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Promoting social protection for all

The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) has a particular focus on promoting universal social protection, seeing it as a human right and an investment in people. Many activities of the ICSW carried out at the country level and internationally are closely linked to advocacy efforts, promoting social protection programmes and schemes, knowledge sharing regarding best practices in this area, and enhancing cooperation with other stakeholders.

The beginning of the year 2018 has been fruitful in terms of collaboration with our partners in all of the above directions. Following is an update of some recent ICSW activities.

The Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors meet in Nairobi

The core team of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors met in Nairobi, Kenya, from 15 to 17 January 2018 to discuss pressing issues on its agenda and to chart a way for future activities. Formed in June 2012 by non-governmental and other organizations of civil society such as trade unions, now the Global Coalition brings together more than 100 members interested in achieving the universal provision of economic and social security through basic guarantees on income and essential social services throughout the life course. Promoting Recommendation 202 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is one of its main objectives. The Coalition operates within a worldwide network structure, but has not established a formal headquarters. The core team, which performs coordinating functions, brings together representatives of the Coalition members who are capable and willing to plan and strategize for upcoming policy and research activities of the Coalition, review all draft documentation produced by the Coalition, and perform other duties. The ICSW has been a participant of the core team since its establishment.

Embracing the principles of inclusivity, solidarity, non-discrimination, gender equality, openness and transparency, the Coalition is fostering a supportive team environment so as to achieve the shared objectives. The vision of the Coalition has been identified as ‘promoting the implementation of social protection floors and the extension of social protection to all’; and its mission is working strategically and in a spirit of global solidarity to provide a space and virtual platform for Coalition members united by the common purpose of promoting the extension of social protection floors and systems.

The meeting in Nairobi was organized in close cooperation with the African Platform for Social Protection – an important regional umbrella organization of civil society devoted to promoting social protection in African countries. The meeting was addressed by Ms Susan Mochache, Principal Secretary, State Department of Social Protection of Kenya, who informed the participants about the recent initiatives of the Kenyan Government in the area of social protection, outlining both opportunities and challenges. The field trip organized by the hosts enabled the participants of the meeting to visit local sites and listen to people who are benefiting from various social protection schemes in Kenya.

Among the key issues discussed by the Coalition core team in Nairobi were how to provide support to Coalition members in terms of information sharing and the coordination of regional activities; the preparation of 'shadow' reports in the context of the monitoring and evaluation of international commitments; as well as advocacy for and promotion of resolutions dedicated to social protection systems, including floors, within the remit of United Nations organs, such as the Commission for Social Development, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly. The issue of social protection financing and new approaches in that area were also discussed at length.

The core team also reviewed and adopted the revised draft of the terms of reference for the Global Coalition, which delineate the background, guiding principles, main goals and specifics on the internal functioning of the Coalition. The recent update of the Social Protection Floor Index – one of the earlier documents prepared under the auspices of the Global Coalition – was highly commended. The core team also decided to update the existing Civil Society Guide and spare no efforts in promoting its use within the Coalition and beyond.

Strengthening the institutional structures for sustainable development: The role of social protection

A side event on the occasion of the 56th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) was organized by the ICSW on 2 February 2018 at the United Nations Headquarters in collaboration with the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the ILO, and the European Union Social Protection Systems Initiative (EU-SPS). Conceived as an international seminar to address major policy issues of concern to the ICSW and its partners, with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the interrelationships among the various factors of Agenda 2030, the side event brought together scholars and practitioners interested in exploring the nexus between social protection and sustainable development. The target audience was national representatives from UN member states, as well as other stakeholders attending the Commission, including ICSW partners from the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors.

Providing guideposts for a discussion, a concept note prepared by the ICSW indicated that a transformative development framework requires substantial changes at the normative and institutional levels, underpinning the common aspiration for a sustainable future. Social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, have been widely recognized not only as a vital tool in the fight against poverty and inequality, but also as an important mechanism for creating synergies among the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. As a holistic framework, social protection grounded in universalism facilitates the quest for the most effective enablers of sustainable development, reducing vulnerability, strengthening resilience and promoting empowerment.

In this light the presenters focused on some conceptual issues, as well as practical solutions, pertinent to the work of the 56th session of the Commission for Social Development. Some of the specific issues chosen for discussion and put before the speakers were as follows: Should social protection be considered a new international social norm? What approaches are best in making social and environmental policies mutually supportive? What role can social protection play in changing mindsets, principles and rules so as to put sustainable development at the core? Lessons learned and obstacles encountered in building sustainable capacities for social protection at the national and regional levels was also one of the key threads.

