

## **First African Union Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development**

### **‘Theme: ‘Towards a Sustainable Social Development Agenda for Africa’**

The Social Affairs Commission of the African Union is convening African Union Ministers in Charge of Social Development from Africa’s 53 member states in Windhoek between 27-31<sup>st</sup> October 2008, under the theme ‘Towards a Sustainable Development Agenda for Africa’.

Senior government experts will convene on 27 and 28 October to review core issues for debate by the Ministers, who will meet on the 30<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> October. The venue is the Country Club Resort Windhoek.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia, through the Ministry of Health and Social Services, is hosting this historic Conference.

The agenda includes

- Review of progress on implementing social development commitments in Africa
- Consideration of a revised Social Policy Framework for adoption by Member States of the African Union
- Review and endorsement of the outcomes on regional consultations under the theme ‘Investing in social protection in Africa’ held in 2008
- Exploration of the development of an African social security system.

Reports will be considered on the

- African Decade of Disabled Persons
- Management of Social Transformation (MOST) programme
- African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development
- Follow up to the Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing
- Plan of Action for the Family

New documents to be debated are

- ‘Study on social protection Systems in Africa’
- ‘Report on the Regional Expert groups meetings on Social Protection’
- ‘Social Policy Framework’ for Africa<sup>1</sup>

The outcomes expected include a Declaration on ‘Sustainable social development agenda for Africa’ with results of the ‘investment in social protection’ consultations embedded into it, for presentation to Heads of State and other fora, and an agreed Social Policy Framework for Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Preparation for the experts meeting will include a small, invitation only ‘consultative’ meeting, convened by the African Union, on the 23/24 October, to be held in Windhoek. The main area of discussions will be inputs and revisions to the Social Policy Framework for Africa.

## **'Investing in social protection in Africa'**

This process, known as 'Livingstone 2', follows on from the Conferences of Livingstone, Zambia and Yaoundé, Cameroon in 2006, when a number of African governments made commitments to further basic social protection in support of their most disadvantaged citizens. Special emphasis was placed on implementing cash transfer schemes, including social pensions and child grants. The outcomes of the meetings are known as the 'Livingstone Call for Action on Social Protection' and the 'Yaounde Call for Action'.

In 2008 the African Union Social Affairs Commission has worked in collaboration with host governments and help Age International to convene a series of six national and three interregional dialogues bringing together 500 participants of 38 of the 53 African Union Member States.

The national dialogues were organised by Help Age International in collaboration with the governments of Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Mozambique, Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Tunisia. The three cross regional dialogues were convened by the African Union, in collaboration with HelpAge International and host governments of Uganda, Egypt and Senegal, for the regions of Eastern and Southern Africa, North Africa and West and Central Africa.

### **Notes on process**

In preparation for the regional meetings six national consultations were held in March in **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Tunisia**. A summary report of this process is available. Findings and recommendations highlighted the importance of political will, having a 'shared vision' for social production, the need for inter-ministerial coordination, the necessity for concrete measures for financing and securing social space in existing budgets, support for capacity building and evidence and monitoring, and the critical role to be played by civil society in extending social protection to the poorest people.

The Regional Expert Meetings took place between April and June 2008. Through country presentations, plenary debate, group work and specialist input, the progress, challenges and opportunities for extending social protection across Africa was debated, alongside issues of cost and financing, design and impact, monitoring and targeting of potential and existing social protection programmes in Africa and beyond. International agencies and other stakeholders including civil society groups shared their expertise.

The meetings were addressed at the highest level by the host governments and the African Union and supported by the findings of the national consultations. Overall the meetings brought together over 400 participants, including senior government officials from Ministries of Social Development, Planning and Finance, of 38 of the 53 AU member states attending.

### **Detail of regional meetings**

At each regional meeting participating governments gave expert input through a country presentation and case studies. This was followed by presentation of specialist evidence provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on costs and financing, by the Economic and Policy Research Institute (EPRI) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on impact on economic growth and on vulnerabilities, by the Government of Brazil and its Institute of Policy and Economic Studies, by United Nations agencies, by development partners and by civil society.

Case studies and input to discussions were provided by the Governments of Brazil and of Zambia, civil society, development partners, NEPAD, the United Nations, and experts and resource persons from specialist regional and international institutions, and multilateral institutions. Presentations were given by the OECD development partners, the European Union, the World Bank and the African Development Bank and the United Nations (UNDESA, UNICEF and ILO).

### **Regional variations**

Experience and evidence presented in the course of the regional expert meetings highlighted differentiated approaches and foci between the sub regions. For example, in the **Eastern and Southern Africa** regional expert meeting, held in Uganda and attended by Comoros, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, a number of established national programmes and experimental pilots exist which target very vulnerable citizens, including children and orphans, older persons, people with disabilities, women, victims of humanitarian crises and people affected by HIV/AIDS, among others. There is a growing evidence base from the region therefore to demonstrate costs and affordability, and benefits in building human capital, reducing chronic poverty and reducing inequalities. Emphasis in the meeting was therefore placed on the 'how' of implementation, including costing and securing the necessary fiscal space in national budgets, the sharing of experience (south south sharing). Sessions showed how enhanced partnerships with development partners can support implementation strategies in Africa, including through South-South cooperation, and by integrating civil society in all stages of programme design, impact assessment, implementation, monitoring and advocacy.

In the **North Africa** meeting, attended by the governments of Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, the Saharawi Republic, Tunisia, Libya, and Zambia, there was a specific focus on the actual and potential impact of social protection on regional challenges, including the persistence of high levels of poverty, a growing informal workforce and increasing unemployment, especially amongst youth, and related concerns about price escalation and societal coherence and stability. Emphasis was put on the importance of affirming the link between social protection and social solidarity values. Social protection is accepted as an entitlement; emphasis in the region is on extending and reforming existing national programmes, alongside increased budgetary provision for them with necessary fiscal reforms, as there is a pressing need to reach the growing numbers of marginalised groups, including those in the informal sector, including migrant, domestic and household workers. More investment in studies and surveys and their evaluation to support better designed strategies and programmes were called for.

The regional expert meeting of **Central and West Africa** held in Senegal was attended by the governments of Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Republic of Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, Niger, Senegal, Chad, Togo, Namibia and Zambia. Emphasis was placed on the right to social protection, the importance of universality, its beneficial impact on human

dignity and redistribution, and its impact on lowering inequality. With some exceptions governments recognised that social protection programmes were not well developed and that coverage of existing programmes was weak, but recognised that national programmes can be improved on and built up on the foundations of past and current community practice. There was also a focus on how social protection reduces the risk of food insecurity, the need to complement existing social protection investment in health insurance with cash transfer schemes and the importance of improving national data sets on poverty and excluded and vulnerable groups.

### **Footnote**

*The definition of social protection adopted for these meetings was ‘Social protection encompasses a range of public actions carried out by the state and others that address risk, vulnerability, discrimination and chronic poverty. The right to social security in childhood, old age and at times of disability is expressed in a range of international Human Rights Declarations and treaties. Social security transfers in the form of, for example, pensions, child benefit and disability allowances are considered to be core elements of a comprehensive social protection system. (By implementing basic social protection, states and supporting international agencies fulfil international human obligations, as expressed in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.)*

