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Issues Paper:

Outcomes of the
World Summit for Social Development

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I. BACKGROUND

Introduction: The World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) was convened by the United Nations to discuss problems of social development through four core themes: the eradication of poverty; employment; social integration; and national and international enabling environments for social development. One hundred and eighty-six countries attended the Summit, making it one of the largest events of its kind in UN history and 118 of the delegates were at the level of head of state or government.

Discussions were wide-ranging: their outcome was the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. The 10 commitments of the Declaration deal with: an enabling environment; poverty eradication; employment; social integration; gender equality; education and culture; Africa and the least-developed countries; structural adjustment; resource utilization; and strengthening social development in the international system. The outcome is the broadest-ever governmental consensus on social development and will influence international social and economic policy for many years to come.

Conclusions and concepts: While most WSSD conclusions fall within the parameters of Canadian foreign policy, the WSSD approach to social development may change the way we manage social development in the future. For example, while the international community generally agrees on the need for economic development in countries, it was often assumed that people would benefit as a by-product of growth and sound economic management. The WSSD concluded that people are both the agents and the beneficiaries of economic development, and that without effective social development they can be marginalized in the development process. Apart from encouraging sound macro-economic policy, the WSSD urged countries to improve their commitment to equity and to integrate social policy into economic and environmental policy and planning. The WSSD endorsed a "people-centred" approach: its documents focus throughout on the rights and responsibilities of people.

Canada's participation and contribution: Canada was one of a few countries that undertook wide-ranging consultations on the WSSD and supported pre-Summit cross-country consultations with the provinces and by civil society, including individuals, representatives of labour, the private sector, political parties, indigenous groups, community organizations, co-operatives, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, the media, and public information groups. Government and non-governmental consultations benefited from a new dialogue between social policy and international development specialists and activists, to the extent that Canada's outline of the Draft Declaration became the basis of the Copenhagen text.

One of the results of this relationship was the promotion by Canada of new concepts in the four core areas of the Summit. For example, Canada promoted and obtained full international recognition of the contribution made to society by people who perform unremunerated activities, such as household work or subsistence agriculture. The Summit

recognized the need to take unremunerated work into account in efforts to create employment and eradicate poverty.

Canada also promoted a strongly participatory approach to the Summit core themes and recommended that people should be seen as the agents as well as the recipients of social development. Social policy analysts recommended that documents avoid "negative labelling" of people who live in disadvantaged circumstances. They reworked some of the current international usage, e.g., the term "the poor" was replaced by "people living in poverty." These analysts also promoted stronger conceptualizations of social development, e.g., the concept of "tolerance" was replaced by "respect for and value of diversity."

Canadian development specialists emphasized a two-track approach to poverty eradication: meeting basic human needs while ensuring access to productive resources and economic opportunities by people living in poverty. Canada also argued that social development must first and foremost take into account the circumstances of the people for whom it is intended. Accordingly, governments that endorsed the WSSD documents recognized the need for partnership with civil society in order to achieve social development.

II. ISSUES

A. An enabling environment: Although social development was seen primarily as a national responsibility, the WSSD recognized the supportive role of the international community in fostering an enabling environment.

- **A new concept:** The WSSD articulated an approach of "people-centred sustainable development" which includes respect for human rights, good governance, equity and the integration of social, economic and environmental policy.
- **Approaches to economic restructuring:** The WSSD noted that environmental and social considerations should be taken into account in the design and implementation of structural adjustment programs. Particular emphasis was placed on gender-sensitivity in economic programming.
- **The international environment:** Countries for the first time acknowledged the positive and negative impacts of globalization and the need to ensure that while countries benefit from globalization, they must mitigate its adverse consequences. Countries also acknowledged the need to move rapidly toward an international political and economic system based on the rule of law. Special consideration was given to the concerns of Africa and the least-developed countries, in particular with respect to debt relief.
- **The national environment:** Countries agreed on the importance of sound economic management, sustainable growth with equity, fairer distribution of resources (through, among other means, graduated taxation systems) and the need to reduce excessive

military expenditures. They also acknowledged the importance of ensuring opportunity for all, especially the most marginalized.

