

SOCIAL POLICY OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

UDC 341.123:364

352

Mile Ilić, Milan Jovanović

University of Niš, Teacher-Training Faculty, Vranje, Republic of Serbia
City Assembly of Niš, Republic of Serbia

Abstract. *The study of social policy almost always has its outset in the Organization of the United Nations. It is also the source and the meeting place for local social policy, benchmark against which the standards are established. Poverty, illiteracy, hunger and social inequality have become serious reasons that can impair global relations, which is the main motive for the creation of the ECOSOC. Since its formation, the United Nations has made significant achievements in the field of social policy and has proven to be an indispensable instrument for international cooperation. With more or less success, the UN remained consistent to its proclaimed goals and principles. A large number of UN declarations in the field of protection of workers, women, children and many other aspects of social policy attain its final form and true value only after their implementation in local communities. Inequalities between regions, crime and unemployment must be accepted as a reality. But it is right there that the need for the UN activities emerges, which should create timely and appropriate measures in the field of social policy and be applied to the local level.*

Key words: *Unites Nations, international cooperation, social policy, local communities, ECOSOC.*

INTRODUCTION

Due to the very concept of social policy and its mission to encompass wider issues of social development, economic development and everyday living conditions of the population, there is a need for scientific understanding of these problems at the global level and their impact on local communities. That implies searching for answers about social phenomena in general, starting from individual human activities and local communities,

Received November 12th, 2015 / Accepted December 18th, 2015

Corresponding author: Milan Jovanović, MA (Political Science)

City Assembly of Niš

E-mail: acsmilan@gmail.com

through specific government policies, to the universal international cooperation. The universal form of social policy in particular leads us to the key global organization - the United Nations (UN), with highly accentuated economic and socio-political implications.

Any serious study of social policy almost always has its origin in this organization. It is the source and the meeting place for local social policy, benchmark against which the standards are established. However, social policy directly concerns the state, society, people, specific activities and actions; it is applicable and practical. Therefore, the role of local communities is ultimately important, as well as the way in which they implement global social policy.

It is often said that the UN is an impractical, slow and passive institution, dominated by influences of various countries and where the principle of force plays a crucial role. Also, its role is unjustifiably limited solely to the preservation of peace and security in the world. This is an epochal and primary function of the United Nations but its other, humane, role which justifies its social and community character should by no means be neglected. There is one thing which these aspects have in common. It is the reform of the UN that will influence its role and future impact in all areas throughout the world, including the area of social policy.

It is exactly the UN where it is necessary to find a common language, to overcome divergent positions, to mitigate conflicts of various workers' and humanist movements, and to coordinate the activities of incompatible local social systems. The gap between developed and developing countries, the rich and the poor, national and international law, will remain a stumbling block in the future. Therefore, the emphasis should be placed on international cooperation and, for this reason, some believe that it is appropriate to say "international cooperation in the field of social policy" (Čekerevac, 2005:40). This cooperation would include: 1. The area of labor (living and working conditions of workers, promotion of employment and unemployment planning, human resources, institutions dealing with standardization in the field of labor relations); 2. Economic and social human rights; 3. The problems of social security (misery and poverty, nutrition, social security system, victims of war and disaster); 4. Demographic problems (population growth, families, dependent categories of the population, migration); 5. Issues from the realm of social organization and actions in the field of living and working conditions (social development planning, research, information, science, human resources, organization activities) (Čekerevac, 2005:40).

The UN has shown the potential in this area; it has made a great number of specific results so far and proclaimed high goals for the future, which are largely accepted by the local communities of individual states. It is necessary to recognize the place of the UN in the modern society, in the process of globalization, but also its real possibilities. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the instruments and specific contributions to the development of humanity, fight against poverty, improvement of living and working conditions, equality, social justice, human relationships and freedom in general. It is especially important to evaluate the importance of such policies and activities of the UN towards the poor and developing countries, crisis areas, as well as their impact on local legal systems so that they could take their place in the long-term humane process.