Opening the discussion, Valerie Schmitt, Deputy Director, ILO Social Protection Department, touched in her presentation upon all three dimensions of sustainability – social, economic and environmental. In social terms, building social protection systems, including floors, proved to be a

crucial ingredient for poverty reduction and social inclusion. In economic terms, social protection raises productivity by facilitating access to health care and education; it helps to maintain disposable income and demand at a certain level in times of crisis, and it reduces inequalities and enhances political stability. In environmental terms, building such systems facilitates ‘just transition’, making green policies more socially acceptable. Several factors increase the sustainability of social protection systems and floors, namely a participatory design process, rights-based legal frameworks, innovative and sustainable financing, as well as transparent and efficient delivery mechanisms. Referring to data contained in the just released ILO flagship publication ‘World Social Protection Report’, the speaker underscored that only 29 percent of the world population has access to comprehensive social protection, and 45 percent are covered by at least one benefit; however, 55 percent (4 billion people) have no social protection. A change in mindsets is required in order to fulfil the promise of the 2030 Agenda, namely to leave no one behind. The success of the global campaign to promote universal social protection depends on the joint efforts of multiple stakeholders – workers and employers, policy makers, corporations, philanthropists, and the public at large.

Representing the EU-SPS, launched 3 years ago, Dr Timo Voipio (Finland) described some results of a 4-year programme supporting national, regional and international expert institutions in 11 mainly low-income countries in their efforts to develop inclusive and sustainable social protection (SP) systems.

The initiative aims at supporting the systematization of national SP efforts, enabling key governmental stakeholders to mobilize, develop and make use of national and regional expert institutions, thus increasing national expert resources and strengthening the partner countries’ domestic analytical and management capacities in social protection. The partner countries are Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Togo, Vietnam and Zambia. Country ownership and participation are the core principles for the EU-SPS’s work. While it is an ongoing project, some preliminary results have been very positive in exploring options for extending social protection schemes at the national level, strengthening SP-relevant education and research capacity, providing technical assessments and facilitating use of other tools essential for building sustainable capacities. The initiative also supports peer-to-peer learning across countries through regional organizations.

In her presentation, Professor Lynne Healy, the main representative of the IASSW to the United Nations, highlighted the challenging issues in the design of social protection systems so as to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’. Social protection plays a critical role in reducing poverty and inequality, but the groups that are farthest behind are also the most difficult to cover. The first of them is informal workers, including care workers; in some countries, more than 50 percent of workers are in the informal sector. Migrants pose a special challenge for governments and the international community, and ensuring coverage will require considerable negotiation. In the future, social protection in a world with limited work, including adults with no work history, will require innovative thinking and the redesign of social roles and protections.

Underscoring the links between social protection and sustainable development, Professor Sergei Zelenev, Executive Director of the ICSW, emphasized that sustainable development is impossible without tackling extreme poverty in a comprehensive and consistent way. The ICSW is keen to join forces with academics, professionals and policy-makers to identify obstacles, explore new opportunities and come up with new policy recommendations in the social field, linking these steps with efforts to promote sustainable development. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda provides a window of opportunity for the proponents of social protection systems, including the ICSW, to advocate and push for the reinforcement of social protection policies in the context of sustainable development. We see a lot of positive momentum towards the support of social protection, including political support, which was so visible during the deliberations at the CSocD, but a lot more needs to be

done to get recognition of social protection as a new international social norm. Together with partners, the ICSW continues advocating for a dedicated ECOSOC resolution on social protection systems, including floors, seeing it as an important political step towards universal and comprehensive social protection for all.

The presentation of Professor Shirley Gatenio Gabel, Fordham University and the IASSW (USA), was devoted to a discussion of theoretical aspects of welfare provision, particularly universal and targeted approaches. In her view, today's societies are characterized by an attack by neoliberalism on welfare states. While neoliberalism is often presented as a natural, reasonable way of promoting democracy and economic expansion around the world, its ultimate purpose promotes corporate domination and upward distribution of wealth and power.

In the 1960s, Richard Titmuss popularized the concepts of universalism and targeting with the intention of capturing the nature of the arguments around the welfare policies adopted by Britain in the post-war period. Universalism was seen as a compromise between the two major perspectives of the period – socialism and liberalism. In more recent decades, social programmes have arisen that may be categorized as both universal and selective. We often label social insurance programmes – public retirement pensions, health coverage, unemployment benefits, some child benefit programmes, maternity and parental leave benefits – as universal, when in fact they tend to cover employees in the formal workforce and omit those who work in the informal sector.

The ambiguity of the term 'universalism' makes it vulnerable to neoliberal attacks. Universal programmes may sound progressive, but this may mask a programme's limited coverage to only formal labourers and other protected groups. A total of 71 percent or 5.2 billion people are not, or are only partially, protected, and many of those unprotected are informal economy workers. We need new approaches that are rights-based rather than earned, and are holistic and sustainable and allow for the voice of beneficiaries and localities to be heard in policy deliberations; they should also make clear the responsibilities of the various levels of government and opportunities for redress. Current concepts have guided us this far, but it is now time to create new concepts to guide us into the future we want.

