



Notes from the field...

February 2017

By the IASSW Interns at the United Nations, New York, 2016-2017

55th Commission for Social Development (CSocD55)

Civil Society Forum & Civil Society Declaration

The Civil Society Forum was held on 30-31 January leading up to the 55th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) and was co-sponsored by the NGO Committee for Social Development and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) Division for Social Policy and Development. The forum is an annual event intended to prepare civil society stakeholders for CSocD deliberations and to provide a platform for cooperation, coordination and inclusive dialogue between civil society and UN Member States. The theme for this year's forum was "Social Protection, Including Floors: A Preeminent Strategy to Eradicate Poverty and Achieve Sustainable Development for All", aligning with the theme of the Civil Society Declaration created by the NGO Committee for Social Development, described below. The forum invited participants to discuss the various applications and implementation strategies of social protection systems, including floors, to address poverty eradication, at every level, from grassroots efforts to international policies.

Participants were divided into regional breakout groups on the first day of the forum to share experiences and strategies for the implementation of

social protection systems in their respective regions, with representatives reporting back on day 2 on the outcomes of their region's discussions. Regional breakout groups shared best practices in social protection implementations; strategies for engaging Member States; and opportunities for engagement and follow-up.

On day 2 of the forum, a panel discussed best practices, lessons learned and models of social



protection to highlight during CSocD55. The panel included representatives from UN-DESA,

International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), North Dakota's (USA) Legislature, SOS Children's Village, the Nomi Network and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The panel was moderated by the NGO Committee for Social Development's own Thayvie Sinn, Founder and President of Save Cambodia and Chair of this year's Civil Society Forum.

The Forum concluded with a discussion of the Civil Society Declaration and of next steps and policy recommendations for next year's Declaration, processes to strengthen representation of civil society's message, and strategies for maintaining engagement throughout the year.



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The NGO Committee for Social Development disseminated its Civil Society Declaration at the Forum and Commission. The Declaration advocates



for social protection as a preeminent strategy for poverty eradication and sustainable development that is people-centered and

aims to leave no one behind. The Declaration calls on member states to recognize the moral imperative to promote social protection systems and reduce inequalities, while also noting the economic and social benefits of social protection systems, including social protection as a means to promote economic growth, social cohesion, and social justice. The Declaration calls for participatory processes at all levels of development, implementation and evaluation of social protection and outlines concrete actions member states can immediately take to improve social protection.

To read the complete Civil Society Declaration:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csocd/2017/csf-declaration-en.pdf>

55th Commission

The 55th Commission for Social Development ran from 1-10 February. Seven of the eight IASSW team members were able to attend various parts of the commission. The priority theme of the Commission was “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all” and reviewed member states’ progress and action plans regarding poverty eradication with particular attention to certain social groups, including youth, disabled persons, older persons, and families. The Bureau that facilitated the

Commission was comprised of a Chairperson representing Austria and Vice-Chairpersons representing Romania, Paraguay, Qatar, and Malawi. This Bureau seems particularly welcoming to the participation of civil society and found many places to feature speakers from an NGO, and made time for questions from the civil society attendees.

The Commission included 3 High Level Panel Discussions and the theme of youth development emerged as a strategy for reducing poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Of special note among these panels, was the Discussion that took place during Session Three. Panelists included speakers representing Panama, Costa Rica, The European Commission, Nigeria, and the United States. The session was moderated by Elizabeth Thompson, Former Minister of Energy and Environment in Barbados. Panelists spoke at length around social and economic platforms as means necessary to achieve poverty eradication but neglected to discuss environment as an important component to contributing to both poverty and its eradication, which is concerning given the critical need for environmental actions and the dependence upon the environment faced by the people experiencing the most extreme poverty.

At the end of the session, members from civil society were given the ability to pose questions to the panel and IASSW intern, Chelsea Cornwell was selected to do so. Video of her question can be found at the following link at the time mark of 2:12:42. (Session 3, February 1, 3pm-6pm, in English)



<http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/economic-and-social-council/watch/3rd-meeting-55th-session-of-the-commission-for-social-development/5307231648001>

For preparatory and outcome documents and more information on the Commission, including a list of side events see :

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development-csodc-social-policy-and-development-division/csodc55.html>

Noteworthy Side Events

IASSW Side Event on Poverty and Environment: “There is no Planet B”

IASSW co-sponsored a side event at the February 2017 session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development. Titled “Thinking long term: Making poverty eradication and environmental policies mutually supportive,” the program addressed key concerns in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Panelists emphasized the intersections between poverty and environmental degradation and presented examples of ways that both problems can be successfully tackled. As Elizabeth Thompson, moderator of the Commission’s priority panel on the opening day said, “environmental issues are both cause and consequence of poverty.”

