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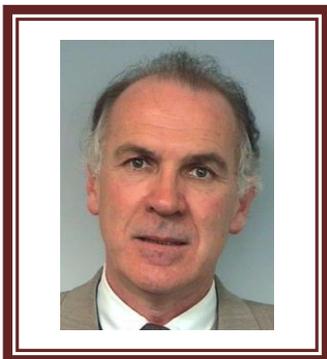
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➤ **Featured article: AICESIS today: an international association for participatory governance**

**by Patrick Venturini**

*Civil society organizations working at the global level play an increasingly important role in the world development and are key social partners in shaping the post-2015 agenda. We have asked Mr. Patrick Venturini, the Secretary-General of AICESIS (International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions) to tell the readers of the Global Cooperation Newsletter about some core activities of the Association, its philosophy and present challenges.—The Editor*



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It seems obvious today that public governance and its basic principles are in a state of flux due to increased complexity and difficulties of governance of modern societies; furthermore citizens and representative organizations of civil society want better participation and wider consultations. Hence a need for intermediaries between governments, decision-makers and citizens. This is a lasting phenomenon which can be widely seen in the world. This is the reason why participatory governance - defined as the set of institutions, rules and practices in a country where citizens and civil society are able to participate in the formulation of public policies through representative organizations, using

consultation and negotiation - appears more and more as a necessary complement, but certainly not as a substitute, for representative democracy.

There is certainly no single answer in the face of such a request. It is up to each country, taking into consideration its history, its culture, its characteristics and aspirations, and even its internal power relationships, to define its own model, to find ways to involve representative organizations of civil society, and to create effective procedures between policymakers and organized citizens.

In the range of possible options, economic and social councils (ESCs) and similar institutions (such as tripartite commissions) provide an institutional solution, potentially effective and well-recognized. The establishment of such structures is a growing trend in the world. When working properly, they provide added value, becoming factors of modernization and social stability.

In recent decades the development of these institutions over the world and, beyond national differences, the multiplicity of issues of common interest, explain the creation in 1999 of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS), established in Brussels (Belgium). AICESIS has been developing rapidly. It had initially 27 full members. In early 2015, AICESIS includes 74 members from four continents: Africa, Asia-Eurasia-Middle East, Europe and Latin America-Caribbean. And the global database established by AICESIS currently lists more than a hundred ESC-SIs around the world.

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This article presents, after some comments on the importance of ESC-SIs, missions and objectives of AICESIS, its priorities and main tangible results and gives a special focus on its strategic partnership with the ILO.

### **ESC-SIs: an important tool for the modernization of governance**

The AICESIS members are economic and social councils or similar institutions, i. e. advisory bodies composed of social partner organizations (employers, trade unions), other actors of civil society (NGOs, etc.), and sometimes members of the government. They are autonomous assemblies with national competence, drawing their legitimacy from the constitution, law, decree or any other official recognition made by public authorities, and enjoying a genuine representation of economic and social interests.

From the perspective of public policy, on the one hand, ESC-SIs can better identify the needs of the community, define the objectives more clearly and assess the impact of public policies, and on

the other hand, they can advise the Government and/or Parliament by making them attentive to certain needs, expectations, suggestions, criticisms or fears of populations. They increase the legitimacy of public decisions and social peace by promoting the participation of representative organizations and by making the public decisions more transparent and efficient. In doing so, they are factors of stability and social cohesion.

But beyond the obvious differences, these institutions have the same type of essential added value: they are primarily spaces for dialogue, expertise - their members are men and women who are rooted in economic and social life of their country and who have a good knowledge of problems on the ground - and synthesis, where divergent or even conflicting interests are represented. Secondly and most importantly, they are real workshops where compromises or consensus can be worked out. As such, they play a useful and irreplaceable role, and their work (opinions, reports) provides good "indicators of acceptability" that show how the population receives examined public policy proposals. Finally, ESC-SIs are used as a link between superstructures and organizations: they function as bridges in both directions, between governments and civil society.

If what is at stake is to promote the participation of representative organizations and develop their advisory functions, then the ESC-SIs are certainly part of the solution. Actually in some cases, this means their renovation, modernization and, in particular, a greater openness to future generations, to whom it is fundamental to transmit the culture of dialogue, of respect for other people's ideas and compromise research. Therefore the advisory function is fully legitimate in modern society, in addition to the executive and legislative functions.

