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**Social Protection in Decent Work Country Programmes:
A Checklist of Issues**

Assane Diop
Executive Director, Social Protection Sector, ILO Geneva

Colleagues and friends,

Last November, the Sector presented a comprehensive paper at the Employment and Social Policy Committee of the Governing Body entitled “Implementation of decent work country programmes: Checklist of policy areas on social protection”. It was a unique opportunity to present an overview of the social protection programme as a whole. We drew on the vast experience of colleagues in headquarters and in the field.

As my colleagues will present the policies on the specific technical areas making up the social protection programme, I

will focus my brief presentation on some overarching and cross-cutting issues.

Why social protection now?

Social protection, like many aspects of decent work, has long been on the ILO's agenda. In fact, it was the driving force behind the establishment of the ILO in 1919.

Why is it so important and urgent now?

Let me just enumerate some of the reasons why.

- There is recognition that economic growth must go hand-in-hand with social development (“social growth”).
Indeed, the Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action call for “the development of an appropriate framework for integration and harmonisation of economic and social policies”. Many countries whose economies are growing

know that to accelerate and sustain this growth, social protection policies must be in place.

- Recognition of the human and economic costs of the absence of social protection. The absence of social security, for example, can lead to personal losses, anxieties and the too-often slide into penury and destitution. The justification is similar to that of poverty reduction.
- The growing focus on social inclusion and integration and increasing efforts to combat discrimination and exclusion
- Changing patterns of work and the process of globalization are exposing the far-reaching repercussions of neglecting or compromising social protection.
- Recognition that quality counts. Quality jobs are increasingly a key factor in a competitive business environment.
- Evidence of the direct relationship between the quality of working life and quality of life. From social protection for all to decent living for all.

- The strong movement for workers' rights, equity, equality and dignity at work.
- Recognition that social protection is an investment in political stability.
- Finally, international, regional and national commitment to make Decent Work a global and regional goal and a national reality are also elevating social protection higher in the political agenda.

Obviously, many of these factors are inter-related and there are more one can cite. But what is clear is that social protection cannot be relegated to a better tomorrow. Precisely because the economic situation is more difficult, markets more uncertain and competitive, unemployment increasing and poverty affecting so many, there must be stronger safeguards to protect workers and their families. In addition, increasing evidence demonstrates that social protection is an economic and productive factor.

My second point is: Why we need to look at social protection in a more global and integrated way?

The different components of social protection are not unconnected with each other. Wages affect and are affected by hours of work, occupational safety and health, and access to health care. Working time influences safety and health and possibilities to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Prevention of occupational safety and health accidents are closely linked to employee injury insurance schemes especially as insurance data provides essential feedback for prevention which in turn leads to the reduction of insurance payments. Anti-discrimination policies and practices influence opportunities for migrant workers and HIV/AIDS-affected workers to have decent jobs and access to benefit packages. Protecting women from discrimination in access and at work are linked to migration policies and have implications for gender equality in social security.

An appreciation of these linkages – that many problems are caused by multiple and cumulative factors involving sequences of events – is important in developing social protection interventions. It facilitates careful consideration of the scope – both synergies and possible trade-offs, the appropriate entry points and the phasing of interventions.

The technical programmes in the Sector continue to link their respective policy areas to other technical social protection policy areas. My colleagues will elaborate on this in their presentations.

Several factors are pushing for a more integrated approach: the persistent demand to be results-based and to focus on fewer but more sustainable outcomes; monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; and increased research and statistical capacity to analyse and evaluate data and impact.

My third point is obvious to many of you. But, none the less, worth recalling: **international labour standards remain a reference point and underpin social protection strategies and approaches.** A very high proportion of the standards adopted are on social protection. They establish the “rules” of social protection, the ethical framework in national policies and workplace conditions.

One of the reasons why a more integrated approach to social protection is needed is that standards on social protection interact with each other. When jobs are threatened, occupational safety and health is compromised. When income replacement is not available, maternity protection is threatened. The presence of certain standards makes others more effective and conversely, the absence of certain standards reduces the potential of others. The “package” character of standards should be taken into account in designing social protection components of DWCPs.

