

SOCIAL PROTECTION IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

1. A human rights-based approach to social protection

Defining social protection is not an easy task, as definitions vary widely depending on who is using the word. Fundamentally, it can be conceptualized as encompassing a sub-set of interventions on behalf of the poor which seek to address risks, vulnerability and chronic poverty¹. From an institutional perspective, social protection is understood to include three main components²: social insurance, which is contributory and addresses income shocks and stresses, life- or work-related; social assistance, which is tax-financed and addresses poverty; and finally employment programs and governmental policies in that area.

However, social protection could also be understood as a human right. It is rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Labour Organisation Convention N. 102. This implies accountability of governments and other development actors to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities towards their citizens and residents, including the most vulnerable or groups at risk. The right to social protection is inextricably linked to poverty reduction. By increasing equity and providing protection against risks, social protection can support poverty reduction and inclusive growth, as well as social cohesion and stability. Therefore the right to social protection should become a reality for all.

This Human rights-based approach to social protection is also recognized by the EU. In its Agenda for Change (2011), much attention is paid to human development and the importance of inclusive and sustainable development. Social protection, education and health are perceived as sectors that build the foundations for inclusive growth and are in that sense essential to reach such development.

Social sectors, including health, education and social protection, are one of the three cooperation strategies set in the Cotonou Agreement. The agreement calls on the ACP – EU cooperation to promote and support the development and implementation of policies and systems of social protection and security in order to enhance social cohesion and to promote self-help and community solidarity. Cooperation should support ACP States' efforts at developing general and sectoral policies and reforms which improve the coverage, quality of and access to basic social infrastructure and services, guarantee equal access to social protection for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and take into account local needs and specific demands (Part 3, Title 1, Chapter 2, Section 2, article 25). The Cotonou Agreement also refers to the importance of an adequate level of spending in social sectors (Part 3, Title 1, Chapter 2, Section 2, article 25).

On the other hand, the African countries recognize the importance of social protection for development and the related strengthening of social sectors. The 2010 Khartoum Declaration on Social Policy Action towards Social Inclusion shows the African commitment to social protection. The Declaration calls for the acceleration of implementation of relevant social protection measures to directly benefit the wellbeing of the family in Africa, with a particular focus on persons with disabilities, children and the elderly³. As a consequence, innovative schemes and approaches to build broad-based social protection systems have been developed and implemented with success across Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the African countries signed the Abuja Declaration and the Maputo Plan of Action, pledging to allocate at least 15% of their annual budget to health, and establishing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) as a priority for African countries. Finally, by signing the Education for All Programme of Action, the African Union countries have also committed to spending 7% to 9% of their general budget to primary education.

2. Issues currently at stake

Social Protection Floors Initiative

A recent new concept in social protection, based on principles of social justice and grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, is that of the Social Protection Floors. In June 2012, the International Labour Conference adopted the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). Social protection floors comprise a basic set of social guarantees for all (horizontal dimension) and the gradual implementation of higher standards (vertical dimension) as an integrated set of social policies designed to guarantee income security and access to

¹ Holmes, R. and Jones, N. (2009) "Putting the social back into social protection: A framework for understanding the linkages between economic and social risks for poverty reduction". ODI Background Note, ODI London

² Armando Barrientos and David Hulme (2013), Social protection in the post-2015 development agenda, Church of Sweden Policy Brief

³ African Union, (2010) 'Declaration on Social Policy Action towards Social Inclusion'. Draft, 2nd Session of the AU Conference of Ministers for Social Development, 21-25 November, Khartoum, Sudan

essential social services for all, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups. Although the Social Protection Floors are a global initiative, based on a certain set of principles, it is not a one-size fits all approach. The design and implementation of Social Protection Floors are matters for each country in line with national-specific institutional structures, economic constraints, political dynamics and social aspirations.

EC Communication on Social Protection in European Development Cooperation

In August 2012, the European Commission published a Communication on Social Protection in EU Development Cooperation, highlighting that social protection is an important tool in underpinning inclusive and sustainable development, and plays a key role in reducing poverty and vulnerability. The Communication states that social protection supports poverty reduction, as it protects households from risks, and increases equity. The Communication also addressed responsibility of the States, country-ownership of development strategies and the importance of both civil society and of the private sector in the context of social protection schemes, without forgetting the importance to focus on people, not countries, as the majority of the world's poor are currently living in Middle-Income Countries. In addition, the European Commission clearly recognizes the importance of nationally-owned social protection policies and Programmes, such as Social Protection Floors. Moreover, the Communication calls on the EU to support social protection strategies and values good practice exchange. It remains to be seen how the EC will implement this Communication, and to what extent the human right to social protection will be included in the upcoming external actions instruments for development, cooperation and assistance for 2014-2020.

Social Protection in the Beyond 2015 Development Framework

It is undeniable that social protection contributed to advancing several of the Millennium Development Goals. Especially with regard to Goal 1, eradicating poverty, social protection plays an important role. Social protection is also closely linked to the health related MDGs such as child and maternal health and combating HIV & AIDS. Unfortunately, in the current framework, these issues are addressed from a silo approach, thus failing to address the broader linkages and interactions between the different topics. Moreover, it is widely recognised that the MDGs overlooked many important issues, such as equality, peace and security, governance and anti-corruption, decent work and social protection. This should change in the future framework. The importance of social protection in the future development framework is also recognized by the European Commission in its Communication 'A decent life for all'. Social protection and poverty are directly linked and sustainable development can therefore not be reached without taking into account social protection measures. The Commission clearly states that the future framework should cover basic human development, reflecting issues such as social protection. In addition, the new framework should be coherent with existing internationally agreed goals and targets, for example the social protection floors. However, if we look forward, we need to keep in mind that social protection is not an outcome, but an instrument to achieving poverty eradication, by reducing vulnerability, and facilitating households' productive capacity, and by ensuring inclusive development. The international community thus has to increase its support to social protection in order to eradicate poverty and create sustainable and inclusive development.

3. CONCORD calls on the Members of the ACP EU JPA to:

- Encourage the ACP governments and the EU to fulfill their commitments by prioritising social sectors in the political dialogue with all actors including civil society (art. 2, 25 and 31bis of the Cotonou Agreement)
- Ensure that the 20% benchmark for health and basic education is applied throughout geographic and intra-ACP funds
- Call for clear and responsive indicators in focal sectors, as well as disaggregated statistical data
- Ask that the European Commission acts upon its Communication on Social Protection in EU Development Cooperation (COM (2012) 446)
- Ensure that EU delegations have adequate expertise in social protection or through drawing on the resources of other partners, including local NGOs
- Guarantee an appropriate mix between modalities at regional and country level to ensure proper provision of essential services, taking into account not only economic issues but also social ones, ensuring that social protection contributes to poverty reduction and inclusive growth
- Encourage the inclusion of Middle Income Countries in development cooperation efforts, especially in the domain of social protection
- Pay particular attention to the inclusion of social protection in the post-2015 agenda, as Social Protection is instrumental to reducing the effects of poverty and vulnerability, facilitating the improvement of productive capacity and income, but also preventing a descent into poverty
- Demand the European Commission an annual evaluation and reporting on social protection related activities and on the 20% benchmark
- Support the implementation of ILO Social Protection Floors in relevant ACP countries