Social Summit Process
Briefing Sheet

City Life

UNED Forum

Promoting Development with a Human Face: The Social Summit Process

"*Poverty is the greatest threat to political stability, social cohesion and the environmental health of the planet*"
Human Development Report, 1994

"*The challenge to eliminate poverty belongs not to developing countries alone, but to the world community as a whole. Partnerships among governments, the private sector and civil society, with the active support of the international development community, are needed to address the structural causes of poverty and inequality in the world.*"
James Gustav Speth, Head of United Nations Development Programme, 1995

Copenhagen +5 and beyond

In June 2000, the UN General Assembly met in Geneva to review progress on the 1995 Copenhagen Programme of Action. The Special Session, entitled the **"World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for all in a Globalising World"** is commonly referred to as **Copenhagen+5.**

Its roots date back to 1995, when the UN World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen, addressed three core themes: poverty, unemployment and social integration. The Social Summit was the culmination of a series of global conferences and summits on social issues sponsored by the UN. The outcomes – **the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development** and the **Programme of Action** - drew extensively on the recommendations for sustainable development agreed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (UN Conference on Environment and Development) and on the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. It formed part of a global cycle of UN events held throughout the 1990s, the others being the Fourth World Conference on Women (Sept 1995 Beijing) and the UN Conference on Human Settlements – Habitat II (1996 Istanbul).

The development agenda now places *people* and *societies* at the centre of the policy-making process. 186 countries adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the ambitious Programme of Action. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) these agreements represent the largest international consensus ever achieved on key social development priorities at such a high political level. Heads of State or senior representatives from over 180 countries signed up to **10 Commitments** to:

- Create an economic, political, social, cultural, and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development
- Eradicate absolute poverty by a target date to be set by each country
- Support full employment as a basic policy tool
- Promote social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights
- Achieve equality and equity between women and men
- Attain universal and equitable access to education and primary health care
- Accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries
- Ensure that the structural adjustment programmes include social development goals
- Increase resources allocated to social development
- Strengthen co-operation for social development throughout the UN

Where are we heading?

Despite the international declarations and World Summits the inequality between the first and third world still persists and indeed widens. There is an increase in absolute, as well as relative poverty in most of the 45 poorest developing countries. This trend is mirrored in most of the world's richest countries (Church & Cade 1998). According to the 1995 Human Development Report, 70% of the 1.3 people living in poverty today are women.

Agenda 21, the international action plan agreed at the Rio Earth Summit 1992, clearly made the links between poverty and environmental issues, but many governments have yet to rise to the challenge of linking action on poverty with sustainability. The Social Summit and its Review Process helped put this huge issue back on the agenda. But there are powerful forces at work: "As long as globalisation is dominated by economic aspects and the spread of markets, it will put a squeeze on human development. We need a new approach to governance, one that preserves the advantages offered by global markets and competition, while allowing for human, community and environmental resources that will ensure that globilisation works for people and not just for profits." Sakiko Fakuda-Parr, director of the Human Development Report Office, 1999 (UNED Aug-Oct 99)

"The world is rushing headlong into greater integration, driven mostly by a philosophy of market profitability and economic efficiency. We must bring human development and social protection into the equation... Globalisation needs a human face." Dr Richard Jolly, Co-ordinator of the 1999 UNDP Human Development Report.

> **Sub-Saharan Africa** (region of 800 million people) life expectancy is falling dramatically as governments, overwhelmed by rapid population growth have failed to curb the spread of the virus that leads to AIDS. In several countries more than 20% of adults are infected with HIV. In absence of low cost cure, 23 million Africans began the 21st century with a death sentence imposed by HIV. (State of the World 2000)

Education is one of the UN measures of human development. The availability of educational opportunities at all levels is important to a sustainable society. If there is to be equality of opportunity, and everyone is able to participate actively in decision-making, it is very important that everyone has access to high quality education.

Words into action

Responsibility for implementing the Social Summit agreements lies primarily with national governments. The United Nations Commission on Social Development is the main body for monitoring the process. Behind the scenes, hundreds of non-governmental organisations and groups within civil society have participated in, and helped shape the Copenhagen agreements negotiated by governments. They are actively involved in tackling the issues on a day-to-day basis. As a matter of fact, a parallel NGO Forum in 1995 attracted 12,000 people.

The Copenhagen +5 Review Process

The UN General Assembly in June 2000 looked at progress made in delivering the basic necessities for human well-being. The well organised event was attended by 35 Heads of State and governments, 4791 government delegates, and 2045 NGO representatives. Despite deep political divisions over issues such as human rights, governance, debt and nature and the scope of globalisation, the negotiating tone was positive. A three part Outcome Document, which includes a political declaration, a review and assessment of the implementation of Social Summit, and further actions and initiatives to implement the commitments made in 1995 was issued. This final document made progress in raising issues such as: the transparency of international financial institutions, the need for new and innovative sources of funding, and the recognition of the critical importance of access to medicine at affordable prices.