THE ROLE OF THE ECOSOC

The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) emerged as a result of the idea "to establish a major body that will exclusively deal with the improvement of

cooperation between the countries in solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian issues” (Račić, Dimitrijević, 1988:17,18). This is an essential feature which “largely differentiates the United Nations from the League of Nations and testifies about the effort to secure peace realized in a deeper and more complex way” (Račić, Dimitrijević, 1988:215). Given the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations to put into practice the principle of collective security, it was concluded that the establishment of peace and conflict prevention must be influenced long beforehand; therefore, it is necessary to find the roots of conflicts that disturb the world peace. The desire and need for more complex, deeper and more versatile causes of international relations has led to considerations that poverty, illiteracy, hunger and social inequality are serious threats that might disrupt the atmosphere of peace. This was the main motive for establishing the ECOSOC. Its seriously planned and designed role is substantiated by the fact, provided in the UN Charter itself, that this Council is one of the main UN bodies. In this way, the ECOSOC was formally assigned the role of the body that will be responsible to work on identifying, overcoming and eliminating the aforementioned problems in a timely manner. The most typical ECOSOC’s feature is that it should “guide economic and social activities of the UN” (Čekerevac, 2005:99). The major issues discussed pertain to: “human rights, refugees, economic and social development, culture, education, health, trade and transport, demography, drugs, housing, working conditions, the state of the environment and communications”. All this has a direct or indirect impact on the local communities, which implement the decisions issued at this level by establishing special procedures. The activity of the ECOSOC was conceived as a kind of a forum, which will promote international economic and social cooperation and development in cooperation with the General Assembly. It also has the role to discuss these issues and formulate the social policy recommendations to the UN or member states. Its responsibility is to promote “higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; international cultural and educational cooperation; and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UN, International Economic and Social Co-operation).

ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Although it is constantly criticized, the United Nations has made significant achievements since its establishment in the field of social policy, and has proven to be an indispensable instrument of international cooperation. From the time of the anti-Hitler coalition, through the Cold War period and all the way to the contemporary challenges of the 21st century, the UN remained more or less consistent to its proclaimed objectives and principles which apply up to the level of local communities. The activities concerning daily-life problems of the world and everyday living conditions of people are in focus. During the long period of its existence and work, the activities of the UN and its agencies in the field of social policy have constantly been examined, redefined and re-designed, with the aim of achieving optimal social results. These activities were mainly conducted in three directions, pertaining to the social sphere, economic (developmental) and humanitarian measures. As a democratic forum for examining and solving various problems in these areas, the United Nations has tried to contribute through its continuous engagement to a better future and better living conditions of every individual, all the way down to the level of local communities. Such a

utopian goal has not been achieved but the groundworks for future activities have been laid down; yet, they will heavily depend on various subjects, including international organizations, the state and individuals.

The main deficiency of the UN activity in general, including the domain of social policy, is the non-binding nature of their decisions. Although morally strong, declarations, resolutions and decisions that are made within the United Nations framework can easily become negligible if the reactions of states and individuals are not positive. The concepts and proposals become effective and efficient only with the appropriate concrete realization of these ideas. The stumbling block in the process of implementing the UN agenda is the sovereignty of countries, the problem which all international organizations have in common, especially the universal organization such as the UN. It is hard to imagine that the decisions made within the UN will become legally binding in a near future. However, this should not discourage the process of multilateral negotiation and consensus building, as well as raising awareness about the need for joint action on the issue of solving universal problems.

There is a fact that the majority of the UN member states are developing countries, which significantly determines the goals of the UN as an organisation which is committed to reducing the backwardness, accelerating their development and encouraging economic activity. Since 1960, the United Nations has developed plans for each "decade of development". The main problem in this area is that the financial momentum for these activities is often a decision factor. The UN cannot provide financial assistance to developing countries from its own resources; thus, its major activity is aimed at attracting developed countries to become providers and that such funds are, through the UN, exploited in the most rational way and redistributed under the principle of fairness in various regions of the world. In this process, the United Nations are assisted by numerous financial and monetary institutions, as well as various commissions for development in other organizations. The question of development is, therefore, the focus of the UN, which is trying to come up with the most favorable conditions to support the life of people in these countries, through comprehensive cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations. The most important role of the UN in this long-term process is the provision of technical assistance, which is the creation of preconditions for the serious economic momentum. The coordinating role in this area has been assumed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The funds available to the UNDP are collected on a voluntary basis, making the results often uncertain. As it can be seen, the economic determinant is an important factor that governs specific activities of the UN. The development of world trade under equal conditions remains the principle on which the future social policy of the United Nations shall be built. This orientation encourages the UN and the poorest countries, raising hope that the most urgent problems can be really addressed and dealt with. This determination assumes: "spotting real problems, solving them in accordance with the established priorities in a manner that will mean not only institutional mechanism adjustment of the UN for economic and social cooperation but at the same time it will address actual modifications of inequitable economic relations" (Račić, Dimitrijević, 1988:227). This approach is increasingly becoming qualitative rather than quantitative.

