacerbated the disparities between rich and poor; as recently stated by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, “The twisted irony is that those who have benefited most from past economic growth and development have been those who were already better off, and those who have suffered the harshest effects of the cumulative crises have been the poorest and the marginalized in all societies.”² The latter continue to experience the worst effects of environmental degradation. In addition, the measures taken to improve their well-being have often failed to guarantee access to fundamental rights. This failure is partially due to the lack of understanding of the reality of extreme poverty and to the lack of participation of those who are the most affected in decision-making processes.

The social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development have been approached in an unconnected and unbalanced way. Real sustainability can only be achieved if these three pillars are fully integrated and treated with equal importance in programming and delivery.

2. A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

UNEP defines a ‘green economy’ as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. The transition

1 The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion, COM/2010/0758 final

2 Statement issued on International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Geneva, 17 October 2011, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11497&LangID=E>

to a green economy is often considered as having the benefit of creating green jobs – defined by the ILO as jobs that reduce the environmental footprint, and provide for a just transition and decent work. The four tenets of decent work are the creation of good jobs, guarantees for the respect of workers and recognition of their rights, the extension of social protection and the promotion of social dialogue. The just transition and decent work provisions have been included in the Cancun Agreements from the UNFCCC COP 16.

UNDP, on its side, stresses that if a green economy is to effectively lead to poverty eradication, it should promote job opportunities in sectors where people living in poverty have their livelihoods; generate the public revenues necessary to ensure equitable access to quality services; promote equitable access to energy in addition to its efficient use; and build resilience to environmental risks.³

Because decent work and green jobs will lift some people out of poverty, but will not meet the need for policies and programmes to eradicate extreme poverty, and because of the different definitions attributed to the term ‘green economy,’ ATD Fourth World puts forward the following:

- **Rio + 20 should consider establishing a roadmap for an ‘environmentally and socially just economy.’** Some of the threats from a green economy for people living in extreme poverty are the inevitable industrial changes and increased shocks and stresses from volatile commodity prices (oil, food), forced evictions due to the reorganization of cities, lack of access and control over natural resources, and underqualification for “green jobs”, making it even more difficult to generate income. Roadmaps for achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication must therefore include the parallel objectives of green jobs and decent work for all, effective use of social protection measures (to offset the increased costs of energy, transportation, housing, infrastructure, etc. as a result of a ‘green economy’), and training and employment opportunities that build on people's capacities and enable them to accede to their fundamental rights. Special attention should be given to ensure that social protection measures benefit people whose incomes depend on the informal sector, and not only those in the formal sector, in order to guarantee universal access to social, economic and cultural rights.
- **Proposals for environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation and economic transition should include mechanisms to ensure that their benefits reach people living in extreme poverty.** Priority should be given to climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies that build on local knowledge and capacities, and empower local communities with the technologies, financial resources and skills required in order for these strategies to be sustainable. This requires participatory mechanisms at all levels of policy-making, to ensure that the knowledge possessed by people in extreme poverty is capitalized upon and contributes to a socially and environmentally just economic framework. To the extent possible, small-scale, inclusively managed projects should be promoted and supported, in order to protect the environment and improve the living conditions of people living in poverty. Many marginalized groups have already

3 Helen Clark, Informal meeting of the Executive Board on Rio + 20, UNDP, 9 September 2011.

developed survival strategies that can contribute positively to an inclusive and sustainable development. These should be recognized and supported.

- **The roadmap to developing a ‘green economy’ in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication should be based on internationally agreed human rights principles and standards.** The work of the Human Rights Council in developing Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights provides a useful tool to this end. Indicators of progress should define the criteria for a just and safe environment for humankind, and measure progress towards that end, thus reflecting the recognition that progress in ensuring a world ‘free of fear and want’ cannot be measured only in terms of the Gross Domestic Product.

3. The institutional framework for sustainable development

A stronger, more efficient and better-integrated multilateral architecture for sustainable development and poverty eradication is needed. Its structure and operational modalities should ensure that the voices of all sectors of society are heard, including those of the most marginalized groups. As highlighted in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, and reconfirmed in the Chisinau Declaration of 1 July 2011, “...public participation in decision-making is not a self-standing objective, but rather an instrument for achieving the sustainability and well-being of society. ... citizens should be invited to participate in defining and implementing green economy programmes and in choosing the most appropriate road maps to sustainability.”⁴

In order for all members of society to be able to participate effectively and meaningfully, including those living in extreme poverty,

- **Obstacles to participation must be identified and addressed**, such as negative stereotypes, lack of access to relevant and understandable information, and opportunity costs.
- Clear performance indicators should be established for this new multilateral architecture, as well as for the existing international funds for climate change adaptation and mitigation – the Global Environment Facility, the Special Climate Change Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, and the Adaptation Fund. **These performance indicators should include the percentages allocated to the eradication of extreme poverty, as well as the progress made in reaching people living in extreme poverty.** Reporting requirements and a review mechanism should be put into place that provide space for citizen participation, including by those groups who are the most vulnerable and likely to suffer the most from climate change as well as from the transition to a green economy.
- **The Sustainable Development Goals that are expected to be an outcome of the**

⁴ Chisinau Declaration, Adopted by the Meeting of Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters at its fourth session, ‘Rio plus Aarhus — 20 years on: bearing fruit and looking forward,’ Economic Commission for Europe, Chisinau, 29 June–1 July 2011.

Conference must have at their core the eradication of extreme poverty, in each of the three pillars of a sustainable development: the environmental, economic and social dimensions. This will ensure complementarity with efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It will also contribute to the development of a post-2015 development framework that maintains the eradication of extreme poverty as a central aim, and which should be based on human rights principles.