Lynne Healy, (IASSW Main Representative), and representative Rebecca Davis

(Rutgers University) spoke on the panel for IASSW. Dr. Healy focused on three main points: 1) people living in poverty suffer more from harmful environmental policies; 2) there is a false narrative that environmental preservation and development are mutually exclusive; and 3) it is a challenge to ensure that environmental policies are not ignored in poverty eradication efforts. She presented several

examples of successful interventions that both improve the environment and reduce poverty at household and community levels. Dr. Davis emphasized ways that social work education is contributing to effective policies and practice to address poverty and environment. She cited the 2015 standards for social work education in the United States that



IASSW Student Representative Chelsea Cornwell posing a question to the panel at CSocD55

require schools to build students’ competency to “Advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice” (Council on Social Work Education Educational Policy and Standards). She presented creative ways to enhance environmental learning, including eco-maps, activities in horticulture therapy, using color maps that visualize the ozone hole, and using theater to address issues of climate change. Service learning that engages students in local environmental projects is particularly effective.



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Our co-sponsor in organizing the program was Dr. Sergei Zelenev, Executive Director of the International Council on Social Welfare; he also moderated the panel. He successfully engaged additional co-sponsors including the governments of Finland and Namibia, and two UN

agencies, UNESCO and the United Nations Research Institute for Social

Development (UNRISD). Paul Ladd of RISD traced the journey from a policy focus strictly on economic growth to a growing demand for “people and planet before profit.” Vilbard Usiku of Namibia discussed poaching of wildlife and the dangers it poses both to the environment and to the country’s eco-tourism industry. Cecilie Golden of UNESCO emphasized the importance of the social sciences for human development—a message welcomed by social workers. Ronald Wiman, Chief Expert from the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland, discussed his country’s new approach to development in its “The Finland we Want by 2050” effort. He concluded the panel by stating that “there is no Planet B!”

Another side event worth noting was one put on by the Mission of Ireland, the Daughters of Charity, and Vincentian Family entitled “The Triad of Grass Roots Engagement, Advocacy, and Systemic Change in the Eradication of Poverty” and attended by several IASSW representatives. This side event spoke about the need to link grass roots efforts with advocacy and systemic change efforts.



IASSW co-sponsored side event panel from left to right: Mr. Vilbard Usiku, Namibia; Dr. Sergei Zelenev, ICSW; Dr. Rebecca Davis, IASSW; Dr. Lynne Healy, IASSW; Mr. Paul Ladd, UN-RISD; Ms. Cecilie Golden, UNESCO; Mr. Ronald Wiman, Finland

Additionally, a fascinating discussion took place about the most respectful terminology should be used to describe

people living in poverty. The debate centered around whether it’s respectful to refer to them as “the poor” or as “people living in poverty”.

IASSW representative, Chelsea Cornwell attended a side event entitled “The Role of a Shared Society as a Strategy to Reduce Poverty” and sponsored by The UN Division for Social Policy and Social Development and The Club de Madrid. This event built on [The Shared Societies Project](#) started by the Club de Madrid, which promotes the ideal of integrating and including marginalized groups in all aspects of societal functioning. The panel discussed that all members of a shared society would equally enjoy the benefits of that society, therefore eliminating the poverty that stems from groups



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being excluded from social benefits. Economist Sanjay Reddy was particularly inspiring as he spoke about societies and governments needing to adopt value-based frameworks in place of “sensible” economic policies. As he pointed out, the Sustainable Development Goals largely capture this idea by promoting universality and collective responsibility.

In the second week of CsocD55, Melanie Berzins had the opportunity to attend several side events. One was "Poverty Eradication through Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and SDGs Appropriation: The Case of Mexico", which included panelists from civil society, the private sector, government and academia speaking on different anti-poverty initiatives in Mexico. Panelists discussed gaps and needs in terms of better measurement of targets and better data collection instruments. This event included a representative from an organization called PETStar, owned by Coca Cola, which highlighted an example of private sector involvement in social protection. PETStar is a recycling program in Mexico that appears to provide a real opportunity for some of those most likely to be left behind to gain income and a role within the formal economy while also contributing to environmental sustainability.

Another side event was entitled "Leave No One Behind: The Wresinski Approach, 60 Years of Experience", which highlighted the work of Joseph Wresinski and how it has informed the work of

ATD Fourth World in addressing the needs of those living in poverty. This event included a panelist who spoke powerfully about her own experience living in poverty. She spoke about how the ATD Fourth World programs profoundly affected her life, not just materially, but particularly by contributing to her sense of dignity and self-worth. The panelists described the Wresinski approach as fundamentally about learning from and listening to those living in poverty rather than dictating to them, and the importance of acknowledging the capacities of those living in poverty, including their ability to educate others and to advocate for themselves, rather than be educated and advocated for. The need to empower those living in poverty by raising their voices and providing opportunities for civic, social and economic inclusion were emphasized by the panelists.