### **The AICESIS: missions and objectives**

The Association, essentially acting as a network showing full respect for the independence of each of its members, has three tasks on the whole: first of all - and this is its main function - promoting dialogue and experiences exchanges as well as good practices among its members by promoting cooperation projects; then, encouraging social and civil dialogue in the world, for example by forming partnerships with international organizations such as the ILO, UNDESA, UNESCO and FAO; finally, the Association also aims to encourage the consolidation or creation of ESCs-SIs in states that do not possess any, and, more generally, to contribute to the development of participatory governance and to the role of representative organizations of civil society in the world.

These three missions structure, of course, the actions of the AICESIS. In addition, every presidency - currently held by the Russian Civic Chamber for the period 2013-15 - naturally gives new impetus by proposing a roadmap and a biennial theme work covering its mandate. For example, 2014 was

marked by the contributions of AICESIS in the debates of the international conference of the ILO's work in June in Geneva on the theme "The transition of the informal economy to the formal economy", and also by its contribution to the high-level segment of the UN ECOSOC on "Addressing ongoing and emerging challenges for meeting the MDGs in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future". Furthermore, reflection on the main working theme suggested by the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, which covers the two years of its presidency, was launched: "National human capital and new sources of national competitiveness". Other important events took place like the third edition of the Youth International Summer School in September 2014 (Kabardino-Balkaria, Russia) as well as several conferences highlighting the role of ESCs-SIs on specific topics and held in Curacao ("Economic growth through the strengthening of human capital"), Athens ("Social Dialogue") and Rabat ("Social dialogue, civil dialogue, participatory democracy in modern governance").

The two-year presidency of the AICESIS, has been successively applied from the beginning, on a rotation basis between continents, by the institutions of the Netherlands, Algeria, France, China, Brazil, Hungary, Italy, Algeria and Russia.

A few spotlights on concrete examples taken from the recent collective experience within AICESIS provide a more concrete vision of initiatives diversity and of their contribution to members.

### **AICESIS activities: some spotlights**

#### **Food security**

In close cooperation with the ESC of Congo and FAO, AICESIS organized in May 2013 in Brazzaville an international conference on "Food Security". Dozens of ESCs-SIs were represented and took stock of the situation in their country and of the action of their respective jurisdictions. It was obvious that beyond their differences, these countries all have commonalities in terms of goals for improved food security. Actions supported or initiated by some ESCs-SIs included, among others, water control; market development; the development of storage structures, processing and storage of agricultural products throughout the value chain; price regulation; promoting innovative financing; the promotion of social dialogue between organizations of agricultural producers and the government, or the implementation of protective measures for African agricultural markets. Several common constraints were also discussed, particularly the deficit in transport infrastructures for agricultural products, poor access to land for women and young people, lack of agricultural

equipment, unfair competition from imported agricultural products and the phenomenon of land grabbing by some multinational companies.

### **The fight against economic crime and corruption**

Corruption is one of the key factors for lack of growth, as it hinders the development of economies and discourages investment, especially foreign investment. Corruption affects the public sector and private companies, for example when they are involved in public procurement. The Italian CNEL took up this subject, has established an observatory of this phenomenon and submitted a report proposing the systematic tracking of all payments made under a contract or a subcontracting public contract. The Italian Government and the Italian Parliament welcomed the CNEL proposal and adopted a law in August 2010 entitled "Anti-Mafia Extraordinary Plan" incorporating the principle of traceability and confiscating illegally accumulated assets. Also on the initiative of the Italian CNEL an exchange of practices on the subject was organized within the AICESIS and it was attended by more than a dozen members. It was an opportunity to take particular knowledge of the practice of the Civic Chamber in Russia which is in charge of drafting an annual report on the subject. A first summary report was distributed and work continues on the basis of a detailed questionnaire.

### **The fight against poverty**

The fight against poverty is another subject on which an exchange of experiences and good practices was organized with the Chinese ESC as leader. Each member of the AICESIS could contribute and, again, a summary report was distributed. In particular, the ESC of Benin showed that the issue of poverty was a real thread linking the various studies of self-referrals to actions of socio-economic development it initiated. Meanwhile, in its report on "The ESC contribution to the National Social easing," it intervened in a period of social crisis where government, firms and trade unions were staring at each other like statues doing nothing. The recommendations it made to the Head of State have been implemented, which has contributed to the easing of the social crisis of 2010.

