



Notes from Side Event: Grassroots Community Based Research Findings.

Occasion: ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum 2021

Date: Thursday 15th April 2021

Time: 7.30 am to 8.45 am

Organized by NGO Committee on Financing for Developed and hosted by the Salesian Missions Inc.

Moderated by Anita Thomas, Chair, NGO Committee on FfD

The side event began by Anita Thomas, Chair, NGO Committee on Financing for Development, one of the 40 plus substantive committees NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO), welcoming the participants to the event. She represents Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund at the UN. In her introductory remarks, Anita provided an overview of the Committee's work and shared that for the NGO Committee on FfD, it has been a hectic but fruitful four days engaging through its side events focusing on its three advocacy priorities - Social Protection, Financial and Digital Inclusion and Climate Finance.

The key purpose of the side event is to present the findings of a research project funded by Misesan Cara and the Salesians Missions Ireland and implemented by the NGO Committee on Financing for Development, on how adequate the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) and the Paris Agreement had been to support Agenda 2030. The focus of the study was on the impact on marginalized and vulnerable communities with respect to Social Protection, Financial and Digital Inclusion and Climate Finance. The proposal for this study was proposed and initiated by Thomas Pallithanam, who represents the Salesian Missions Inc and sourced the funds from Misesan Cara. The NGO Committee on FfD served as the implementor of the project through the 9 member organizations of the NGO Committee who conducted the surveys in 7 countries. On behalf of the Committee, Anita Thomas served as project manager. Godsee Joy and Elsa Barron served as the project interns.

The NGO Committee hesitated to embark on this project as COVID-19 set in, but there was no other time than the pandemic instigated situations to assess how effectively the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement have translated to the ground to meet the needs of the people. The result of 8 months of work on the project in collaboration with 9 members (cosponsors of this side event) of the committee and their constituents in 8 countries is what this side event presents to you. Today you will hear from our partners organizations including representatives of the grassroots organizations that participated in this survey.

She then invited Eamonn Casey Advocacy Director of Misesan Cara (MC).

Eamonn Casey made a PowerPoint presentation providing an overview of the work of Misesan Cara. He highlighted the importance MC places on advocacy on behalf of the marginalized. He said that was the

reason MC partnered Salesians Missions Ireland, Salesian Mission Inc and the NGO Committee on FfD in this project. His presentation is attached.

Fr. Patrick (Paddy) Hennessy from Ireland and a member of the Salesians congregation appreciated the fact that though the COVID crisis set in after the project was planned it was possible to complete it the way it was designed to get the voices from the ground to influence policy at the UN. He underlined the reality that any building forward better has to be done with renewed respect for the earth.

Resina Katafono, Financing for Development Office of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Lockdown in a way increased access of digital finance services and this helped maintain economic activity. Waiving transaction fees, mobile transactions, and the effort to adapt quickly helped financial activity and inclusion to some extent. Countries that invested in digital infrastructure could provide services to the needy. E.g.: India built on existing programs– 300 million account holders for cash transfer services. E-wallet, unique code-based payments also help tide over the situation for some countries.

This also brought increased risks: consumer protection, financial integrity, expanding inequality, increasing gender, and digital exclusion, leave out the most vulnerable and those who lacked skills. Use of Artificial Intelligence, use of non-transparent algorithms too brought in new forms of exclusion. These risks need to be addressed.

Climate Finance

The COVID-19 crisis has affected delivery of 100 billion target – lag behind, demand and delivery, delayed data.

Most of the Climate Finances available is mitigation finance to SIDS and other vulnerable countries. There is need for increased attention to Adaptation finances. Increase CF, Grant finance, not just concessional finance only is the need of the hour. The increase in climate finance as of now is far below what is required. The increase visible is but a small fraction of what is needed.

There is need for coordinated effort by bilateral donors, multilateral public development banks, climate funds from private sector. And the funds need to be Gender Responsive.

There is need for Political will to scale up Climate Finance and ODA so that it can address the confluence of crisis. The fact that globally 16 trillion was raised shows that if there is political will Climate Finances required is target that can be realized.