The UN has laid the groundwork for international cooperation in the field of social policy and social development. Ever since its foundation, the United Nations have been striving to overcome the unequal economic and political relations, to achieve social justice and to improve daily living conditions of the local population. The governing idea which prevailed in all these activities has been a joint internationally organized action,

which would solve the existential problems of the population, especially in the residual parts of the world. Such actions have often brought concrete results but, even if not quite successful, they have generated progressive changes and a different way of thinking around the world, especially in developed countries. Despite numerous difficulties encountered in the practical realization of these activities, social progress has certainly been made, while „the international cooperation has contributed to social, national and general human emancipation on a world scale, and the international social policy became inevitable in a connected and interdependent world“ (Čekerevac, 2005:156).

The UN activities in the field of social policy have been largely focused on the protection of human and social rights. In this process, the United Nations have collaborated with a number of specialized agencies. The protection of these rights began shortly after establishing the UN, in 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Although conceived as a set of ideal goals, the Declaration has become part of the practice of states in international relations, and was consciously applied almost everywhere in the world. The application of the principles and attitudes of the Declaration is in the competence of the UN, particularly the Commission on Human Rights. It can impeach individual states for „systematic and massive violations of human rights“ (Račić, Dimitrijević, 1988:227). In addition to political and economic rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also proclaims social rights. The recognition and implementation of human rights, such as: the right to work, the standard of living, housing etc., found their place in a universal document for the first time.

The UN has adopted a number of significant documents: the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples. Furthermore, a large number of resolutions, decisions and documents have been adopted by the UN Assembly and by the ECOSOC, as well as numerous specialized agencies engaged in the process of concretization and specification of basic documents in this area. Despite all the flaws and frequent interpretation of these documents as optional, it is certain that they have laid the foundations of international social cooperation, friendship between nations, social development, positive change of the opinion, international co-existence, and ultimately greater peace and security in the world (yet, not absolute). It was particularly difficult to achieve such interdependence in the world imbued with diverse economic, political and social values and systems.

In the post-Cold War period, a significant contribution to establishing a new approach to international relations and the role of the UN were two documents adopted at the beginning of the mandate of the sixth Secretary-General of the UN, Boutros-Ghali. These are *An Agenda for Peace* and *An Agenda for Development* (Milinkovic, 1995:63). *An Agenda for Peace* expresses a tendency towards preventive diplomacy and peace-keeping, but it is an important indication that the sources of conflict are deep and that they can be prevented only by respecting human freedoms and economic and social development for wider prosperity. It clearly reiterates the view that the rights of minorities and the rights of women and children must be respected. However, these rights cannot be separated from social stability. Therefore, the leading role of the UN should be the one „in the field“, in order to include the poor and those on the verge of society to participate in decision-making processes and in the democratic implementation of decisions on social and economic issues. *An Agenda for Development*, adopted in the same year, points out that the development is the basic and

safest prerequisite of peace. The development concept includes the reduction of poverty, illiteracy, disease and mortality. For the first time after the Cold War, an Agenda for Development publicly proclaimed that the interests of the poor and disadvantaged people were ignored for the interest of the conflicting parties, that many of them were discouraged and that the economy of many countries was either in transition or in a serious trouble. Moreover, it was stated for the first time that the UN dedicated more attention to peacekeeping operations than to development. Hence, without the all-round development, the chances of peace are minimal. Economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems are becoming global and the responsibility of the UN and national governments is growing.

