

South-South dialogue on the Social Protection Floor Initiative

Tuesday, 2 February 2010

3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

UN headquarters New York - Conference Room 8 (Formerly room 10 in the Secretariat Building)

Concept Note

Background

The Social Protection Floor Initiative was adopted in April 2009 by the CEB as one of its nine initiatives to cope with the current global crisis and was supported by a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly¹. The UN Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPF-I) aims to promote nationally defined strategies that protect a minimum level of access to essential services and income security for all. A national Social Protection Floor guarantees access to essential services and supports throughout the life cycle for children, people in economically active age and older persons, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups and considering further key characteristics in given contexts (gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, disabilities, populations exposed to natural hazards, etc).

Ensuring a SPF for the entire world population represents a considerable challenge, but research has shown that it is feasible to implement all or some of the basic elements of the social protection floor even in low-income countries. But different countries face distinct challenges. There are no best solutions or 'one-size-fits-all' formulas to set up the SPF. Each country has different social needs, development objectives and fiscal capacity to achieve them, and will choose a different set of policies.

Many developing countries have already successfully taken measures to introduce elements of national social protection floors. Flagship programmes, like Oportunidades and Seguro Popular in Mexico, Bolsa Familia in Brazil, the subsidized health insurance scheme in Colombia, the child, old-age and invalidity grant system in South-Africa, the health insurance scheme in Rwanda, the unfolding 100-day-employment guarantee scheme or Yeshashwini and RSBY schemes for health in India, have shown that the impact of the social floor on poverty can be dramatic. This illustrates that safety nets are already in place in some countries of the global south with sufficient institutional capacity. Considering the technical knowledge of these countries, they can support other countries in their efforts in building, expanding, extending or reorienting their social protection systems by offering technical

¹ Resolution A/C.2/64/L.61, *Welcomes the joint crisis initiative launched by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in 2009 to provide coordination on social protection floors, which aims at advocating for and advising on the provision of social protection floors and public spending in ways that will both kick-start growth and support more inclusive and sustainable social and economic development.*"

assistance and capacity building through the provision of know-how and advisory manpower in the framework of a South-South exchange. South-South cooperation is an important and strategic partnership development tool which the international community is increasingly using as a practical modality for partnership-building and collaboration. It is well recognised that the knowledge, skills, and technical expertise which can be exchanged through South-South cooperation are in many cases those most suitable to meeting the development challenges faced by countries in the South.

The High-level meeting on South South Cooperation held in Nairobi from 1-3 December 2009 concluded with the adoption of the Nairobi Outcome Document on South South Cooperation (A/64/L.37) which urges the UN system agencies to be more engaged in South-South Cooperation². In-line with this request, the cooperating UN agencies of the SPFI are prepared to promote, coordinate and support South-South cooperation, including peer reviewing arrangements to ensure high quality advice on a national basis.

Objectives

The main objective of this meeting is two-fold: a) to support and facilitate an exchange of knowledge and experiences across the South on complementarities, best practices, lessons learned in establishing social protection floors while also examining existing opportunities and obstacles; b) to establish a consortium of member states from the South in supporting efforts to establish and/or expand social protection floors.

Key questions

- What does the global South expect of South-South cooperation on social protection?
- What are the national needs of member states relating to South-South cooperation on the SPFI?
- What is the content of knowledge-sharing: exchanging technical support, training and how to organize this technical assistance? (Technical assistance can be described as technical cooperation in the design or improvement of a program through the development of social policies and programmes, training, analyzing existing systems, distance learning by disseminating programme activities).
- What is the role of the UN in support of member states requesting assistance in initiating or expanding their social protection floors?
- What are the experiences of existing networks on South-South cooperation and how can partnerships between participating countries be best leveraged to promote the SPFI?

² Document A/64/L.37 *“Urges United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies to take concrete measures to support South-South cooperation by acting as catalysts for cooperation and strengthening the capabilities of regional organizations. Welcoming the ongoing activities of many of the Organization’s units in that regard, it reaffirms the importance of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, hosted by UNDP, particularly in implementing that agency’s latest framework for cooperation. It encourages Member States to provide support for that effort.”*