



## REGIONAL EXPERTS GROUP MEETINGS ON SOCIAL PROTECTION

### *Investing in Social Protection in Africa*

#### **NORTH AFRICA REGION**

The African Union Commission, in collaboration with Help Age International, convened the second of its series of three Regional Expert Meetings on social protection on the theme: “Investing in Social Protection in Africa”. The North Africa Region meeting was hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt at the Conrad Hotel in Cairo, Egypt from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

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 80 participants. Governments attending were: Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, the Saharawi Republic, Tunisia and Libya. Case studies, panelists and input to discussions were provided by the Governments of Zambia, Egypt, Tunisia and Brazil, civil society, development partners, the United Nations, and experts and resource persons from specialist regional and international institutions.

Regional challenges discussed included the persistence of high levels of poverty, a growing informal workforce and increasing unemployment, especially amongst youth, and related concerns about societal coherence and stability. Participants affirmed the importance of extending social protection in North Africa to those in the informal sector, including migrant, domestic and household workers. Participants highlighted the significance of political will in supporting and extending social protection systems and the necessity of including it as a core pillar for global and sustainable development. They called for more investment in social protection to deliver economic growth which can be tracked through enhanced consumer capacity, improvements in health, education and employment potential and greater social solidarity with the poor. Social protection is good ‘pro poor’ development as it contributes to reducing poverty and inequalities.

It was acknowledged that current programmes of social protection do not cover all marginalized groups, and that financial resources for them should be increased. Programmes should be designed to clearly support all those considered vulnerable: including those who work in the informal sector, senior citizens, those with special needs, the poor, the unemployed, special youth, women, migrant workers and workers dismissed for economic reasons. Constraints for securing finance include the need for better data for improved targeting. Participants called for improved and more databases, including on income, unemployment, and capacities. Participants also called for more investment in studies and surveys and their evaluation - which can contribute to the formulation of accurately designed strategies and programmes. Affirming social solidarity values is a positive way to deliver the benefits of globalization and avoid social fragmentation. Social protection systems should not be considered as charity but as universal entitlements.

Participants agreed that it was possible for action on social protection to be built on existing commitments made at previous African meetings. The process being led by the African Union should enable heads of state to make social policy and protection a priority. It was important for there to be costed plans and commitments to enable budgetary allocations to be made.

## **Recommendations**

### **On building political consensus**

- Social protection to be included in all national development programmes
- The right to social protection to be articulated in national constitutions policies and legislations
- Heads of State and governments must make social protection a policy priority and implement commitments made in various policy documents related to social development

### **On design and targeting**

- Governments to develop comprehensive, integrated, and inclusive national strategies and programmes for social protection, emphasizing the active involvement of all civil society components.
- Governments must establish or expand databases to ensure accurate targeting of groups eligible for social protection.
- Social protection programmes must reach out to and include groups not yet incorporated in them, with special attention to be paid to workers in the informal economy and other marginalised groups

### **On Finance**

- Governments must develop costed national plans based on a minimum package of social protection programmes
- Governments should ensure the state budget provides the necessary finance for social protection plans, at a percentage of GDP which takes into account the situation of each country
- Governments should put in place structures and mechanisms to enhance coordination, review and consolidation of social protection programmes and budgets
- Governments and the African Union Commission should mobilise resources for technical cooperation programmes related to social protection programmes from development partners.

### **Strengthening capacity coordination and communication**

- Stakeholders to strengthen mechanisms of coordination and consultation among actors concerned with social protection programs, with special attention to evaluation and follow-up.
- African Union Commission to establish a programme of inter-country learning to build capacity of Ministries
- Countries to set up mechanisms to learn lessons from within and between regions regarding the impact of social protection on economic development
- Stakeholders to promote SP by highlighting good practice through campaigning and awareness raising including through the media