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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

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Economic and Social Council***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Introduction, objective and purpose

The global commune venerating the goal of poverty alleviation has undergone numerous transformations overtime in terms of its nature, type and extent. Traversing years, it has come to include multiple stakeholders from the United Nations to governments, civil society organizations and most recently, the communities themselves that grapple with poverty in its various forms. A report by the World Bank highlighted improvements in the global poverty trends. However, it did underscore the great regional differences in poverty reduction. While in India and other South Asian countries poverty reduced marginally, in Africa it actually rose by a few percentage points. Given the dynamic nature of poverty, the global switch from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came in time to address the issue of poverty in a sustainable manner.

In the global poverty scenario, India surfaces as a unique case. Owing to its commitment to the MDGs and the socio-economic reforms it has undergone since independence, India has achieved exponential growth with poverty levels coming down from 70% at the time of independence to 22% in the year 2011-12[1]. Despite such progress, the country continues to house the largest number of people living under the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day. With a population of 224 million falling in this category, the issue of poverty becomes even more pernicious given India's diversity and plurality. Despite reforms, challenges of deficient infrastructure, last mile connectivity and lack of active and aware citizenry continue to decelerate the pace of development.

Against this backdrop S M Sehgal Foundation (SMSF) steps in and strives to fill the gap through designing and promoting rural development interventions that create opportunities, build resilience and provide solutions to some of the most pressing challenges in the poorest communities. This statement explicates the strategies that SMSF employs to devise and develop interventions that are community led and are able to thrust communities out of poverty in a sustainable manner. SMSF's approaches, detailed in this document, are backed by evidence of impact, scalability and replicability.

Overview of the issue as it relates to the work of the NGO

Earlier, the mainstream approach to address poverty was to foster economic growth. It got widely established and accepted that a rising tide will eventually lift all boats, albeit with variations. However, owing to the heterogeneity and complexity of an economy and realizing that growth cannot be a panacea, the focus widened and included tailored interventions by the state. It was further recognized that this widening still leaves considerable deficiencies. In India, policymakers followed a socialist development policy based on central planning and controlled markets. From 1980s, the country gradually adopted market-oriented economic reforms followed by major neo-liberal reforms programs centred on economic liberalization. The country has since achieved rapid economic progress resulting in a burgeoning middle class, absorbing people from the lower end of the economic spectrum. However, with a population of 224 million continuing to live below poverty line, India accounts for one in three of the poor worldwide.

It is this multidimensional nature of poverty that SMSF addresses through empowering people at the grassroots by mobilizing communities to develop their own vision for development and transform their awareness into action. Our mission is to strengthen community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India. Our interventions positively

affect key non-monetary indicators of poverty — education, health, sanitation, water, and food — that are extremely important for understanding the many dimensions of poverty that people experience. The three major work spheres of SMSF are water security, food security, and social justice. The yardstick of every program at SMSF is driven with the principle of leaving no one behind with gender sensitivity and women’s empowerment being central to all its initiatives.

Understanding that water affects every aspect of village life and is essential for health, education, and farming, the SMSF team works with communities to secure adequate local water supplies, improve sanitation, and manage wastewater in schools, homes, and throughout the community. As for agriculture that employs a large part of the population in developing countries, especially India (more than 50%), SMSF works to help farmers identify and utilize sustainable agriculture practices.

As for social justice, to combat ignorance among citizens and the inadequate delivery of services that afflict many rural areas, SMSF provides individual citizens and the leaders of village-level institutions with knowledge, skills, and confidence to become informed active self-advocates for their own development. This in turn helps empowering marginalized populations to participate in the decision-making process. SMSF recognizes that when citizens drive their own development and make local government institutions accountable, it is then that issues of poverty are addressed and situations improve sustainably. The team engages in participatory research, impact assessment, interactive dialogue, and community media to take informed actions and achieve sustainable results.

Specific examples of accomplishments by the NGO and remaining challenges

SMSF’s interventions have reached out to 700 villages and more than 230,000 villagers across five states in India. Our good governance model aimed at securing social justice is transforming into a national movement to steer policies and their effective delivery in not only eradicating poverty but also making the poor participate in strengthening and orienting systems and strengthening democracy and delivery of justice at multiple levels. Recognizing that India is at rank 130 on the women peace and security index, our model strives to overcome the plight of women in the face of growing economic disparities. About 39,000 villagers have participated in the ‘legal literacy camps’ organized by SMSF. Our work on social justice has won us awards like the Namati Global Justice Prize and Japanese Award for Most Innovative Project. Our innovations on augmenting water availability have been demonstrated and adapted globally. Our model of high-pressure recharge well was showcased at the UN solutions summit and our stainless-steel bio sand filter is also being adapted nationally and in other developing countries. In improving food security, our testing of salt resilient paddy and wheat varieties have yielded positive results. So far, we have constructed 83 rainwater harvesting systems, our agriculture-yield enhancing programs have trained more than 2,300 women farmers, have facilitated construction of more than 1,000 toilets in schools, and our community radio, “Alfaz-e-Mewat” provides a media platform to the local population and is broadcasted 13 hours daily in 224 villages discussing various development issues. We impart life skills training to rural youth and work towards making them digitally literate to build on their resilience and help them keep pace with the changing world and expose them to new opportunities.

Poverty is indeed a multi-dimensional issue and certainly its solution needs to match this incidence. Continued subjection to poverty leaves community groups resigned, especially the youth. Instilling a sense of ownership in communities and escalating their participation in development interventions such that they become drivers of their own development continues to be challenging. It is necessary that

our models that have demonstrated sustainable positive impact and are replicable be disseminated effectively across the globe such that similar contexts can benefit.

A way forward: expectations, specific recommendations

Poverty solutions can be classified under two categories: first, to help with current consumption while placing little emphasis on breaking the poverty circle; and second, to adopt interventions that might allow the poor to become self-sufficient. The former serves short-term goals while the latter serves the sustainability requirements.

SMSF's intervention strategies address the latter and through the experience generated at the grassroots aim to disseminate the knowledge thus created. Engaging all societal groups segregated by varied factors is imperative to achieve impact. Dovetailing social justice interventions with other domains helps transform the nature of interventions in being bottom up and adds strength and on ground feasibility to programs thus devised and implemented. Apart from women, the aged and infirm, SMSF strategically recognizes youth to be a vulnerable group that are instrumental participants in the development regime of the country. It is important to recognize the role of local government institutions and engagement of citizenry in initiating and effecting any development initiative across contexts.

A prudent policy mix is therefore required that would strive for inclusive growth. One that could provide the opportunities and improve capabilities of 'the farthest behind' so as to enable them to participate in a sustainable growth process. The international community must strengthen the effort and will to spearhead the global agenda.
