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Parallel thematic discussions

Theme 6: Building a social protection floor in Africa: Follow-up to the Yaoundé Tripartite Declaration

At the Second African Decent Work Symposium, which was organized at Yaoundé from 6 to 8 October 2010, African countries adopted the Tripartite Declaration on the Implementation of the Social Protection Floor, recognizing the urgent need for all ILO African member States and social partners to commence its effective and rapid implementation.

In the Yaoundé Declaration, African countries recognized, *inter alia*, that:

- social security is a fundamental and universal human right that needs to be realized;
- implementation of a social protection floor must be undertaken within a national framework and social dialogue process;
- extreme poverty and avoidable morbidity and mortality in Africa can be largely attributed to the absence of income security and effective health systems;
- without effective national social protection systems that combat poverty and social exclusion, insecurity, inequality, ill health and educational deficits, there can be no social peace;
- policies aimed at fostering growth conducive to employment creation should be guided by the principles set forth in the Global Jobs Pact and the promotion of sustainable enterprises that can reduce the number of people requiring social protection and increase the number of people actively contributing to the financing of such systems;
- sound social protection is a political, economic and social necessity, being a necessary condition for sustainable inclusive growth.

Since the start of this third millennium, the ILO constituents have further reinforced their consensus on the paramount role of social security in countries' harmonious development. In 2001, the conclusions of the 89th Session of the International Labour Conference recommended, *inter alia*, that the highest priority should be given to the design of policies and initiatives to make social security available to those not covered by the systems in force. The ILO was called upon to launch a global campaign to improve and extend social security coverage to all those in need of such protection. That campaign was

launched by the Director-General at Geneva in 2003 on a worldwide scale and at Addis Ababa in 2004 at the African continent level.

During this past decade, the ILO conducted several empirical and case studies to examine social security in greater depth and to explore the feasibility of extending its coverage. The findings led to the concept of the social protection floor as an appropriate response to peoples' social protection needs. Analysis of countries' resource levels resulted in the feasibility of a policy on extending social protection. In some cases involving countries with limited resources, the extension of social security coverage should be progressive. What has proved to be the constant and decisive factor for the successful extension of social security coverage is governments' political will to give priority to social security programmes by providing them with resources to meet the long-term challenges within a national policy implementation planning framework.

Beyond national policy implementation, there has in recent years been a worldwide recognition of the importance of social security, first as a factor of social cohesion and peace and then as an investment in the future, in particular with regard to education and health spending. The global crisis has highlighted the importance of social security as a stabilizer of societies and as a stimulator of national economies.

Global recognition of the importance of social security as a human right

Since the ILO's establishment in 1919, social protection has been a core element of its mandate. In 1944, the Declaration of Philadelphia reinforced this by recognizing the "solemn obligation of the International Labour Organization to further among the nations of the world programmes which will achieve ... the extension of social security measures to provide a basic income to all in need of such protection and comprehensive medical care".

In 2004, the Global Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization concluded, inter alia, that a "minimum level of social protection for individuals and families needs to be accepted and undisputed as part of the socio-economic 'floor' of the global economy".

The Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2009, reaffirmed the tripartite commitment of the Declaration of Philadelphia (1944) to extend social security to all.

The High-Level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination adopted the social protection floor as one of its joint crisis initiatives in April 2009, with the ILO and WHO as lead agencies.

In June 2009, the International Labour Conference endorsed the social protection floor approach in the Global Jobs Pact, which requests countries which do not yet have extensive social security to build adequate social protection for all, "drawing on a basic social protection floor".

The Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Strategies for the Extension of Social Security Coverage, held at Geneva in September 2009, recommended a two-dimensional strategy to extend the coverage of social security: a horizontal dimension, whose objective is the provision of coverage for all, and a vertical dimension, which would seek to increase the levels of social protection.

The United Nations Commission for Social Development adopted a resolution in February 2010, inviting the ILO to “strengthen its social protection strategies, including the assistance to countries in building social protection floors and policies on extending social security coverage”.

