



ESCWA

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**FRIEDRICH
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Concept Note for

Closed Workshop on:

Social Protection *as* Development

Bristol Hotel- September 28-30, 2010

Social Protection as Development

In the wake of successive crises, (food security, fuel, financial and economic) and the threat of a rapidly increasing number of vulnerable and poor populations, academics and policy makers have begun refocusing their attention on social protection and social assistance schemes. Traditionally considered a means to provide security to marginalized or vulnerable population groups, especially in countries that relied on “trickle down” economic theories, many of those schemes were criticized for creating dependency among recipients.

Today, these schemes are being rethought as part of a larger set of interventions, short, medium and long term, that aim to cushion individuals in times of crisis and provide venues for a longer term move out of chronic poverty. Such an approach directly links these different schemes to a discourse on citizenship rights and questions of equity. Many of these interventions are meant to **protect** vulnerable individuals and families, **prevent** their fall into poverty and socio-economic marginalization and/or **promote** their economic independence by enhancing income and access to economic opportunities. They include **1)** social insurance schemes that cushion risks associated with unemployment, poor health, disability, work injury and old age; **2)** social services for vulnerable population groups such as female headed households, the elderly, the disabled etc. **3)** conditional or unconditional cash transfers and **4)** temporary subsidies (housing, energy etc.). Other schemes to assist specific communities or the informal sector, such as agricultural subsidies, social funds etc. are also being implemented in some countries. **Transformative** measures that strive to address the root causes of social and economic inequity and vulnerability, through emphasis on minority rights, social funds, tax instruments of redistribution, improved access to land & other assets, etc.) are also beginning to be considered.

This thinking has in part materialized in recent discussions on social protection and assistance mechanisms by international agencies, as they have tried to move beyond a safety nets approach and toward an integrated minimum social protection floor. While safety nets tend to focus on poverty reduction or on addressing the social consequences of economic choices through a targeted set of non-contributory transfers, depending on government priorities, the social protection floor initiative promotes universal access to essential social transfers and services. This initiative was adopted by UN agencies, spearheaded by the ILO as one of nine key priorities that were geared to cope with the impact of the global financial crisis.

What is of concern in this context is that in the effort to deal with the aftermath of the crisis, a focus on a minimum social protection floor or on safety nets, could de-emphasize the larger policy nexus in which these need to occur. This may also delink such processes from broader citizenship rights that are rooted in the constitutional process of each country while turning attention away from larger questions of development. As such, both mechanisms need to be considered one element in a broader social policy framework that aims at redistribution, risk management, poverty reduction and investment opportunities. For these initiatives, like many others, require determined political support willing to

consider a substantial investment in institutional structures/ administrative and implementation capacities as well as sustainable financing and adequate human resources.

These questions have also taken center stage in various countries of the ESCWA region, where the social policy landscape has been marked by a fragmented and project oriented approach to development. As in other contexts, this approach has tended to avoid broader issues such as the root causes of poverty as they organize their work around the design and funding of projects that meet local needs. This “projectizing” approach was based on the belief that the provision of improved services for the poor requires decentralization and community participation and that non-governmental organizations are the best vehicles for the provision of such services and the implementation of the development agenda. However, while this approach plays an important role in alleviating the conditions of poor and vulnerable families and individuals it also detracts and distracts attention from the necessary policy reform at higher levels that needs to be lead by government institutions. The role of social policy remains restricted to remedial measures that aim to correct or address basic needs or provide safety nets for vulnerable sections of the population while the role of the state in policy formulation and direction and the coordination of multiple initiatives was often underestimated. Social issues were often not considered a part of the broader question of distributive justice and sustainable economic, political and cultural development, nor were the political and institutional arrangements required in order to generate resources for social development and ensure the protection of the most vulnerable taken into account.

At the same time, most social protection programs in ESCWA countries are provided under the label of assistance or insurance (latter in the Gulf region) and are based on a concept of solidarity. However, in the wake of political, economic and social crisis and dwindling resources, policy makers in the different ESCWA countries have been increasingly looking to move from this charity or philanthropic based approach to the welfare state to a more development oriented model of socio-economic growth. Such an approach considers the investment in human capital critical to the equitable distribution of resources and the promotion of long term productivity. These include reform of public pension schemes as well as a reconsideration of currently available social security or social assistance programs as well as labor policies and employment generation programs. A vital issue to consider in this process is the financing instruments, both national and international available for implementing such schemes. Here available public budgetary support, fees and income related contributions, and charitable donations can be instrumental in the long term sustainability of such schemes. They are also central for mainstreaming the needs of citizens into social policy. In this context, the role of the state, of individuals, of civil society, the private sector and international agencies can also be brought into play.

