

Concept note for WSSD2 High-Level Round Table 1

Strengthening the three pillars of social development: poverty eradication, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and social inclusion

Background

The World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 represented a landmark achievement of multilateral action to address critical shortcomings in social development. At the Summit, Governments agreed to approach poverty eradication, employment and decent work, and social integration, in an integrated manner, marking a breakthrough in systemic thinking and action. Since then, UN normative frameworks have underscored the importance of international cooperation, solidarity, and equitable access to trade, finance and technology in supporting these goals. The commitments enshrined in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, reaffirmed and expanded in the Doha Political Declaration, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Pact for the Future and other intergovernmental accords, serve as a guide for integrated policy action and social progress.

Since 1995, much of the progress in poverty reduction, decent work, and social inclusion has resulted from policies that are in accordance with these normative frameworks. Progress in reducing poverty has generally been faster in countries and among groups that have benefitted from globalization, particularly through economic integration and external trade operating as an engine of growth. At the same time, recurrent crises and the growing debt servicing obligations that affect many countries have constrained national policy space. Weakening growth and rising protectionist trends may further constrain policy space, steering policy choices away from investments in reducing poverty and inequality, and enhancing access to health, education and social protection. Demographic shifts, with increasing youth populations in some regions and population aging in other regions, place additional pressures on meaningful policy solutions for the majority.

Science, technology and innovation, including digitalization and artificial intelligence, offer many of the solutions to social development challenges, but equally entail the potential for disruption, particularly in the absence of inclusive human-centered governance frameworks. The growing threats from climate change and escalating conflicts are a reminder that millions who have escaped poverty are often one misfortune away from falling back.

Poverty eradication, the promotion of full and productive employment and decent work for all, and social inclusion are interrelated and mutually reinforcing goals. They require integrated, comprehensive policy solutions, grounded in a shared commitment to equality, social justice and solidarity. By adopting the Doha Political Declaration, Member States have reaffirmed the importance of a whole-of-government approach, integrating economic and social policies so that they are mutually supportive and avoid policy silos across sectors. While siloed and fragmented efforts may yield results in the short term, they fail to address the structural drivers of poverty, inequality or social exclusion. Only an integrated and transformative strategy - as envisioned in both the Copenhagen and Doha Declarations - can deliver lasting change.

There is a critical need, therefore, for strengthened international cooperation to address policy gaps and structural imbalances and to promote a stable environment for effective social development policymaking. Translating such ambitions into action demands coordinated efforts, sustained cooperation at the regional and international levels, and an overall supportive environment of global

stability and respect for collective norms and responsibilities. National governments alone cannot meet today's challenges when faced with shrinking fiscal space, limited policy autonomy in an interconnected global economy, and vulnerability to shocks beyond their borders. Shared challenges require shared solutions. This round table provides an opportunity to galvanize such solutions.

Objectives

Through an open, multi-stakeholder exchange, Round Table 1 will identify priorities for integrated actions that would accelerate social development progress and address critical cross-cutting issues, while taking into account global systemic trends and their impacts on the three core commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration.

Format

The Round Table will begin with welcome remarks by the Co-Chairs, followed by a keynote speech by a high-profile personality. These are followed by a moderated panel discussion composed of Heads of State and Government, selected NGO, private sector and/or intergovernmental organization representatives, each responding to specific aspects of the Round Table theme in the form of pre-assigned questions. In this interactive format the Moderator will pose questions to panellists, with each given three minutes to respond. All panellists will be given the list of questions. The Moderator will reserve the right to invite different members of the panel to respond to the same questions from their own perspective, allowing each panellist the opportunity to offer multiple responses.

When the questions are exhausted the Moderator will invite contributions from two lead discussants who will speak from the floor (three minutes each). The panel segment concludes with a brief presentation of key takeaways by the Moderator. The Co-chairs then open the floor for a predetermined number of interventions from participants in the audience. Interventions will be limited to three minutes, and a countdown clock will be activated with the option to cut microphones when the time elapses. Interventions from the floor should be specific on the theme in keeping with the interactive format. At the conclusion of interventions from the floor the Co-Chairs will invite final comments from each panellist (one minute) and the Moderator. The Round Table ends with the two Co-Chairs providing brief concluding remarks.

Guiding questions

- How do actions on poverty reduction, decent work, and social inclusion reinforce one another? What risks arise when progress in one area lags behind the others?
- Considering systemic trends – challenges and opportunities - what course-correction is needed globally to ensure fulfilment of the commitments in the Doha Declaration and in what specific areas of action?
- What examples of national-level actions through macroeconomic, labour and social policies, offer lessons for addressing effectively structural drivers of poverty, inequality and exclusion?
- How can fiscal policies be designed to better support social development objectives? What are the obstacles to this and how can tax systems be strengthened to more equitably and progressively increase national revenue?
- What specific follow-up actions, commitments and partnerships can help strengthen the three pillars of social development in the decades ahead?

- How can the social development priorities of the Pact for the Future — including eradicating poverty, inclusive social policies, transparent institutions, social cohesion, and the inclusion and protection of children and youth — be advanced in ways that give momentum to the Copenhagen Commitments and the Doha Declaration?

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