Commission for Social Development
Sixty-first session
5–14 February 2024
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
Priority Theme: “Fostering social development and social
justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the
implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development and to achieve the overarching goal of
poverty eradication”

Statement submitted by Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual
University a non-governmental organization in consultative status
with the 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

*A new ‘Natural Resource’ – Incorporating social policies that enrich the indomitable human spirit and accelerate the path to sustainably overcome poverty.*

The goal of eradicating worldwide poverty by 2030 is an essential goal to ensure the health, social cohesion and economic growth of the planet. Although progress was being made, the COVID-19 pandemic reversed this progress and recovery has been further complicated by increasing geopolitical, socioeconomic, and climatic risks. As the year 2030 draws closer, it is imperative that we explore new and bold strategies to accelerate progress.

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is integrating universal spiritual concepts that take an inside out approach, with an individual’s hidden potential to uplift themselves and their communities, enabling them to lead with emotional resilience. By centering policies and programs that focus not only on meeting basic needs, but also on building respect for the self and others, we can capitalize on the strength and beauty of the human spirit. This new vision of themselves empowers those living in poverty to avail themselves of the wealth of their inner resources, creating a ripple effect of change that starts with the individual and spreads to the world.

By stabilizing ourselves in our own inner wealth of innate strength, talents and virtues, we are able to authentically offer ourselves to those in need because there is a deep feeling of belonging to one world family, thereby becoming the catalysts of change. Our elevated vision of the dignity inherent in all individuals enables us to identify the strengths of the souls we endeavor to support, as we engage with individuals and the community. These interactions inspire us to scale our impact far and wide. Our symbiotic relationship with the community helps us build local capacity: the community designing their own solutions ensures the long-term sustainability of our interventions.

We also recognize the intent and capabilities of our partner organizations and work with them to build on each other’s strengths, encouraging a shift from competing for resources, attention, and recognition, to cooperation and feeling secure in our own contributions. Through nurturing relationships, we create a feeling of belonging that uplifts and restores self-respect – both in the teams that serve and those being served. This holistic approach not only addresses physical needs like food, water, shelter, clothing, and medicine; but human needs like feeling valued and respected, and a vital part of our communities and the world. In essence, this vision of belonging to one family acts as the spiritual pillar that supports the larger vision of world transformation.

Based on our experience of initiating social change led by spiritual principles, we offer the following reflective questions to practitioners and policy makers to consider as they design or implement interventions to address poverty:

1. Do we have and hold an elevated vision that disadvantaged welfare recipients have the potential to become active contributors to the economy?

2. When approaching disadvantaged individuals and communities, how might we operate with the conviction that we can build upon the innate ability and strength of every individual?

3. How might we eliminate the biases that limit genuine compassion and create barriers to meaningful actions?
To ensure long-term sustainability of our interventions, how might we spot, enable, and nurture a supportive environment that catalyzes individuals and communities to find their own solutions, restoring their dignity and power?

To illustrate our experience of creating impactful interventions with individuals, we share the story of a single individual who finds their strength and shifts his internal view, makes a significant difference in the lives of many, and changes their external world. Mr. Chandra Mohan is from Chhaurahi Village, India. He was born with polio, which affected his legs and made every step he took very challenging. Although he was born into a high-risk group and lived in poverty – because of his disability and living in a resource-constrained area – Mr. Mohan embarked on a journey towards resilience.

He attended several youth camps organized by the Brahma Kumaris. Here, he was introduced to the profound concept of his identity as a soul, his deep connection with God, and the incredible potential within every soul to conquer life’s daily challenges. This camp planted the seeds of determination and self-belief in Mr. Mohan’s heart. He gained the understanding that the soul was free from disability, and that the power of the mind could triumph over the limitations of the physical body. He emerged from these camps with an unshakable resolve: he could achieve anything he set his determined mind to.