The Social Summit and its Review explicitly places poor and disadvantaged people as actors and contributors to social development. The 1995 Summit showed a clear shift in perspective away from the notion of 'the poor' as 'victims of poverty' into 'people living in poverty' who are 'citizens universally entitled to development who should fully enjoy economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.' Unfortunately, the controversial launch in Geneva of 'A Better World for All', published by the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD, reverted to a victim stance, and was heavily criticised by NGOs for its patronising tone

and implication that developing countries would be best placed to follow the lead of developed countries. NGOs were kept informed on the negotiations via a proper information service, but what was missing from the overall Copenhagen+5 process was a sense of where it was all going. There is no clear mandate for following up the Process and no ten year review was written into the original process.

In the run-up to the Review, the preparatory process included different stakeholders and countries sharing experiences about achievements and challenges in social development policies and programmes, convening of expert groups, issue-based working groups, and NGO's holding stakeholder events to gather views.

Getting involved

Although the Review process has happened, work on pushing the boundaries of social development continues as new issues are emerging all the time. Implications of these, including the impacts of globalisation, will need to be fed into the Rio+10 process. NGO's perform a valuable monitoring role, keeping the pressure on decision-makers. At the national and local levels, on a day-to-day basis, NGO's are translating the outcomes of the Social Summit into reality. This might involve lobbying for more effective policies and programmes on education or health, or working for local economic development that supports meaningful employment. Voluntary agencies, the local municipality, and national campaign groups are all sources of information for the individual wanting to get involved. Local people are the best experts on their situation: measures that help empower them and unleash their creativity will go a long way towards the desirable partnerships for action outlined in the Rio process.

Glossary

Sustainable Development: "*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (Brundtland Report, 1987) also "*development which improves people's quality of life, within the carrying capacity of the earth's life support system.*" (2nd World Conservation Strategy (UNEP))

Sustainability: Working towards sustainability involves:

Social development: increasing social equity

Environmental protection: protecting and improving the environment

Economic development: developing economic security for everyone

Stakeholders: Groups or organisations who have influence in a particular area of policy or are affected by policies. Agenda 21 identified 9 Major Groups: women, children and youth; indigenous peoples; NGOs; local authorities; trade unions; business and industry; science and technology, and farmers. This is not an exhaustive list; at any stage in a process there can be other specific stakeholder groups.

Helpful links and information sources

Documentation from Copenhagen + 5 can be found at: www.un.org/esa/socdev/geneva2000/docs/

Documentation from UN Commission for Social Development: www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2001.htm

Copenhagen+5: A Social Development Resource for all Stakeholders:
www.earthsummit2002.org/wssd/default.htm

UNED Forum Central information resource with document downloads (UN etc), newsletters, briefing material, national reports plus links to the Road Map of how all the processes fit together:
www.earthsummit2002.org

Stakeholder Toolkit for Women: www.earthsummit2002.org/toolkits/women/index.htm

UNDP Human Development Report 2000 – Human Rights and Human Development is available online via www.undp.org. The Report looks at human rights as an intrinsic part of development and at development as a means to realizing rights. It explores the new rights agenda for the 21st century and proposes new approaches to political and economic governance that foster social justice.

References

Brown, L et al. (2000) State of the World. London: Earthscan.

Church, C. & Cade, A. (1998) An Environment for Everyone. Community Development Foundation. London. Summary available online at www.cdf.org.uk

UNDP 1995 Policy Paper - Poverty Eradication – A Policy Framework for Country Strategies 1995 New York

UNED Forum Connections Newsletter Aug-Oct 2000 www.unedforum.org

Variety of UN documentation, adapted by UNED Forum and placed on www.earthsummit2002.org

Also see

This short Briefing Sheet is one in a series specially prepared by UNED Forum for Life II. It aims to outline key issues covered within the topic and to act as a sign-posting service to further information sources and official documentation. Many issues are cross-cutting so we encourage you to investigate the other material available. Other sheets include:

- **Cities as Symbols of Hope: The Habitat and Istanbul+5 Process**
- **A World of Difference? The Earth Summit 2002 process**
- **Investing in the Future: Financing for Development Process**
- **Making Women Count: The Beijing Process**
- **Whose Decision it is Anyway? Decision-making Processes at the national & international Level**
- **Promoting Involvement in the Search for Sustainability - We are all Stakeholders Now**
- **Resource Sheet - more Background Information and Inspiration**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**

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