- **Specific concerns:**

- (i) **Gender:** The WSSD recognized that economic and social development cannot be achieved without gender equality.

- (ii) **Youth:** The WSSD expanded on outcomes of the Children's Summit by highlighting both the needs of children and the specific concerns of young people as new entrants to the labour market.

B. Poverty: The agreement on eradication of poverty was the Summit's most notable achievement.

- **New agreement on poverty eradication:** Governments agreed to "national policies and strategies geared to substantially reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time, reducing inequalities and eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be specified by each country in its national context." Absolute poverty was defined as severe deprivation of basic human needs — including health, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, shelter, education and information — and was evaluated not just by income measurements, but also by lack of basic social services.

Countries agreed to formulate national and integrated strategies to eradicate poverty that will include greater emphasis on meeting the basic human needs of all people living in poverty. WSSD conclusions establish that poverty reduction, not poverty alleviation (poverty cannot be "alleviated"), is a holistic process and should be the primary purpose of both development and infrastructure programming. The conclusions also recognize the importance of establishing a continuum between emergency disaster relief and rehabilitation and urged the UN General Assembly to declare a decade for poverty eradication in 1996.

- **Future profiles of poverty:** The WSSD acknowledged that while poverty is currently concentrated in rural areas, urban poverty is one of the fastest growing forms of poverty. The documents stress the increasing relationship between poverty and the unsustainable use of the environment. Also discussed were issues such as the "feminization" and "juvenilization" of poverty, the latter referring to the emergence of massive youth unemployment in some regions of the world.
- **Participatory approaches to poverty eradication:** The WSSD conclusions encourage governments to approach poverty eradication differently. Countries agreed to review the root causes of poverty and acknowledged that poverty eradication must be based on an understanding of the livelihood strategies of people living in poverty. They also acknowledged that people living in poverty should have access to a sustainable livelihood and social safety nets to ensure that they do not fall back into poverty. Governments accepted that people living in poverty should be fully included

in defining and implementing poverty reduction schemes. They also agreed to promote the further development and use of quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure poverty reduction.

- **Poverty and income:** In addition to basic human needs, countries paid special attention to the relationship between access to economic opportunity and poverty eradication by emphasizing measures such as land reform, secure land tenure, improved access to credit, extension services and markets, and support for small-scale entrepreneurs and the informal sector. The WSSD also recognized the need for all countries to develop social safety nets that include measures to help people find productive employment. The documents acknowledge that poverty programming needs to address problems of underemployment and the issue of unpaid work.

C. Employment: WSSD conclusions on employment mirrored much of the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO). However, the Social Summit was the first time that such a large group of countries adopted an international strategy for the creation of employment and reduction of unemployment.

- **New emphases:** Governments agreed to place employment creation at the centre of economic policies and to facilitate employment creation. They will explore the causes of long-term unemployment and pursue policies that will stimulate the demand for labour. They recognized the importance of information technology in training, education, employment creation and labour market information systems and undertook to exchange information and best-case scenarios in employment creation. They underscored the importance of education and training to improve labour-force participation.
- **Who generates employment?** Countries agreed to explore innovative options for employment and the distribution of work. They recognized the importance of the private sector and in particular the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises and co-operatives in generating employment, and the important role of communities and the (non-criminal) informal sector in creating jobs. Governments agreed on the need to facilitate the transition of enterprises from the informal to the formal sectors of the economy and, while doing so, to extend labour standards and social protection to people working in the informal sector. They also agreed to monitor and assess the economic impact of trade liberalization, especially as it relates to employment.
- **What kind of work and for whom?** Governments recognized the importance of sustainable job creation, freely chosen employment and quality jobs. They acknowledged the importance of promoting and respecting international labour standards and workers' rights in all employment, removing systemic barriers to participation in the labour force, and understanding workers' needs to combine employment with family responsibilities. Governments agreed to set target dates for the elimination of child labour and to ensure the protection of working children and

street children. They recognized the difficulties of groups with specific needs, including people with disabilities, indigenous people, migrant workers and potentially disadvantaged groups such as women and youth, in entering and staying in the work force.