Objectives of the Workshop

The aim of this brainstorming session that will take place **September 28-30, 2010 at ESCWA** is to bring together experts and practitioners to discuss the challenges, successes and failures of different models of social protection implemented in the ESCWA, Latin America and Asia-Pacific regions. The purpose is

to explore lessons learnt and to consider the ways in which such schemes can be transformed from instruments for the provision of residual welfare into tools for mainstreaming the needs of citizens into social policy. The goal will be to identify innovative approaches that can increase the impact of social protection programs and projects and can consider different ways of combining assistance with insurance. While these discussions will focus on options for social protection, these will be grounded in a larger socio-economic policy nexus with a long term development agenda.

In preparation for this workshop ESCWA is mapping out currently available social protection and insurance programs across the fourteen ESCWA countries. These include social assistance programs, social security and insurance programs as well as community development programs where possible. The aim is to establish the first comparative matrix of the different kinds of programs that are underway in the different countries.

Two social protection “clinics” will also be held for Oman and for Lebanon whereby both Ministries of Social Development are in the process of finalizing their National Social Development Strategies that include the reform of their current social protection programs.

Themes & Presentations

The proposed country case studies include Tunisia, Jordan, Oman, Egypt, Lebanon, Chile, Brazil, Mexico and Malaysia. The maximum number of participants is 20-25 individuals.

The presentations and discussions in each of the sessions will be grounded in a particular case study that addresses

- **The planning challenges** such as the needs and stakeholder assessments, goal setting, joint activities and projects, participatory approaches, etc. that were faced and how they were overcome
- **The implementation challenges** that includes financing challenges, efficiency and targeting, mechanisms and tools, equitable service delivery service, quality service delivery, etc.
- **Monitoring and evaluation challenges**
- **Synergy with other social policy and social protection instruments**

Each of the **different sessions** will engage with a mix of the issues outlined below.

Components of a social protection strategy: Towards a development oriented model

What should the main components of a social protection framework be and how is it grounded in a broader socio-economic policy nexus? What are its main elements? How does it relate to existing pension schemes and health insurance? Should the protection of communal properties or communal resources be integrated into social protection and social development schemes? Is this feasible in the context of the modern world where we have moved to a more individualistic concept

of society especially in the ways in which social protection programs are constructed? Or is the concept of the “commons” more aligned with notions of solidarity that permeate social assistance programs in the region?

What schemes for what purpose? Mainstreaming Equity

What are the successes and shortcomings of current approaches and programs (CTs, CCTs, subsidies, social assistance, fee waivers, in kind transfers etc)? How can social protection schemes help mainstream issues of equity? What should their focus be? The poor or the vulnerable? What are the different approaches to targeting? What modes of service delivery: decentralization to what level and through what model? What role for civil society, donor agencies and the private sector (current and future)

Building capabilities and access to opportunity

How do we create conditions for adequate income security and allow households and communities reproduce their productive and work capacity? What kind of Complementarities and linkages with other programs can be created? What sort of entry and exit strategies can be envisioned? Policies that facilitate work or that insure short terms jobs? Linkages to labor market policies and training options? Access to credit and microfinance?

Monitoring, Evaluation and Project Cycles

What kind of monitoring and evaluation framework should be in place? Examples from the field? Examples of successful integration into project cycle and shortcomings. How can one insure a flexible policy cycle that can integrate lessons learnt?

Financing Options

What financing options are available? What approaches exist to opening up a fiscal space in the different countries? What are the successes and failures of such a process?

Outcomes

Several outcomes are expected of this activity:

- **Support to Oman and Lebanon in rethinking their social protection programs and the link of social assistance to social security.**
- Increased South-South Technical Cooperation
- Establishment of a South-South community of practice on social protection and social development
- Resource Material on the Region: Participants will be asked to provide papers that will be then published in an edited collection with concrete recommendations of relevance to the region.