A related point is to avoid turning social protection simply into questions of minimum standards. What is “basic” is constantly evolving with changes in the patterns of work and working relationships.

Decent work is not a static notion. Rather, it mirrors both aspirations and possibilities in the short and long term, reflecting the evolving priorities of each society. This is why Regina’s statement at the DWGTM meeting that Africa is a “driver of its own development”, that Africa is “taking its own destiny in hand” is so relevant and potent.

My fourth point: social dialogue is a very important means in strengthening and delivering social protection.

Social protection policies are more likely to be effective if constituents and other policy-makers jointly define problems, develop appropriate solutions and set realistic timetables. When the difficult economic climate reduces resources available for social protection, a national policy developed through dialogue

and tripartism becomes even more useful. Social dialogue drives consensus, ownership and commitment and helps in ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are in place and resources are allocated.

National plans of action on occupational safety and health and HIV/AIDS built on social dialogue and consensus are building blocks in developing DWCPs in some countries. In Senegal, the National Committee on Social Dialogue is playing a major role in the extension of social security in the transport and rural sectors.

Social dialogue provides a vehicle for negotiations on a range of social protection areas such as wages and working time. Collective bargaining has an obvious impact on the structure, level and conditions of employment. Social dialogue provides a forum for negotiations on the form and content of social security. Social dialogue also makes it possible to influence implementation and monitor achievements. This is

especially important because many social protection policy areas relate to rights at work.

Mapping social protection coverage requires taking into account macro-economic factors, microeconomic parameters and a range of strategic issues. Social dialogue ensures that policy-makers from different ministries, local economic development authorities, employers and workers at different levels, and community groups have voice and representation. In fact, as decent work is integrated within a broader development context, social dialogue is an important means in engaging all stakeholders in processes and policies aimed at enhancing social protection for all.

Fifth point: social protection is a means to achieve other goals especially employment and productivity.

The Global Employment Agenda is the basis for operationalizing employment support for DWCPs.¹ The GEA recognizes the synergy between social protection and employment. Two the 10 core elements are directly on social protection: **Core element 8** on social protection as a productive factor; and **Core element 9** on occupational safety and health and productivity.

The other core elements also refer to the importance of social protection policies. For example:

Core element 2 (Promoting technological change for higher productivity, job creation and improved standards of living) states that because technological change can be disruptive on labour markets, mechanisms for social protection become of increasing importance.

¹ Programme and Budget Proposals for 2008-09.

Core element 3 (Promoting sustainable development for sustainable livelihood) states that workplace safety and health and tackling HIV/AIDS would contribute to sustainable development.

Core element 4 (Macroeconomic policy for growth and employment) emphasizes that the design of macroeconomic policies should incorporate measures for social protection and labour market activation to minimize the volatility of labour demand and to mitigate its adverse social effects.

Core element 5 (Promoting decent employment through entrepreneurship) specifies that in promoting entrepreneurship, quality of employment encompass preventing discrimination at the workplace, including against those with HIV/AIDS and minorities, and enabling policies such as a sound regulatory framework. Compliance even in small enterprises is possible. A particular challenge is to reduce the burden of

compliance on the entrepreneur, while ensuring adequate worker protection. Exempting micro-enterprises from the requirements of labour law and safety regulations could create a “growth trap”.

Core element 6 (Employability by improving knowledge and skills) notes that competent policy choices including on migration determine economic growth, job creation and the demand for labour. Discrimination including against migrant workers creates barriers to education, training and decent employment.

Core element 7 (Active labour market policies): specifies that active labour market policies are linked to minimum wage and wage policies, ageing and retirement, income security and social transfers.

Core element 10 (Productive employment for poverty reduction) notes that poverty in many countries stems from the

inability of many jobs to ensure decent levels of income and living. Protection in case of illness, disability and old age should complement employment and poverty strategies. Safety nets are crucial particularly in crisis situations. Tax policies and minimum wages reinforce measures to increase growth and productivity.