- **New agreement:** The conclusions recognize the need to better understand the relationship between paid and unpaid work; to measure and value the contribution of unpaid work to the economy; and to incorporate such understanding into employment and poverty reduction strategies. Examples of such work, much of which is still unrecorded or undervalued, include care of dependants and the subsistence agriculture practised by many people living in poverty.

D. Social integration: The social integration conclusions emphasize the need to respect and value diversity and to ensure enabling legal and regulatory frameworks for the participation of individuals and civil society in social development. The conclusions also identify groups whose situations warrant specific attention.

- **Improving governance:** Countries committed to transparent, open, inclusive and accountable public institutions. They agreed to simplify administrative regulations, disseminate public information and ensure effectiveness at all levels of government and encouraged the free formation of co-operatives, community and other organizations of civil society and their involvement in social development activities. Internationally, the Summit called for enhanced international co-operation to eliminate crime, violence against women and trafficking in women and children.
- **Valuing diversity:** Countries stressed the importance of understanding diversity and valuing its contribution to society. They advocated laws to combat racism and intolerance; ratification of the Convention Eliminating Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); strengthening dispute resolution machinery and respect for cultural heritage. They also encouraged the media to promote social integration. Special attention was given to the role of education and culture in promoting the value of diversity. Countries also committed to eradicating illiteracy.
- **Equality and social justice:** The WSSD acknowledged that people who are particularly disadvantaged should not be marginalized from society and recognized the need for capacity-building measures to develop their potential. Emphasis was placed on including marginalized and disadvantaged people, such as those with disabilities, indigenous people and older persons, in mainstream life. The need for fairer and more equitable treatment for refugees, displaced persons, migrants and asylum seekers, and the vital importance of family reunification was recognized. The Summit documents promote justice and equality for all, in particular for women and youth.

III. IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The WSSD suggested ways in which the international community can improve social development and advocated improvements in policy and programming.

- **Strengthening the UN system:** Recommendations for follow-up included strengthening the UN system to deal with social development. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is expected to oversee system-wide co-ordination of the Copenhagen results. This may include strengthening the Commission for Social Development, a potential focal point for follow-up to the WSSD. The Summit requested the General Assembly to hold a special session in the year 2000 to review implementation of the WSSD conclusions. The UN was also encouraged to identify new and innovative sources of funding to promote social development.
- **International dialogue:** The UN General Assembly (UNGA) was invited to convene meetings of high-level representatives to promote dialogue on international co-operation in social development. UNGA was asked to draw on the Agenda for Development to elaborate a common framework for implementing UN conference outcomes.
- **A role for the International Financial Institutions (IFIs):** The Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the ILO were urged to promote coherent international approaches to social development and to take social development into account in their structural adjustment programs. ECOSOC was requested to consider holding joint meetings with the Development Committee of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on social development issues.
- **National and international reporting:** Although the WSSD documents did not specifically mandate countries to report to the UN on social development, they encouraged the creation of national strategies for social development. The UN was called on to "create a consolidated reporting system" on social development with a view to establishing clear policy recommendations for governments and international organizations.
- **Indicators for social development:** The Summit urged the creation and better use of national and international indicators to monitor social development, and consolidation of such data internationally. Participants agreed that indicators should be both quantitative and qualitative and should be based on the experience and evaluation of the groups studied.
- **The 20/20 proposal:** This compact was seen as a historic breakthrough which demonstrates an international commitment to social investment. The 20/20 is intended to be a bilateral compact between developing and donor countries: recipient

countries that do not already do so will allocate 20 per cent of government expenditures towards meeting basic human needs and donor countries that enter into the compact will support these efforts by re-orienting 20 per cent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to meeting basic human needs.