Mr. Mohan began his inspiring journey by teaching 20 children in a humble hut. His initiative slowly gained momentum; today, he has established a school providing high-quality education to hundreds of children. As well, Mr. Mohan has become a conduit for social justice, because the majority of his students are girls who otherwise wouldn’t have access to a nearby school. They’re excelling in their exams, proving that anyone can achieve greatness, given the right guidance and opportunities. As mentioned in Uncertain Times Divided Societies by Yanchun Zhang, such new social contracts realize their potential when they include all marginalized and vulnerable people, with a focus on gender equality. Working together in solidarity and partnership is essential for building a more equitable, inclusive, and just world.

Mr. Mohan’s story is a testament to the fact that the strength of the human spirit can overcome any obstacle. It also highlights the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like the Brahma Kumaris, who can empower those who may be at a disadvantage. When such a platform is provided to those with hidden abilities, they realize their potential to become active contributors to their community. With the right support and understanding of their true capacity, they make a more significant impact.

Organizations and NGOs also have the incredible capacity to effect positive changes in communities. One such example is the Rajrishi Villages Project in three villages in India, village Jahota in District Jaipur, village Oriya in Mount Abu and village Bharapar in Kachchh. In this project, the Brahma Kumaris, in cooperation with other organizations, such as Aakar Charitable Trust and Global Kachchh, used a holistic approach to revitalize three villages that deteriorated because they fell victim to poverty, helplessness, and low self-esteem. The project’s mission was to build a spiritually empowered resilient community to face climate changes, by using a multi-faceted approach that considered people, prosperity, and planet. Through clean-up and beautification projects to increase the villagers’ pride in their surroundings, programs to support women through self-help groups and training programs, health improvement programs, enhanced livelihood programs, and sustainable farming and water management systems, the residents of these villages were realized their collective potential and forged respectful relationships with each other and their environment. Through hosted discussions on values and nightly meetings to promote kinship and create strong ties to the community, these villages began to thrive. More
more than 400 new unskilled-labor jobs were created, and small and medium businesses were established to make yoga mats, dinner sets, and carpets. To address social justice, women were given leadership roles in the local governments that promoted unity, transparency, and authenticity. Through the Brahma Kumaris’ work with the villagers, they learned about useful government programs to promote better health and water usage.

In *Towards a new equilibrium: Why social policies alone will not eliminate poverty*, Vidya Diwakar says that people often escape poverty through combinations of social and economic inclusion, such as assets and livelihood strategies within an enabling environment that adequately protects against various sources of risk. Such an environment includes components of social policy, economic policies related to pro-poor growth, agricultural market improvements, infrastructure, and insurance against major risks. Additionally, progressive social change is also a part of the enabling environment. The Rajrishi villages are proof that these concepts can affect powerful and lasting change. These villages are an example of how a shift in vision from participants being disadvantaged welfare recipients to active contributors to the economy can make that vision a reality by taking a holistic approach. The residents of the villages were taught universal spiritual concepts while respecting each other’s spiritual beliefs. This focus on upliftment from within thus empowered them to find and use solutions that were meaningful to them; and change the trajectory of their lives, their village, and the planet.

In *Mainstreaming social dimensions in economic development framework by Policy lessons from successful poverty reduction and social Interventions in the last two decades* which emphasizes the capabilities approach, which considers human well-being and freedom to choose a life they value. Professor Santosh Mehrotra highlights the need for understanding the interaction between economic and social objectives, emphasizing the importance of social services, human development outcomes, and feedback loops between them. The Brahma Kumaris believe that, for progress to be sustainable, the needs of the human spirit must be addressed along with a person’s basic needs. By bolstering self-respect and universal spiritual values and having faith in the innate strength and beauty of every human soul, we can truly eradicate poverty.

The Brahma Kumaris’ SOUL framework for making a positive, sustainable impact in the field:

- **Source**: What guides our actions is the awareness that we’re all the children of one God, spiritual beings.
- **Outlook**: Our mindset as we engage with a community is that we are one global family, siblings. We’re deeply connected to each other.
- **Unlimited**: To increase sustainability, organizations and individuals should nurture the human spirit by treating the whole person and helping them discover and use their strengths.

**Love**: At the heart of any program or policy is an unconditional, unbiased love.