The points above underscore the importance of a comprehensive strategy. This means looking at **social protection as a goal in its own right**. People are entitled to some levels of protection. But it also means looking at social protection, especially within the context of decent work, **as an instrument – a means – to achieve other goals**. Addressing these dimensions is important because they interact and influence the feasibility and sustainability of improvements.

A comprehensive strategy is increasingly called for to ensure impact and results. In one way we experienced this in our programming. But what is more important is the increasing

recognition by both constituents and donors of the need for a more integrated approach for maximum impact and sustainability.

For example, there is increasing recognition of the potential for “win-win” approaches at enterprise level to boosting productivity and competitiveness through better working conditions and labour-management cooperation. Approaches built on the inter-relationship between these three elements, together with practical training tools for managers and workers’ representatives, have been jointly developed through inter-sectoral cooperation involving principally TRAVAIL, EMP/ENT and DIALOGUE, with other ILO units also involved. This approach and the training tools are being pilot-tested in Morocco in a Spanish-funded project for the garment sector that is a core element of the DWCP.

More broadly, the ILO and the International Finance Corporation agreed in August, 2006, to collaborate in

developing a global programme for better labour standards in global supply chains. The objective of the Better Work programme is to improve labour standards and enterprise performance in global supply chains in developing countries. It will do this by (a) promoting compliance with international labour standards and national law in global supply chains as a basis for building socially responsible export strategies; and (b) enhancing enterprise-level economic and social performance. The focus will be on long-term sustainable solutions which build cooperation between government, employers' and workers' organizations, and international buyers. As part of the programme there will be a number of pilot projects, potentially including Lesotho.

Now, let me conclude by commenting briefly about methodology.

We can easily appreciate the reasons for social protection and the principles underpinning them. But in designing DWCPs,

we also have to answer: Protection of what? For whom? How much? and How? **These are complex questions and the replies will depend on a host of factors. But it is important to keep them in mind.**

Protection of what? is a vital question and often answered too quickly, pre-empting consideration of second-level impacts, linkages and alternatives. Should the focus of protective policies be to compensate for losses, or to provide against such effects? Is it enough to provide a level playing field in the market, or should there be concern for the inequalities in the resources brought by the players? We are making progress in widening the domain of attention and making the linkages as in the project mentioned above and the framework developed in the Social Security Department.

Protection for whom? The answer depends on the social protection agenda. It is significant to note that constituency of social protection includes not only employees and workers in

the formal economy but also those in the informal economy.

Concern for the poor is noteworthy but in many cases difficulties arise in identifying them. The same is true for “vulnerable groups”.

How much protection? Financial resources, the prevailing degree of inequality, the political culture, and the presence or absence of egalitarian normative practices are key determinants of the balance that is struck and it is important to examine these factors. For example, it should be possible to achieve the basic needs line without socially unacceptable costs, such as overwork, exposure to hazards and accidents.

How? Social protection for all is a defensible proposition. This raises issues at two levels. On the one level, the answer depends on who provides, who pays, and who delivers. On another level, the question relates to the availability of methodologies, strategies and tools. We are in the process of looking at the tools we have, assessing and adapting some of

them, and identifying new tools we need to develop. We would appreciate your ideas and suggestions.

The foremost and biggest challenge for ensuring comprehensive and sustainable social protection is to secure the necessary political will, commitment and solidarity. There is no doubt that issues such as social security, conditions of work and employment, occupational safety and health, the situation of migrant workers, and HIV/AIDS and the world of work are widely seen as a priority issues of workers and employers. They are also important elements of government strategies regarding employment, competitiveness and other key issues such as gender equality. And yet, governments and the social partners have found it difficult to secure adequate resource allocations to deal with these issues or to ensure their integration into national planning as reflected in PRSPs and DWCPs. A clearer understanding of these difficulties would enable us to better target our work.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to our discussion.

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