

ILO Asia-Pacific meeting on extending social security opens

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Delhi (ILO News) - The lack of a social security floor, and the social stability it can bring, puts at risk sustainable economic growth and development in Asia-Pacific and may compromise the positive effects of globalization, according to a new assessment by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The paper calls for a challenging of the conventional economic wisdom that sees spending on a social floor as unproductive, resulting in a "one-sided view of social security as a cost to society rather than a potential benefit and an investment in economies and people".

The paper, "Poverty, Economic and Social Development and the Right to Social Security within the Global Decent Work Debate", will introduce a high-level Asia-Pacific meeting on extending social security coverage, particularly to the informal sector, to be held in New Delhi from 19-20 May 2008. The two-day meeting, at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi, will be opened by India's Minister of Labour and Employment, Mr. Oscar Fernandes, on Monday 19 May 2008 at 9.30am.

The paper demonstrates that implementing basic social security systems can make an enormous contribution to pulling people out of poverty and to the achievement of the first Millennium Development Goal (which calls for the number of people living on less than a dollar a day to be halved by 2015). In contrast, economic growth alone does not automatically reduce poverty, unless it is supported by employment promotion and income redistribution mechanisms. But while social security is an established human right it "remains a dream for 80 percent of the global population".

According to ILO calculations less than two per cent of Global Product could provide basic social security benefits to all the world's poor, and six per cent would cover all those who currently lack access to social security. What's more, even most low-income countries can afford some level of social protection, the paper says, citing examples in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Viet Nam where research shows that the cost of a basic benefits package, varying over the next 20 or so years, should not exceed six to eight per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Such a package might include essential health care, benefits directed at child welfare, and old age and disability-related income security.

Making the case for a global social floor, the paper cites "good social reasons to introduce social protection mechanisms at an early stage of economic development and generally no good economic reasons why that should not be done".

The Asia-Pacific Regional High-Level Meeting on Socially-Inclusive Strategies to Extend Social Security Coverage will bring together representatives of Governments, Workers and Employers from 21 Asia Pacific countries. It has been organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the Indian Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India.

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The aims of the conference include helping delegates to share experiences regarding ways of extending social security coverage and dealing with emerging challenges, identifying good practices and fostering consensus on ways to proceed. As well as a high-level round table on the Extension of Social Protection and a panel discussion on Social Security and the Right to Work, there will be thematic discussions on strategies for extending income security and health protection.

Copies of the paper, other background papers, and more information about the meeting can be found at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/events/sis/index.htm>

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