### **Youth employment**

At the start of its term, the presidency, then provided by the CNES of Algeria, proposed as the main working theme for 2011-2013: "What are the new issues and what role can the organized civil society play in promoting employment and socio-professional integration of young people?» The

development of AICESIS report was the subject of intense preparation spread over 18 months. The final text is developing a widely shared analysis and highlights the role of social partners and other civil society organizations in the socio-professional integration devices as middlemen, ombudsmen, coaches or facilitators. The report emphasizes that the ESCs-SIs, with their various components, can be a central reference, through their action on the ground but also through their direct involvement in the assessment of public policies for young job seekers. The economic and social partners and other civil society organizations have therefore a broad perspective of action, which can install them as effective partners of government. Among the many actions identified, one should underline the practices of some councils that brought or supported the following activities: networking of organizations, institutions and businesses in order to promote the creation of support networks to youth employment; mobilization of the resources held by chambers of agriculture, industry and crafts; or the development of microfinance associations in rural areas.

### **The International Summer School for youth**

At the initiative of the SER (Economic and Social Council) of the Netherlands, AICESIS organizes every two years a university opened to all young professionals of ESCs-SIs members or involved in social dialogue in their countries in order to promote mutual understanding and exchange of experiences among participants. Thus, the first University held in 2009 in Noordwijk (Netherlands) gathered participants from 40 different countries and focused on "The ESCs in a globalized world". A second edition was held in Shanghai in 2012 with the topic "ESCs and sustainable development". The third edition was hosted by the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (CCRF) in Nalchik, capital of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic in 2014 on the theme of "International cooperation between ESCs-SIs for the overall development." Each time, all participants coming from different backgrounds and beginning their careers, were enthusiastic with regard to this opportunity, they gave the best of themselves and got actively involved in the proposed activities. The fourth edition will take place in 2016 on the African continent.

### **Action in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

AICESIS periodically awards the Millennium Development Goals of Development Prizes. The first prizes were awarded by President Lula of Brazil in 2007 in Brasilia to civil society organizations and public institutions that had undertaken outstanding initiatives on the theme of education. In 2011 in Rome, attended by President Napolitano, second prizes were awarded to operations promoting "Gender equality and the empowerment of women." The third prize awarded in 2013 in Algiers, paid tribute to civil society organizations for their efforts in favour of "full employment, decent and

productive work for poverty reduction." Finally, the fourth edition of the Prize, dedicated to the post- 2015 agenda, will take place in 2015 at the International Meeting of Moscow.

### **A strategic focus: the partnership with the ILO**

AICESIS has been linked to the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 2012 by a cooperation agreement. This strategic partnership is legitimized by the highly complementary composition of the two institutions, shared values and the multiplicity of themes of common interest. In addition, ESCs-SIs are useful actors to promote the key elements of the ILO agenda: social dialogue, global pact for employment and decent work, social protection floors.

### **Continuous development**

In 2010, several AICESIS-ILO conferences had already been organized in cooperation with ESCs-SIs host Member of AICESIS to exchange good practices on a given topic. This was the case in 2010 in Cotonou, with "The role of ESCs in the implementation of the Global Job Pact"; in 2011 in Dakar on "The status of the Global Job Pact in Africa and the role of ESC-SIs" with the adoption of a roadmap. In 2012 in Geneva, a meeting was organized on the theme "Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization".

As part of this partnership formalized in 2012, a major conference was organized in December 2013 in Madrid on "The role and impact of the ESCs-SIs in response to the global financial, economic and employment crisis: sharing of experiences and good practices". The conference brought together over forty boards. As part of its preparation, a detailed questionnaire was sent to about 90 ESCs-Sis around the world. The outcomes of this investigation have been particularly rewarding, several ESCs-SIs having played a major role in the face of the crisis.