The discussion was moderated by Ms Wenyan Yang, Chief, Social Perspective on Development Branch, UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

Interagency cooperation on social protection

The 10th meeting of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) took place on 1 February 2018 at the UN Headquarters in New York. Established in July 2012 in response to a request from the G20, the Board promotes collaboration and the coordination of activities among international agencies aimed at improving social protection systems around the world. The Board accomplishes its goals by focusing on four key areas: the promotion of universal social protection as one of the top development priorities at the global, regional and national levels; advancing interagency policy coherence when responding to country demands regarding the development and reform of national social protection systems, including floors; helping to avoid the duplication of efforts, enabling members to coordinate technical and policy advice regarding social protection systems; acting as a hub for the exchange of social protection knowledge, policy experience and good practices, and statistical data (see http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—nylo/documents/genericdocument/wcms_301456.pdf).

Co-chaired by the ILO and the World Bank, and bringing together leaders and technical experts of several major international agencies and participating governments, as well as selected international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the ICSW, the Board deals with practical issues pertinent to the coordination of the activities of various stakeholders in the area of social protection, particularly in the context of implementing Agenda 2030.

The agenda of the meeting in New York covered several substantive topics: update on the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection (USP2030) and measures to make the partnership operational; update on social protection assessment tools; update on UN work on social protection, including flagship reports; update on SPIAC-B working groups on humanitarian development nexus and capacity development; and update on the activities of the working methods and governance working group.

The progress report made to the participants highlighted a number of events in support of universal social protection organized in 2016/17, such as:

- Sept 2016: Launch of the *Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to achieve SDGs* (USP2030) at the UN New York, and *China South-South High Level Event to Achieve the SDGs on Universal Social Protection* in Beijing after the G20 Summit (see <http://Universal.social-protection.org>).
- May 2017: Financing social protection floors throughout economic cycles – side event at the UN Forum on Financing for Development (FfD).
- July 2017: Side events at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development ‘Global Partnership on USP: Ending Poverty by 2030’ and ‘Universal Social Protection: End Poverty and Reduce Inequality’.
- Nov. 2017: ‘Universal Social Protection: The Global Partnership 2030’ at the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labor.
- Jan. 2018: UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD) side events on Universal Social Protection.

It was agreed that a *two-track approach* regarding USP2030 promotion will be adopted, effective immediately: short-term track – action plan focused on advocacy, resource mobilization, knowledge generation, country support among others; medium-term track – action plan focused on UN work, exploring working together with UHC2030 and Education for All for a new Global Social Policy Compact, including the constitution of a Global Forum with all member states, regional organizations and civil society organizations.

Making USP2030 operational requires continuous efforts among agencies in the context of joint support for SDG 1.3 and USP2030. Two points were singled out in this regard: mainstreaming gender in social protection within the SDGs framework, and social protection for informal workers.

The development of a set of Interagency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA) tools that provide an agreed framework for analysis regarding various dimensions of social protection systems has been one of the visible results of the interagency collaboration. The ISPA work at the 10th meeting of the Board was presented in terms of tools development, tools application, learning strategy, communication strategy and budget.

The update on UN work on social protection included a brief description of the changes resulting from the UN Secretary-General’s UN Reform. Generating knowledge on social protection within the Board assumed various forms, including the preparation of flagship reports by the international agencies and interagency publications. The attending agencies presented summaries of the following reports that have just been released:

- the UNDESA 2017 Report on World Social Situation: Promoting inclusion through social protection;
- the ILO World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal social protection to achieve the SDGs;

- UNDP report Social Protection for Sustainable Development in Africa;
- the World Bank's State of Safety Nets report announced for April 2018.

The UN reports are periodical flagship publications that use the ILO's World Social Protection Database but then supplement it with more specific information as needed.

The capacity-building working group created by SPIAC-B earlier presented its findings at the meeting. Several agreed priority areas of this working group were explained: (1) making wider use of the socialprotection.org portal; (2) emphasizing the gender sensitivity of social protection schemes; (3) making social protection disability inclusive SP; (4) put emphasis on social protection curricula at universities.

In the context of the 'humanitarian-development nexus', the session presented an update on the International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and Forced Displacement. The discussions and results of the conference were presented, including the outcome statement. The SPIAC-B Joint Statement of Social Protection Actors was presented earlier to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2017.

The 10th Board meeting also reviewed and discussed a preliminary paper on a proposed governance structure, including such issues as the clarification of membership, agenda setting and working methods, among others. There was agreement that the SPIAC-B has so far been tremendously successful in improving collaboration, policy-coherence and building a platform for joint activities like ISPA.

The chairmanship of the SPIAC-B was also discussed, with a majority of members agreeing to maintain ILO and the World Bank as co-chairs.

Sergei Zelenev
Executive Director, International Council on Social Welfare