The side events dovetailed thematically in terms of emphasizing the need for those experiencing poverty and social exclusion to be included in decision-making and participatory processes at every level, including at the UN. Other themes included the need for better data collection and for the disaggregation of data by age and gender in order to ensure no one is left behind.

IASSW representative Rebecca Davis attended a side event entitled "Global Citizenship for Development: Universal Curriculum Design and ICT Facilitated Intercultural Learning Environments for All Students". It was hosted by the NGO



Committee on Education, Learning, and Literacy



and the presentation was linked with the SDGs: 1: No Poverty; 4: Quality Education; 4: Gender Equality; and 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

The NGO Committee on Education, Learning, and Literacy is cross-cutting and is closely affiliated with UNESCO. The work of the committee parallels social work and social work education given the number of social work students and practitioners who work in educational institutions and settings.

This presentation defined *intercultural competence*, key to *global citizenship*, as the ability to collaborate to solve problems within the multicultural context with people from different cultures and based on an understanding and respect for cultural difference.

This side event explored how the use of Universal Design for Learning and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can facilitate and enhance accessible and intercultural collaborative learning environments for all learners, including those with disabilities and girls from different cultures. For more information, see [Girls Education Initiative in Ghana: Global Citizenship for Social Development](#).

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For a complete list and description of all CSocD 55 Side Events:

[https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development-csod-social-policy-and-development-](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development-csod-social-policy-and-development-division/csod55/side-events.html)

[division/csod55/side-events.html](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development-csod-social-policy-and-development-division/csod55/side-events.html)

Upcoming Events

Commission on the Status of Women

From March 13th through the 24th, women (and men!) from around the world will convene at the United Nations to focus on Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work. For 61 years, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has organized the opportunity for UN delegates and participants to hear about issues affecting the lives of women.

Civil society is given the opportunity to participate in the events running parallel to the UN activities. These parallel events organized by the NGO CSW Forum provide activists from around the world the forum to discuss the theme, network, share strategies/good practices, and lobby governments to implement resolutions and treaties affecting the well-being of women around the world. The NGO CSW Forum includes a Consultation Day, Reception (including the announcement of the annual Woman of Distinction Award), Parallel Events, Rally, and 45th Anniversary Celebration.

CSW Presentation March 17 by IASSW:

“Hearing what social workers have to say about the empowerment of women worldwide”

IASSW was chosen to present a parallel event at this year’s CSW On March 17th, Drs. Lynne Healy and Shirley Gatenio Gabel will make a



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presentation on behalf of IASSW on the “Pitfalls of Today's Neoliberal Economy on Women's Economic Empowerment”. Their presentation will be in conjunction with and based on the survey that Dr. Darja Zavirsek carried out on behalf of IASSW’s Women's Interest Group (WIG). In 2016, WIG launched a survey about current gender inequality issues facing women across the world. Issues identified were economic disadvantage that includes unequal pay for equal work; the glass ceiling; the gender pension gap; unpaid care work; lower education and higher vulnerability to unemployment compared to men and the impact of violence on women's economic achievement. Survey responses suggest that neoliberalism and globalization have widened gender differences. The result is the economic disempowerment, particularly of low skill women creating enhanced situations of vulnerability, potential violence and lower well-being overall.

Social Work Day at the UN

On April 17th, Social Work Day at the UN will be hosted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the IASSW. This year’s theme is “Promoting Community and Environmental Stability”. Details about this event will be forthcoming in future newsletters. Keep an eye here for updates about the event as they occur:

www.monmouth.edu/UNDay

A Student Social Work Forum will take place following this event, focused on the theme of environmental justice and focused on environmental

racism and water access. In an attempt to bring a global perspective to the forum, the student committee planners are asking for submissions of photographs from social work students around the globe showcasing what it is they love about their environment and why it is worth protecting. Students are encouraged to post their photos to the “Student Social Work Forum at the UN” Facebook page to be included in a slideshow that will be shown on the day of the event. Videos of the speakers during the day will also be posted to the website with suggestions on how students can take the events at the Student Forum and host their own day in their communities or school. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/SSWForumUN/> and follow the event on Twitter @SSWForumUN

Other UN Events

March 7-10: [The 60th Commission on Narcotic Drugs \(Vienna\)](#)

March 13-24: [The 61st Commission of the Status of Women](#)

April 3-7: [The 50th Commission on Population and Development](#)

April 17: [Social Work Day at the UN](#)

April 24- May 5: [The 16th Session of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples](#)

Respectfully,



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