In 2008-2009, most states responded with fiscal stimulus packages to mitigate the effects of the crisis and accelerate the recovery. In countries such as South Africa, Poland, Brazil or South Korea, the ESC-SIs were at the core of the political response. They have thus successfully negotiated national agreements on anti-crisis measures. Overall, the accompanying measures include provisions for part-time employment, job sharing, strengthening of social security, training and investment in infrastructures to foster the creation or maintenance of jobs. At a later stage of the crisis, some ESCs-SIs were involved in new collective responses, such as Honduras, the Netherlands and Slovenia, with particularly interesting results. Yet, in these countries, the consequences of the crisis varied, as well as their professional relationships and the configuration of their ESCs-SIs, because the power of the unions at the national level varies, as does the tradition of social dialogue.

The ESCs-SIs of Brazil, Republic of Korea and South Africa are tripartite bodies, while the Bulgarian one is rather a civic dialogue platform.

All in all, the Madrid Conference, enriched by contributions from academic experts and from representatives from the ILO and the IMF, has been particularly useful, and a summary report was published.

### **Social protection: the conference and the Seoul Declaration and their consequences**

Strengthened by this success, the ILO and AICESIS organized jointly with the CDES of Republic of Korea, a new high-level conference in Seoul on 20-21 November 2014 on "The role of the ESCs-SIs and social dialogue in the implementation of a social protection floor for all". Several contributors from international (World Bank, IMF, ISSA) and regional (ADB, ESCAP) organizations, as well as those of the International Organization of Employers (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), intervened to highlight and complement the testimonies and contributions of more than 30 ESCs-SIs from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. In particular, the ILO was represented by Isabel Ortiz, Director of the Department of Social Protection, and the spokesman for the International Council on Social Welfare (CIAS / ICSW) was Dr. Heung-Bong CHA, Regional President for North-East Asia.

An introductory report has usefully informed discussion at the conference. Not surprisingly, it reveals disparities in the levels of commitment of the various ESC-SIs. Some boards are very active stakeholders in the national effort aimed at building a social protection floor, either by negotiating agreements, the search for social coverage defects or the defence of the social protection level against the measures of fiscal consolidation. Other members have no explicit mandate for negotiation, but have a full consultative function as they give advice on proposed reforms, organize public hearings and / or make concrete proposals. However, a third group of ESCs-SIs remains away from any initiative or solicitation in the matter. The complex and technical nature of social protection, resource limitations, the priority given to issues relating to the labour market and the lack of constructive relationships with the executive and legislative powers are all the more reasons that could explain such a deficiency.

In any case, this document details the four avenues to follow in order to strengthen the role of intervention ESCs-SIs in this area: increase skills and invest in knowledge to become a (more) relevant actor; establish close links with the marginalised and vulnerable groups, especially when these populations themselves are poorly represented; focus on clearly identified priorities and allocate the corresponding resources; and finally, adopt in the public debate a proactive stance for promotion and defence of social protection and of the most directly involved populations. In a more general way, it is recommended that some ESCs-SIs strengthen their relationships and dialogue with the Government, the Parliament, employers' organizations and workers' unions and other civil society organizations.

### **The Seoul Declaration**

Aware that the ILO Recommendation 202 on the Social Protection Floor is a major breakthrough in the global commitment to social protection, development and the fight against poverty, the participants have adopted the "Seoul Declaration on the promotion of national social protection floors for all by the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions".

This text, in the form of a manifesto commitment, envisions that the ESCs-SIs try on the one hand to "include social protection floors in their agendas, prioritize engagement in the field of social protection in line with Recommendation 202 and contribute to the development of national dialogues, by making time and resources available"; "actively participate in the definition, implementation and monitoring of social protection floors and other aims of national strategies for the extension of social security"; "actively promote the fundamental principles of Recommendation 202; undertake proactive advocacy and awareness efforts among stakeholders and the general public on the key role of social protection for national development; help shape virtuous alliances for the development of national strategies for the extension of social security. "

For its part, the AICESIS intends to "promote the exchange of information, experiences and best practices between national ESCs-SIs for their contributions and their specific roles" and to "take action in response to the Seoul Conference will be presented at the Moscow General Assembly in 2015 and could include specific initiatives to strengthen the capacity of ESCs-SIs to support the implementation of national social protection floors at the country level and to ensure public discussion of any reform of social assistance. " The ILO finally commits to "promote social dialogue and consultations (...), with the support of large platforms such as ESCs-SIs, in the formulation and implementation of reforms and strategies for social protection at the national level" and "to

offer its expertise to ESCs-SIs to formulate strategies aimed at establishing national social security systems that are socially and economically viable and adequate. "

## **Extensions**

Beyond the timely success of this conference, the first initiatives for its implementation have been taken. In the first half of 2015, the ESC of Congo Brazzaville will organize a training and skill-building workshop of its advisers, in collaboration with the AICESIS and the ILO. The general theme will be: "Strengthening ESC and social dialogue capacity in favour of an efficient and sustainable social protection floor". Its ultimate aim is to define the elements of a road map for the ESC of Congo so that it strengthens its role in the field of social protection.