Godsee Joy, Intern, NGO Committee on Financing for Development

Godsee reflected on the exploratory research of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement that helped shape the directions of the study put on by the NGO Committee on Financing for Development. An analysis of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda demonstrates important commitments to social protection programs and financing for countries unable to implement these programs without support. The Paris Agreement provides additional state commitments to slow the progress of climate change and limit global emissions. However, both agreements lack enforcement mechanisms for

financing or implementation, raising doubts about how these commitments translate to the grassroots level.

Elsa Barron, Notre Dame University, Indiana, US, Intern NGO Committee on Financing for Development

Elsa presented and analyzed the results of a 7-country survey analyzing access to social protection, financial & digital inclusion, and climate finance programs among NGO community contacts in India, Nepal, Haiti, Mexico, Kenya, The Philippines, and Senegal and the impact of COVID-19 on that access. The results around social protection services varied widely from country to country and between services, with a notable decrease in access to social security and insurance in the Philippines and Mexico. Financial and digital programs and services generally maintained their accessibility post-pandemic, indicating the resilience of those programs/services through major challenges. The use of mobile phones and mobile financing has proven effective at creating widespread access to financial services among the NGO community contacts surveyed. Countries like Kenya, Mexico, and the Philippines have been successful in this effort. Finally, climate finance and resilience programs decreased drastically after the pandemic in all seven countries analyzed. This suggests that climate programs are some of the first to go when disaster hits, presenting major challenges for long-term sustainable development.

In response to these findings, some broad policy “asks” include bolstering legislation and funding around social protection programs as well as increasing NGO and community awareness of services offered, prioritizing the implementation of digital financial services as a key method of increasing financial access for all, and building “resilience” to challenges such as the pandemic into climate policies and initiatives to ensure that they remain a consistent priority. These steps can help ensure continued progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as the world looks ahead to a post-pandemic era.

Moderator then introduced the second part of the side event: Hearing the Voices of those who had conducted the surveys in the different countries.

M. Vasantha Pengal Sangam, Dhinipa, Tamil Nadu, India

Earlier experiences and disasters such as cyclones have prepared us to reach out to communities. Given more time we could have done a more in-depth survey. People did ask us why this survey was being done and what benefit would they have by participating in the survey. We were able to explain the purpose of the survey. The respondents told of their difficulties in accessing the services provided by the government. The best accessed provisions were ration rice from Public Distribution Systems (PDS) and employment under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Access to health services, educational support. Pensions were the main social protection measures accessed. Yet there is insufficient information regarding these. The self-help groups for women were helpful in the conduct of the survey. An important policy ask should be assured employment and decent wages.

Sudha Thomas, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto, Bihar, India

The situation was very bleak for the poor people they work with. It was compounded by the return of migrants from cities. They had absolutely no economic support as they had exhausted their meagre savings on their trek back home. Government was able to provide food grains and some meager cash transfers. People had expectations from the survey. But we were able to explain the purpose of the

survey and the earlier contact with the community helped doing the survey. There were several schemes like building toilets, house, access to ration cards, pensions. During the covid communities – spontaneously came to support the migrant returnees. But one thing that was noticed was that this support was more to individuals than families as a unit. When families returned en masse the support was less. What is required is to build pressure on the government for proper and effective implementation of the various schemes and laws that are in place.

Taskhil Cein – Congregation of the Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, Nepal

Survey was conducted in the three districts: Kathmandu, Kaski and Rupandehi.

Was long but helped gather a lot of information. Translation was a challenge. Effort was made to cover a wide range of different constituents, and from different walks of life. So, the sample is really representative. Access to pension was the main social protection measure but is often delayed and during the covid several had no access to these provisions.

As regards Financial inclusion mobile connectivity was there but could not do online banking. There is urgent need for enhancing Financial literacy. The area is often affected by natural calamities: flood, earthquake etc. People therefore has a lot of resilience. There is lack of sufficient understanding of climate resilience. People have been rendered much poorer due to covid. They have hardly any savings to fall back to and most have a hand to mouth existence. Even basic provisions do not reach those at the margins. Women are deprived of their rights and face gender-based violence. There has been an increase in cross-border trafficking. There is need to advocate for financial inclusion and social protection.

Dr. George Kollashany, Salesians of Don Bosco, Nepal

Shared three important insights. Drew from the conclusions that Elsa had made; The sense of community that prevailed during the covid. Our policy demands should be based on the understanding and lived experience of the community.