The Millennium Summit, held in New York in September 2010, recognized the importance of social protection floor policies for accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

African recognition of the social protection floor as a human right

In the pursuit of the universal recognition of social security as a human right, African countries have confirmed their commitment to that principle.

The third extraordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in September 2004 at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and the Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action aim to empower people, open opportunities and create social protection for workers through building an enabling environment for development and national growth.

The Livingstone and Yaoundé Conferences (March and September 2006) recommended the general introduction of a basic package of social security benefits.

The 11th African Regional Meeting, held at Addis Ababa in April 2007, invited all African countries to adopt coherent national social security strategies.

The first session of the African Union Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development (Windhoek, Namibia, 27–31 October 2008) adopted the Social Policy Framework for Africa, which recommended a number of steps to guide the implementation of a minimum package of social security benefits.

The First African Decent Work Symposium, on “Recovering from the crisis: the implementation of the Global Jobs Pact in Africa”, held at Ouagadougou in December 2009, highlighted the progress in building a social protection floor in several African countries.

On 8 October 2010, the Second African Decent Work Symposium adopted the Yaoundé Tripartite Declaration on the Implementation of the Social Protection Floor.

The ILO itself has, since its establishment in 1919, adopted several international conventions on social security. One of the most important is the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). Other conventions on higher levels of protection have subsequently been adopted. The adoption of the social protection floor by the International Labour Conference at its 100th Session is innovative in that it defines the basic social security guarantees that should be recognized for everyone. At its 100th Session, the ILO decided that it would discuss an international standard, in the form of a recommendation, at its next session in June 2012.

Scope of the social protection floor

The social protection floor is an integrated set of measures designed to guarantee for all, in particular vulnerable groups, income security and access to essential social services.

It guarantees:

- basic income security in the form of social transfers (in cash or kind), such as pensions for the elderly and persons with disabilities, family and child benefits, unemployment benefits and services for the unemployed and working poor;
- availability and affordability of essential social services with respect to health care, drinking water and sanitation, education, food security, housing and other areas identified on the basis of national priorities.

The concept is part of a two-dimensional strategy for extending social security, comprising a set of basic social security guarantees for all (horizontal dimension) and the progressive application of higher standards (vertical dimension). The social protection floor is complying with the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and other international instruments as countries expand their policy and fiscal space.

At its session held in 2011, the International Labour Conference consolidated the link between income security and access to essential goods and services in the form of basic social security guarantees. It agreed on the following definition: the social protection floor comprises “basic social security guarantees that ensure that over the life cycle all in need can afford and have access to essential health care and have income security at least at a nationally defined minimum level”.

Building the social protection floor

From the start of discussions on extending social security (a new consensus, 2001), it was recognized that there is no single right model of social security. Systems are put in place and evolve with the economic and social realities of each country. There are schemes of social assistance, universal schemes, social insurance and public and private provisions. A changing mix of such mechanisms can be seen in virtually all countries of the world.

That being so, the social protection floor is neither a single recipe nor a universal standard. Its implementation is flexible and varies in line with each country’s needs, priorities and resources.

The added value of the social protection floor is the promotion of a holistic approach to social protection which gives priority to basic benefits. Its flexibility allows for a gradual process in response to national aspirations based on each country’s financial and institutional capacities. The social protection floor encourages cohesion and the translation of a policy and strategy vision into concrete programmes.

The social protection floor cannot be regarded as a miracle solution to social problems but several successful experiences across the globe and especially in Africa show that countries can achieve more rapid progress in reducing poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

A selection of examples of good practices in building the social protection floor are annexed.

Questions for discussion

Necessary reforms: African countries have already put social protection mechanisms in place. What reforms can be contemplated to ensure greater coherence? Is there not a need to define a national social protection policy?

National policy coherence: National social protection policies that advocate optimum use of available resources are naturally linked to wealth-creation policies (employment–income-generating activities–entrepreneurship). How to ensure optimum coherence of these different sectors?

Capacity-building: Necessary reforms in the area of social security and the establishment of a social protection floor will require human resources able to implement them effectively. What capacity-building strategies?