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This panorama aimed to concretely describe the diversity of approaches and realities of the ESCs-SIs, their great potential or actual value, and AICESIS activities, showing the dynamism of this Association which is, after all, only 15 years old. As for the future orientations of the AICESIS, one has – something that is done too rarely along the period - to "look far and wide," without preconception or precipitation, respecting diversity and each priority of its members. Even though the existence of some ESCs-SIs is sometimes fundamentally undermined by the executive in some countries, as is the case now in Italy, it is allowed to remain confident and aware that, globally, participatory democracy has fine days to come. Helping find the right path of development is the challenge facing the next Algiers symposium on "The future of the AICESIS", to be held towards the end of 2015.

***The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and may not necessarily reflect a position of the ICSW Management Committee***

- **ICSW speaks out at the UN on gender and ageing nexus of development.**

## **ICSW Statement to the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 9-20 March 2015, New York**

The International Council on Social Welfare, one of the oldest non-governmental organizations with a global reach, promotes social development, social welfare and social justice worldwide. Promotion of gender equality for girls and women of all ages is one of our priorities. Given that older women

remain particularly disadvantaged and excluded in many societies, we believe that the international community should not overlook such an important aspect as social protection of older women when undertaking the review of Beijing Platform of Action, and even more when the post-2015 development framework is discussed. Twenty years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action the international community still has to address specific needs of older women in society and address the existing gaps. The adoption of a life course approach in development strategies together with well conceived anti-poverty measures and other social protection schemes helps to promote gender equality and social inclusion. The International Council on Social Welfare considers it crucial to address the following policy concerns in future deliberations at the international level:

**Population Ageing:** The world-wide demographic revolution in longevity continues into the 21st century against a backdrop of lower birth rates in many countries, with the projection that by 2050 the number of the world's citizens 15 years and younger will equal those age 60 years and older for the first time in history. Developing countries are experiencing a demographic transition even more dramatically than developed countries with developed social protection schemes available for the old and disabled. Today two in three people age 60 years and above live in developing countries and by 2050, almost 4 in 5 will live in the developing world. How to protect the vulnerable in a rapidly ageing world is a crucial question for policymakers.

**Gender Disparities:** Gender differences and disparities remain marked for older adults in all countries of the world. Starting from birth, females in many societies have less status, less access to education, less choice in marriage and childbearing, less access to paid work and employment in the formal economy compared to men. They are less likely to inherit property, more likely to be widowed, and more apt to be disadvantaged by harmful traditional practices. Women are more likely than men to be unpaid caregivers of children and grandchildren, spouses and other relatives, and in turn less likely to be able to count on their spouses for care in old age. Women in older age are more likely than men to experience both absolute and relative poverty, and social exclusion. Social exclusion of women in society is related to a multitude of factors including marital, health and employment status.

**Growing Inequality and persisting income insecurity:** Growing inequality within and between nations plagues societies in a number of ways. For older people in both developed and developing countries increasing levels of poverty and income inequality, declining health and pervasive discrimination based on age serve as barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights. Older women are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social insecurity. Due to changing family structures, older people's lives become less socially secure. They are being housed and cared for

less frequently by younger family members than before. Due to gendered income discrimination patterns throughout their lives, women accumulate less individual wealth and individual rights to income security transfers (such as pension entitlements) and hence remain much more vulnerable in old age. As a result, older women face multiple disadvantages related to both gender and age.

