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REGIONAL EXPERTS MEETING ON SOCIAL PROTECTION



Investing in Social Protection in Africa



Kampala, Uganda 28-30 April 2008

The African Union Commission, in collaboration with Help Age International, convened the first of its series of three Regional Expert Meetings on social protection on the theme: "Investing in Social Protection in Africa". The Meeting covering the Eastern and Southern Africa Region was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Uganda at the Speke Resort & Conference Centre, Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda from 28th to 30th April 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 over 150 participants. Governments of the Eastern and Southern Africa region attending were: Comoros, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Case studies and input to discussions were provided by the Government of Brazil, civil society, development partners, NEPAD, the United Nations, and experts and resource persons from specialist regional and international institutions.

The meeting reviewed progress, challenges and opportunities to extend social protection across Africa. Participants noted the progress underway in a number of African countries to implement programmes on social protection which remain low in many countries' investment. It was noted that social protection has multiple beneficial impacts for national economies and is a government obligation, especially in relation to supporting the most vulnerable citizens, including children and orphans, older persons, people with disabilities, women, victims of humanitarian crises and people affected by HIV/AIDS, among others. Investing in Africa's poorest people through social protection is essential to build human capital, break the intergenerational poverty cycle and reduce the growing inequalities that constrain Africa's economic development. It was emphasized that social protection is affordable within rationalized national development priorities and budgets.

Participants welcomed the opportunity for exchange and learning, including from best practice in the region. It was highlighted that national debate is now focused on the 'how' of implementation, including costing and securing the necessary fiscal space in national budgets. There were, therefore, opportunities for enhanced partnerships with development partners to support implementation strategies in Africa, including through South-South cooperation. Participants called for renewed multi-stakeholder collaboration, and affirmed the role of civil society in all stages of the design, impact assessment, implementation, monitoring and advocacy around social protection programmes.

It was stressed that strong and sustained political will is required to build up and resource the programmes, which Africa cannot afford not to implement. It is necessary to sensitise key policy makers, including Ministers of Finance, on the benefits of investment in social protection. It was unanimously agreed that the poorest cannot and should not wait; Africa must institutionalise social protection within its development agenda. The African Union Commission's leadership in taking the agenda forward within Africa and internationally was welcomed and affirmed.

At the end of the meeting the following KEY RECOMMENDATIONS were adopted:

On building political consensus for social protection:

- Establish appropriate legislative and policy frameworks for Social Protection where it does not exist, review and amend National Constitutions, and political manifestos to include the right to social protection
- Member States and African Union Commission to promote awareness on Social Protection amongst all stakeholders including parliamentarians and civil society at regional and continental fora

On design and targeting of social protection programmes:

- Develop and implement a minimum package of social protection programmes that take into account the unique circumstances of each country, existing social security and humanitarian assistance measures and compliance with agreed regional and international Conventions, treaties and undertakings
- Review and reform social protection programmes to expand progressively their coverage to all citizens while promoting the spirit of self reliance and human dignity
- Review and amend existing data systems to ensure that they are fully disaggregated and able to support effective impact assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SP programmes

On securing financing:

- Develop costed and prioritised national plans and strategies for social protection within the planning cycles of each country and establish specific budget lines for social protection that should not be less than 2% of GDP
- Conduct review of existing social sector and microfinance expenditure and taxation revenue to identify scope for broadening the financial base and the freeing up of fiscal space to finance social protection programmes
- Coordinate with development partners to encourage provision of long term predictable harmonised funding
- Invite Ministers of Finance to the African Union Conference of Ministers in charge of Social Development and thereafter its biannual meetings on social protection
- African Union Commission to raise social protection issues in international fora including the G8 and its preparatory conferences
- Include progress reports on issues of social protection on agenda of relevant African Union Ministerial meetings including those of finance

On strengthening capacity, coordination and communication

- Put in place effective national inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral mechanisms to improve coordination and harmonisation of the roles of all stakeholders, including ministries of finance
- Build and invest in requisite technical, infrastructural and institutional capacities including South-South learning and pooling of resources to improve Social Protection programmes in Africa
- Member States to monitor social protection programmes and advocate for them, in collaboration with civil society, development partners, the media, the private sector and other stakeholders to achieve effective national Social Protection programmes
- Member states, with the support of development partners, to invest in action research in social protection and inter country exchange
- African Union Commission to provide leadership to address Social Protection opportunities and challenges in Africa in collaboration with all stakeholders and hold biannual conferences to assess progress on the implementation of Social Protection programmes.