
The Social Protection Floor

exploitation of women and girls increases which associated increases in the risk of HIV infections. There is a risk that the gains of ensuring access to treatment of millions of people suffering from AIDS could be reversed as could access to other essential health and educational services. The aggregate effect could well be a slowing or reversal in progress towards many of the MDGs.

Generally the impact of recessions has not been gender neutral, with a disproportionate burden placed on women in both developed and developing countries. They are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs, to be under-employed or without a job, to lack social protection, to have limited access to health services and control over economic and financial resources, and to have increased responsibilities in all spheres of their life.

In economic crises, the provision of social protection, i.e. social assistance including food

an overall national poverty reduction strategy. The Asian crisis in the 1990s has shown that the build-up of a system of basic social security also enhances the national crisis preparedness for the future. In addressing both the short-term crisis and building a basic social security system, the strategies adopted should ensure the equal right to adequate protection from social risks and contingencies.

In countries that currently lack strong social security and income support programmes, a social protection floor consisting of a basic package of social transfers, combined with actions to guarantee that the poor and vulnerable have access to adequate and affordable sources of nutrition and needed social and health services, is critical to mitigating the poverty and welfare fall-out of the crisis, while at the same time providing a significant stimulus to the economy. Widespread support is gathering for the policy position that countries can grow with equity, i.e. providing some form of social protection from the early stages of their economic development. Indeed, there is now evidence that economic growth that does not include a concept for equity and equa anme

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- *Essential services:* geographical and financial access to essential services (such as water and sanitation, adequate nutrition, health and education).
 - *Social Transfers:*

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- encourage and facilitate market and social inclusion (be demand-driven and user-oriented);
 - be based on a clear definition of rights, that govern the relationship between the citizens and the state, and
 - ensure continued and predictable funding.

This document seeks to provide the elements for a coherent UN approach to a social protection floor taking lessons from the “Delivering as One” approach. That being said, important elements have already been endorsed by the governing bodies of several UN agencies and/or are enshrined in their constitutions. For example the WHO, often in collaboration with other UN agencies such as the ILO and the World Bank, supports countries to develop health financing systems capable of ensuring universal coverage, defined as ensuring that all people can access needed health services while avoiding catastrophic expenditure and impoverishment as a result of seeking care. It is also working with countries to renew and strengthen Primary Health Care, in which universal coverage is one of the key components along with: service delivery reforms to reorganize health services with people at the centre; public policy reforms that integrate health public policies across sectors; and leadership reforms to strengthen the important role government has in ensuring the health system moves in the desired directions.⁹

The World Food Programme is mandated to support economic and social development, concentrating its efforts and resources on the neediest people and countries. UNAIDS is working with partners to ensure universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support as well as social protection mechanisms for patients and their families. UN-HABITAT in collaboration with UNITAR4 Tf 0.999402 08()-206.12.6 2(e)-1.91977()

International experience

Presently 80 per cent of the global population has less than adequate social protection coverage. In some settings, the situation is much w

additional teachers are needed to achieve universal primary education by 2015, while the WHO estimates that 57 countries have a critical shortage of health workers, the total shortage being 4.25 million health workers.¹⁷ There is still a substantial resource gap if the goals of the EFA-FTI, or universal coverage of health services, are to be achieved.¹⁸

Affordability

A number of the UN agencies have estimated the costs of establishing components of a potential social protection floor. For example, the ILO estimates that a set of minimum transfers is not costly in per capita terms, although it is likely to require support from

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- a. Tax reforms to increase financial resources, raised and spent progressively.

spectrum of human development and all social sectors, and in particular the well-being most vulnerable groups, including women and children. There is also a need to recall that powerful evidence exists on the benefits of education, income security and access to health services.

The next step is for the participating agencies to assess what activities are currently under way, where they overlap, and where synergies would lead to substantial increased benefits globally.

In a third step the coalition could:

- (1) develop a compendium of (already existing) technical tools of all UN agencies that can be used at a country level to establish the feasibility of national social protection floor concepts that are gender responsive;
- (2) support a national dialogue-based country-by-country assessment of what a national development objective to move towards the implementation of a social protection

6. Summary and conclusion

There is growing international consensus on the importance of essential social transfers and essential social services as core elements of a social protection floor for national development processes. There is also consensus that the current economic crisis should not delay their introduction. Rather, the crisis reinforces the necessity to protect the poor and vulnerable from the crisis through the implementation of a social protection floor. However, this should provide a systemic basis for a systemic build-up of more comprehensive social protection systems as countries