The stories of Indira and Sangeeta to some extent prove this point. Nepal is made of three different geographic areas: the Terai (plains) the hills and the mountains. Covid brought the community together. This was facilitated by the recent constitutional changes that vested local bodies with the authority to take decisions about what needs to be done for the community. This created the kind of resilience that was seen during the Covid. There was no Covid in the plain area and people from the other areas were able to come to the safety of the plains. The need to travel between these different regions helped build physical resilience and that helped fend off covid among the people. The shared life in the community helped provide support to each other.

The knowledge of the young to use mobile services helped the community at large. Though people were illiterate and computer illiteracy was even higher the youth was able to support the community by using apps that could convert voice to text.

Hector Jair Arzate Beltran, United Religions Initiative, Mexico

Reached out to respondents through mail. They were very eager to participate and continued the conversations even after the survey was done. But the process was harder than what was initially thought. People were eager to share. There was lack of information particularly regarding Climate

Finance. There is need to share more information with grassroots communities. The complexity of the region, population made it more difficult to go deeper into the issues. A more in-depth study will help better policy making.

Gabriel Virzi, Associazione Don Bosco 2000, Senegal (Quite a bit was unclear for me)

Doing the survey was a very inspiring experience. Covid made it difficult to gather people and yet was able to reach out to some remote areas. The presence of young people who could act as interpreters helped to conduct the survey. There was a deep sense of hope among the people despite their remoteness and poverty. For those involved in the survey it was a joyous experience. During the covid people were left to fend for themselves. It was difficult to convey several of the issues that were being discussed. The health sector was really bad before and after covid. The Young people of Africa is indeed the hope of the continent.

Geoffrey Ngui, Salesians of Don Bosco, Nairobi, Kenya

Survey was conducted in the three regions of Nairobi, Machakos, Muranga, with three different categories of people: Salesian community, Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) and parish leaders (key community informants). They were rural, urban, and semi-urban areas.

Kenya has a very good Financial Inclusion program due to a robust financial inclusion infrastructure. This came in very handy during the Covid. IT played a critical role in alleviating the hardships of covid. The presence of the services of MPESA was very transformative. Quoting the example of his own grandmother who could access cash he illustrated how the old people were able to benefit from easily accessible cash transfer facility.

With regard to Climate Finance, he drew the attention to wanton industrial development that is affecting the environment and the need to make community focused intervention. There is insufficient knowledge regarding Climate Finance. And, about the care of the environment. There is need to educate people to see the environment as part of themselves. Research in environment is very urgent. Climate mitigation programs should be the core agenda now. Actions on the ground does not match the efforts required to meet climate disasters. It needs to be inclusive between countries and within countries.

Sr. Joel Urumpil, Sisters of Charity Federation, Jharkand, India

She was herself a COVID-19 victim. The respondents, mostly youth and women came to the center. Initially were not very eager to answer the survey questions doubting how it was going to help them with covid crisis, but the relationships built with the community helped overcome the initial hesitation. Over the years the health facility has improved. So has the PDS system and the roads and other means of transport. Prevalence of corruption is rampant, and the poor people suffer due to it. Despite PDS there is hunger and malnutrition. Democracy and individual freedom are under threat. There are great plans, but the implementation is poor. Children are out of school and the lack of access to internet deprives the poor children of education that is available to children from economically better off households. In the community youth came together voluntarily to help migrants. The women and youth were very supportive in the efforts to reach out to the migrants. The loans taken by the government is a heavy burden on the people. Advocacy is needed against the unconscionable exploitation of natural resources especially through coal mining. It's affecting the environment very adversely. Social

protection, financial security and addressing inequality is the need of the hour. During the pandemic it was the NGOs who did most of the relief work.

Fr. Wilginz Polyniz, Port-au-Prince/Fond Parisien/Ganthier, Haiti

The remoteness of the area was a great challenge. The lack of internet added to the challenge. The government was mostly indifferent to the plight of the people. The fact that people depended on remittance from abroad and those abroad were out of jobs added to the woes of the people. NGOs like the Salesians had to step in to meet the basic services needed by the people: food, water, mask, medicine etc. There was also the prevalence of other diseases like Chikungunya etc.