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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: “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 Kosmos Associates, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **An Ontological, Paradigmatic Approach to Poverty Eradication**

Poverty is endemic to the current economic and social architecture. We cannot eradicate the part of the system we call poverty and expect the rest to sustain. Endemic poverty experienced by people living on an abundant planet suggests systemic, paradigmatic dysfunction. While efforts to fight against poverty undoubtedly change lives, the actual eradication of poverty requires transformation toward a common good-centered, values-driven paradigm that is built on social and economic architecture which is both fit to accommodate the reality of our interdependent co-arising with every being and with the planet itself and fit for the purpose of creating a world that works for everyone.

In the spirit of Einstein's wisdom about the need to step out of systems to find solutions to problems that are endemic to those systems, securing the world's needs cannot happen from within global systems with inherent structural problems like endemic poverty. Focusing on the ontological ground of poverty, that is, using a deeper, more systemic lens from which we view poverty, helps shift the focus from merely pushing back against the conditions of poverty to transforming systems so that they are not set up to tolerate, accommodate or reproduce impoverished conditions.

An ontological shift, a shift in the fundamental basis from which we view poverty, requires a leap of consciousness away from our current separation-based cultural paradigm that is us/them and win/lose oriented, toward a unitive ground of being, a paradigm that is more coherent with cutting edge science and with most major religious and indigenous wisdom teachings. It is a shift away from "othering" and toward a world of mutual vitality and thriving. (Ref below: Unitive Narrative)

Rather than reacting to emergencies of poverty that call for alleviation, the emerging ontological up-script places at its core the right to live in vibrant interdependency with equitable access to, and distribution of, resources. Shifting the ontological ground away from a have/have not world to one that works for everyone requires transformation of mindsets, values, norms and policies.

A world without poverty requires a re-evaluation of what we value. This involves collectively prioritizing what people truly value most, like quality of life. We must shift our social and economic valuation systems away from the narrow confines of economic indices, and the myth that "Greed is good," to broader and more holistic systems that account for the genuine well-being and quality of life of every individual and for the interdependent nature of our global reality.

Values animate the UN Charter and the Sustainable Development Goals. (Carley 2021) Values are our most primal motivators, more operative than genetics and social pressures. However, our actual values are often disconnected from our public policies, institutional norms, and personal practices. And the most operative values that are driving systems at this moment in time are antithetical to human survival. Values are the building blocks of cultures, and paradigmatic change requires increasing the valuation we collectively place on the vitalization of all beings and decreasing current valuations for militarization, competition and materialism.

The ontology of the current paradigm is exclusive of metaphysical ideas like happiness and well-being and often categorically ignores and denies related indicators. But when values-driven decision-making and policy happen, studies using well-tested methodologies from just about every sector throughout the world show that almost all social and economic indicators improve. In 2012, the General Assembly unanimously recognized that happiness and well-being are what people value most, yet those values are not accounted for by the social and economic

indicators we choose to rely on, which currently hold little to no valuation for such things. (Ref below: Happiness and Wellbeing at the UN)

It is time to end the world's over-reliance on indicators like interest rates, inflation, and GDP because they fail to address the basic needs and desires of global society. Because current indicators primarily address poverty only in the realm of finance, underlying driving forces like emotional, social and spiritual poverty are ignored. Merely improving the scores on traditional indicators has not and will not lead to the eradication of poverty. We need new indicators that account for what people value most, including personal development and social connectedness.

Addressing poverty at its deepest ontological roots requires a shift toward building systems based on values like unity, loving our neighbours, and personal, communal, and ecological vitality. A values-driven cultural infrastructure could not support poverty. Just like a culture in a laboratory dish will grow some things and not others, social cultures inherently accommodate issues like endemic poverty or not. Poverty simply could not be sustained in a culture of peace, compassion, and justice. More focus is needed at the level of culture and consciousness if we are to eradicate poverty.

Developing a world that knows poverty as a relic of the past entails a shift toward creating systems that reflect our existential unity, systems underpinned by emergent cosmological and biological research and corroborated by almost every major religion and indigenous spiritual teachings, systems built on the assumption that every sentient being has the right to go to sleep safe, fed and warm.

In "Failure vs. displacement: Why an innovative anti-poverty program showed no net impact in South India", Bauchet et al. discuss the results of a randomized trial of an innovative anti-poverty program implemented in Andhra Pradesh, South India. This program, known as the "ultra-poor graduation" model, aimed to provide the poorest households with assets, resources, training, and support to help them build sustainable livelihoods, often involving livestock rearing. The program aimed to uplift ultra-poor households from extreme poverty. While similar programs in other regions, such as Bangladesh and West Bengal, had shown positive impacts, the study in South India found no significant lasting net impact on key outcomes, including household income, consumption, asset accumulation, and the use of financial services.

The article explores various factors that may have contributed to this lack of impact, including issues with data quality, program implementation, low take-up, and high drop-out rates. A considerable number of households that initially engaged with the program later chose to withdraw. This shows that eradicating poverty must go beyond simply implementing anti-poverty programs and requires a shift in personal and global mindsets along with legal and institutional systems. One significant factor highlighted is the strong labour market in the region, where wages for unskilled labour rose during the program's implementation, leading to an offsetting effect that diminished the net impact of the intervention. This also diverted participants away from the program.

Bauchet et al. suggest that the success of such employment-based interventions can be highly dependent on external factors, such as the overall employment opportunities available to the beneficiaries. The ultra-poor graduation project demonstrates the significance of factors that lie beyond direct program interventions and also reveals the need for a comprehensive shift in mindsets, values, and policy approaches as fundamental to eradicating poverty.

This transformation requires a shift in both personal and global consciousness and a concerted effort at multiple levels. Transformation is both an inner and outer

experience. A world without poverty involves creating valuation for inner work, contemplation, prayer, and creativity, in all economies, including academic, governance, private, and public sectors. Creating such a world would require a renaissance of values, a resurgence of compassion, a new understanding of justice and common-good, centered ethics as fundamental pillars of new social and economic architecture.

**Interventions:**

The interventions proposed include breaking through old ontological assumptions by robust engagement at the level of mindset. We call upon all educational systems and upon leaders in the public and private sectors to recognize this call for a new lens on solving poverty, one that is underpinned by a unitive ontology that can account for the indisputable reality of our existential interdependency. We need to invite public input on matters of consciousness and culture as a means to develop transformative policies, practices and accountabilities that are more commonly grounded in the values that humanity holds in common. We can only build new financial architecture that supports universal well-being, the common good, and unitive solutions if we attend to developing the necessary mindset.

The eradication of poverty requires a fundamental shift in our values, consciousness, and cultural systems, to move from the current paradigm in which poverty is endemic, to one that holds happiness and wellbeing as core criteria. This shift is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is time to recognize and address the roles of consciousness and culture in creating social norms and systems for a world where poverty is eradicated not by creating more, better and different projects to fight against it, but by developing unitive approaches to cultural development.

**References:**

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Happiness and Wellbeing work at the United Nations, <https://www.unsdsn.org/happiness-and-well-being-research>

A Unitive Narrative: <https://sdgthoughtleaderscircle.org/unitive-new-narrative/>

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