In addition to the adopted documents, which include more or less binding principles, standpoints and rules, the UN and its specialized agencies in particular propose, adopt and implement a variety of programs, plans and strategies, with the aim of developing and practically applying the principles of primary sources. In addition to the ECOSOC, the Department of Social and Economic Affairs has the main role in the development and implementation of individual programs. The programs and activities of this body cover a number of areas: 1) social policy and development; 2) eradication of poverty and unemployment; 3) integrations; 4) sustainable development; 5) the non-governmental sector. Within the first area of social policy and development, it is important to mention the World Summit for Social Development, which was held in Copenhagen in 1995, where the Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action were adopted.

Most of these programs have yielded results. Some have remained unrealized due to objective constraints, others due to the lack of will. It is encouraging that the results achieved in the framework of the UN and its special bodies are monitored and evaluated on a daily basis but, at the same time, new plans and strategies for the future are created. When planning and organizing a specific activity, the first step for the UN is to assess the actual situation, which is not always good, but constitutes a challenge for humanitarian missions and assistance programs.

IMPLEMENTATION ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

In the present-day interdependent world, the UN activities in the field of social policy are in great demand but, in order to make this global mechanism important to every individual, city and region, it is necessary to implement universal documents on the local level. Although globalization increasingly blurs the distinction between states, the observance of legal hierarchy in sovereign states remains an important principle for the implementation of international standards in the field of social policy. A large number of the UN declarations in the field of protection of workers, women, children and many other aspects of social policy attain its final form and true value only after being implemented in local communities. That is why the local government has an important role in recognizing the significance of universal rules and transferring them directly to the citizens, in accordance with the Constitution and applicable law of each state.

That is the case in Serbia as well. The Serbian Constitution clearly shows concerns about social policy, which is elaborated through the Local Self-Government Act. Social security at the local level is also envisaged in other acts, such as statutes and decisions in the field of social protection. In this way, Serbia has created a system of social protection which has its origin in a number of UN declarations. In particular, Article 20 of the existing

Local Self-Government Act provides the specific competences of the local authorities: “the municipality establishes institutions in the field of social protection and monitors and provides their functioning, gives permission for the opening of social protection institutions founded by other legal entities and individuals, determines whether the requirements for the provision of social services are provided, establishes norms and standards for conducting the activities of institutions founded by the municipality, issues regulations on rights in social protection and performs the role of a state guardian“ (Ilić,2013:289). An important part of the authority vested in the local self-government pertains to enacting regulations on the social protection rights, which is particularly significant because it provides an opportunity to enact a number of decisions, resolutions and declarations proclaiming the principles of the UN social policy and, thus, contribute to establishing a comprehensive system of social policy in the Republic of Serbia. It is, therefore, highly important for implementing the principles of the UN social policy in local communities.

CONCLUSION

It is undisputed that the United Nations, with the help of its main bodies such as the Economic and Social Council, and a number of specialized agencies and subsidiary bodies, has been conducive to solving existential problems of a large number of people on the global, national and local level, especially in underdeveloped areas of the world. An even greater contribution may be the change in the mindset and constant advocacy of a progressive attitude toward positive change. Owing to the UN Organisation, there is more freedom, equality, prosperity and general human emancipation than ever. The change has become inevitable and constant. What should be certainly worked on in the years to come is the pace and intensity of change, as well as the joint role of all subjects in an interdependent world.

Nevertheless, there remains the problem of willpower, ethics and interests of the superpowers in a globalized modern society. The UN is a paradigm of international cooperation in social policies and its potential is enormous. The results yielded by the UN activities so far have been encouraging. However, there are real obstacles that hinder some very ambitious plans. Activities aimed at improving the global economic and social conditions are in the hands of the ECOSOC. Its task is to reach a consensus among states on economic and social policy, and to include as many relevant subjects as possible in order to implement decisions in local communities.

