



REGIONAL EXPERTS GROUP MEETINGS ON SOCIAL PROTECTION

Investing in Social Protection in Africa

Central and Western Africa Region

The African Union Commission, in collaboration with Help Age International, convened the third of its series of three Regional Expert Meetings on Social Protection on the theme: “Investing in Social Protection in Africa”. The West and Central Africa Region meeting was hosted by the Republic of Senegal at the Meridian President Hotel in Dakar, Senegal from the 9-12th June 2008. T

The meeting was held within the framework of the 2002 AU Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing; follow-up to the 2006 Livingstone and Yaoundé Calls for Action on Social Protection; and the Social Policy Framework which is being finalized by the AU Commission. Preparation for the meeting included national consultations on social protection which took place in Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Tunisia.

The meeting had 134 participants. Governments attending were: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Republic of Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, Niger, Senegal, Chad, Togo, Namibia, Zambia and Brazil. Case studies, panelists and input to discussions were provided by the Governments of Zambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Brazil, civil society, development partners, the European Commission, the United Nations, including ILO, DESA, UNDP and UNICEF, experts and resource persons from specialist regional and international institutions and the World Bank and African Development Bank

Participants placed emphasis on the right to social protection, the importance of universality, its beneficial impact on human dignity and redistribution, and its impact on lowering inequality. They wished to reinforce their vision of social protection as a means to reinforce human dignity and to further redistribution. Nevertheless, with some exceptions, it was acknowledged that social protection programmes are not well developed in the region, and that coverage of existing programmes was weak. Poverty levels were unacceptably high and therefore reform of existing programmes, as well as implementing of new ones, will be necessary to more effectively reach the poor. Improvements can be made to existing programmes and new ones built up on the foundations of past and current community practice. Where programmes and pilots exist it is clear that specific links can be seen between the extension of social protection, including cash in the hands of very poor people, greater social cohesion and the reduction of chronic food insecurity and its related risks. Furthering universal social protection coverage was seen as an integral part of the MDG agenda. The regions' wide experience of health insurance was noted, and that it was necessary to complement existing investment in health insurance with cash transfer schemes to make them more effective. Attention was given to the importance of improving national data sets on poverty and excluded and vulnerable groups, and specific priority was given to gender questions. As a number of countries in the region are rebuilding national economies after conflict and humanitarian crisis it was recognized too that social protection had an important part to play in supporting and encouraging community regeneration.

Recommendations

Building political consensus

- Governments to ensure social protection is included in national Poverty Reduction Strategy processes and national development plans
- Civil Society organisations to call for SP to be included in national policies
- The right to social protection (SP) to be embedded in national legislation and the constitution
- The African Union (AU) Commission and its Member States to cooperate in taking forward the SP agenda
- Stakeholders to collaborate to ensure linkages are made between SP and economic growth.
- Governments should ensure that social protection policies are developed in a multi stakeholder and cross ministerial manner especially in countries where social protection policies do not yet exist
- AU to lead on promoting social protection within the social policy framework at regional and Continental level

Targeting and Design

- SP programmes to be based on reliable national field-based data
- National governments to strengthen national statistical capacity and invest in applied research institutions.
- AU Commission and Member States to support South-South learning and promote the collection and use of disaggregated data for social protection via, e.g. the open source single registry system;
- The design of SP to be country driven evidenced based including via community involvement and design, and developmental

Finance

- Governments to produce costed plans for the minimum package of SP, with special reference to social transfers for children, older people and disabled people and the access of these groups to health;
- Governments to allocate a specific budget line for SP and communicate it
- Governments to assure adequate and sustainable resourcing for SP through a mix of public and private means with development partners assistance as appropriate.
- Government should fix a percentage of funding for social protection of not less than 10% of the national budget to extend social security to vulnerable groups

Capacity building, Communication and Coordination

- Governments and AU Commission to promote the development of support technical expertise within Africa by promoting an Africa-wide cohort of Experts
- Governments to engage in inter and intra regional exchange and experience sharing taking into account field based learning for the development of national programmes
- Governments to strengthen national coordination of SP by integrating existing interventions under one national body
- Civil society, in collaboration with government, media and other partners to campaign on the right to social protection; and highlight its developmental and redistributive impact, making effective use of media and partnerships in the public and private sector