- **Resource issues:** There were calls for mobilization of new, adequate and/or predictable resources for social development from all sources, private and public, in all WSSD documents. The UN was tasked with finding new resources for social development.
- **Partnership for social development:** The program of action called for involvement of civil society and all levels of government (provincial, municipal, etc.) in achieving social development.

IV. ELEMENTS OF A CANADIAN RESPONSE TO INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Canada views the WSSD as a qualified success. While it achieved a measure of consensus on social development that was unprecedented in UN history, the documents do not represent a comprehensive work program. More work is needed to create an international program of action on social development.

People centredness: This is already an objective of Canadian policy. Canada is promoting greater commitment to financing social development by re-orienting 25 per cent of ODA toward meeting basic human needs. The government is also committed to ensuring greater focus on the needs of the poorest people and countries. The promotion of good governance, respect for human rights and democracy — key elements of Canadian policy — encourage a people-centred approach to development.

An enabling environment: Canada's approach to trade liberalization and debt relief contributes to an enabling international environment for social development. Canada has consistently promoted a rules-based international trade and financial system, and has worked to ensure the success of the WTO. Canada is a leader in debt relief for the most severely indebted least-developed countries and promotes this policy internationally.

Poverty eradication: One of the overarching objectives of Canada's international policy is the eradication of poverty. Canada is committed to reallocating 25 per cent of ODA toward meeting basic human needs and giving priority to those countries in which there are substantial concentrations of people living in poverty. Canada's poverty programming recognizes the changing profiles of poverty and the relationship between poverty reduction and income. Canada is currently promoting an international conference on social indicators to improve measurement and monitoring of social development and will encourage the development of indicators to monitor the situation of disadvantaged groups listed in the program of action. The Department of Human Resources Development will play a leading role in co-ordinating programs for the international year for poverty eradication in 1996.

Employment: Canada is a leader in the development of labour market information systems and has pioneered understanding of the measurement and valuation of unpaid work, knowledge that should be shared. Canada recognizes the importance of international labour standards but prefers to promote respect for these standards through mechanisms other than trade agreements. The Government supports a central role for the ILO in the follow-up to the WSSD and strengthened co-operation on social development within the multilateral system.

Social integration: Good governance and respect for the value of diversity are objectives of Canadian policy. Canada has actively promoted ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), introduced language on the elimination of violence against women in many international forums and is a leader in programs for people with disabilities. Canada is willing to assist countries wishing to better understand social policy issues and is supporting the development of indicators to monitor the situation of groups with specific needs.

Implementation and follow-up: As Chair of the recent G-7 Summit in Halifax, Canada promoted and obtained agreement that the IFIs should focus more on poverty reduction. Canada has also actively promoted a central role for the Commission for Social Development in following up on the Summit as well as the participation of civil society and expert guidance in assisting in the Commission's work. Canada is seeking better consolidation of UN reporting systems before agreeing to further national reports on social development. The Government is also committed to working with like-minded countries to enable developing countries to reduce excessive military expenditures and direct the funds to social and economic development.

A role for civil society in follow-up: Canada's partnership role with civil society was noted by many other delegations at the Social Summit. While consultations are just beginning on its follow-up, it is expected that civil society will participate in discussions on implementation of Summit agreements and indeed on follow-up to several other UN conferences that address social issues.

Conclusions: The WSSD has given a fillip to issues that have lingered on the international agenda for many years without much cohesion, commitment or co-ordinated action. The Summit achieved an international consensus that poverty eradication, employment and social integration should be objectives of social and economic policy. This consensus will permit more effective, focussed action by the international community in the future and perhaps assist the discussions of the G-7 when they meet in Lyon in 1996.

Canada has been invited by several countries to provide technical assistance in social development as a result of its active participation in the Summit and is developing strategies to market its expertise in social development. Dialogue on follow-up is just beginning and will involve consultations and concerted action with representatives of civil society and all levels of government involved in social development.

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