Research data show that much has been done, that fewer people are starving, that millions of people break away from fatal poverty, while millions of children now go to school. However, the mortality rate of mothers and children, the huge debts of the poorest countries and access to clean water remain major problems. Progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals varies from region to region (The Millennium Development Goals, Report, 2007). China is an example of a country that has made a huge step forward in recent years; on the other hand, places like Sub-Saharan Africa still do not get relevant results. Yet, success is possible in most of the world, and this provides an incentive to spend the forthcoming period of seven and a half years investing more effort and helping the most vulnerable. The examples of certain positive results may be perceived in the area of increasing women's participation in politics, as well as the success in fighting death from measles in young children. This report includes disturbing data on a total number of 500,000 women per year who die due to various diseases and complications during pregnancy

and childbirth. In addition, half of the population in developing countries lacks basic sanitation facilities; carbon dioxide emissions have increased dramatically, and the climate change continues to cause enormous damage to the economic and social development.

It is unrealistic to expect that the ongoing process of economic globalization, trade liberalization, wealth increase and poverty expansion will abruptly stop. Inequality between regions, crime and unemployment must be accepted as a reality. But, it is exactly the point where the activities of the UN may prove to be invaluable. The UN should profile objective and rational measures; instead of fighting against the givens of the globalization it should follow up its development and benefit from its positive side. In that context, local communities should play an important role as they provide a “top-down“ monitoring and implementation of the necessary measures in the future, which are ultimately aimed at defending human dignity.

REFERENCES

1. Bennett, A., Oliver, K. (2004). *Međunarodne organizacije* (International Organisations), Zagreb.
2. Čekerevac, A. (2005). *Međunarodna socijalna politika* (International Social Policy), Beograd.
3. Ilić, M. (2013). *Lokalna samouprava* (Local Self-Government), Vranje.
4. Milinković, B. (1995). *Ujedinjene nacije* (The United Nations), 1945-1995.
5. Račić, O., Dimitrijević, V. (1988). *Međunarodne organizacije* (International Organisations), Beograd.
6. ECOSOC, <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/>, Retrieved 29.10.2015.
7. Global Policy Forum, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/finance/index.htm>, Retrieved 30.10.2015.
8. Millennium Development Goals, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>, Retrieved 29.10.2015.
9. Opšta deklaracija o pravima čoveka (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>, Retrieved 29.10.2015.
10. UN Charter, <http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>, Retrieved 28.10.2015.
11. Ustav Republike Srbije (The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia). *Službeni glasnik RS*. Broj 98/2006.
12. Zakon o lokalnoj samoupravi (The Local Self-Government Act). *Službeni glasnik RS*. Br. 129/2007, 83/2014.
13. WHO, <http://www.who.int/en/>, Retrieved 30.10.2015.

SOCIJALNA POLITIKA UJEDINJENIH NACIJA I NJENA IMPLEMENTACIJA U LOKALNIM ZAJEDNICAMA

Proučavanje socijalne politike gotovo uvek ima svoj početak u Organizaciji ujedinjenih nacija. Ona je i izvor i stecište lokalnih socijalnih politika, merilo na osnovu koga se uspostavljaju standardi. Siromaštvo, nepismenost, glad i socijalna nejednakost postali su ozbiljni razlozi koji mogu narušiti globalne odnose i to je glavni motiv nastanka ECOSOC-a. Organizacija Ujedinjenih nacija je, od samog svog formiranja, napravila značajne rezultate u oblasti socijalne politike i pokazala se nezamenljivim instrumentom međunarodne saradnje. UN su, sa manje ili više uspeha, ostale dosledne svojim proklamovanim ciljevima i načelima.

Veliki broj deklaracija UN u oblasti zaštite radnika, žena, dece i mnogim drugim vidovima socijalne politike, dobija svoj konačan oblik i pravu vrednost tek nakon implementacije u lokalnim zajednicama.

Nejednakosti između regiona, kriminal i nezaposlenost se moraju prihvatiti kao realnost. Ali, upravo odatle i izvire potreba za aktivnostima UN-a, koje treba da kreiraju pravovremene i svrsishodne mere u domenu socijalne politike i koje će se primenjivati sve do lokalnog nivoa.

Ključne reči: *Ujedinjene nacije, međunarodna saradnja, socijalna politika, lokalne zajednice, ECOSOC.*