**Gender Differences in Employment and Poverty:** The impact of gender differences and inequalities in education and employment opportunities increases through every stage of an individual's life accumulating and hitting hardest in old age, and as a result women are more likely to be poor in old age in both developed and developing countries. Older women and poverty are connected for many structural reasons and also are affected in different ways related to marital status, age in life course, race, ethnicity, linguistic background, ability, sexual orientation, citizenship, caste and class. Women who live alone are more likely to be in poverty than women who are married or live with extended families. Women are also more likely than men to have gaps in their employment histories due to child birth and child care as well as caregiving for older relatives and for spouses as they age. This translates into disadvantages in retirement income that can be exacerbated by the death of a (male) spouse and loss of retirement income in his name.

Women are paid low wages for "women's work", and by and large they are expected to do for free such work as caring for and teaching children, nursing the sick, preparing food, cleaning, and serving others. Women in developing countries who migrate to other countries to work in the informal economy, for example, as domestic workers, can find themselves without access to pensions or work as they age. No society so far has found a fair means to compensate women for their reproductive work that is of pivotal importance for the continued existence of any society.

**Gendered Social Protection Schemes:** While many older adults in both developed and developing countries remain in the paid workforce, eventually the demands of the jobs they perform may exceed their ability to perform needed tasks. In developed countries social security and pension schemes along with savings replace earned income for many older workers and in both developed and developing countries families may provide needed economic support for older members. While women are entering the labour force in greater numbers and staying longer over their life course, gender differences still persist in labour force participation, distribution of paid and unpaid work between genders, employment conditions and earnings. Especially in developing countries, women more often than men work in poorly paid jobs that lack social protection and are often found in the informal sector. In developing countries informal employment makes up over half of total non-

agricultural employment. Informal employment usually means that there are no or only low pension entitlements unless there are non-contributory systems of significant reach.

**Gender and Family Caregiving:** Unpaid work burden can negatively affect older women in both developed and developing countries. While the majority of caregiving is provided by women to family members, the long term care system both mitigates the burden on women family caregivers and also provides needed in-home care to care dependent older adults who live alone. Women are also more likely than men to be unpaid caregivers of children and grandchildren, spouses and other relatives, and in turn less likely to be able to count on their spouses for care in old age.

There are increasing numbers of skipped generation households with older people and dependent children, the result of HIV and AIDS and the rural to urban migration of working age adults. In countries where HIV and AIDS has decimated the working age population, grandparents are left with no adult children to care for them in old age, and instead are providing caregiving to orphaned grandchildren and other dependent relatives. The impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on older women in Africa include greater care responsibilities, violation of housing and property rights, increased exposure to violence, and increased vulnerability to poverty.

In some parts of the world older women are the targets of community vengeance through accusations of practicing witchcraft, and disadvantaged by inheritance laws that prevent them from remaining in their homes if divorced or widowed. The cumulative effects of such practices are poverty and social exclusion.

The International Council on Social Welfare considers social protection of all people as a crucial step in creating a "society for all" identified as one of the core objectives by the World Summit for Social Development convened in Copenhagen twenty years ago. The new impetus to the efforts aimed at promoting social protection worldwide was provided when Recommendation 202 on national floors of social protection was unanimously adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 101st session in 2012. There is increasing recognition of the fact that the implementation of nationally defined social protection floors may be regarded as an important tool in the fight against poverty and inequality of all people, including older women. The social protection floors are essential for preventing marginalization of older women in society and securing their rights. A rights-based approach aimed at protecting women, men and children from risks and vulnerabilities helps to sustain their well-being throughout the lifecycle, guaranteeing access to health care and other basic services, as well as at least a basic level of income security. The International Council on Social Welfare has supported that initiative since its inception by the United Nation in 2009. Joining forces

with more than 80 other Non-Governmental Organizations, the International Council on Social Welfare formed a Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, which has an increasingly important role to play in shaping the debate, raising awareness, achieving a national consensus on Social Protection Floors and making economic order world over more people-oriented and humane.

We strongly agree that “no one should be left behind” and urge the Commission to consider the following recommendations:

The “Data revolution” advocated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations should be extended to detailed poverty data (including localized data gathering) and disaggregation by age and gender for all Member States of the United Nations;

Anti-poverty measures for older women should begin with girls and continue throughout the life course, ensuring adequate nutrition and health care including reproductive health and violence prevention, education, elimination of discrimination in access to employment opportunities, social protection schemes across the life course, and a fair recognition for unpaid work including caregiving;

Governments should consistently work to reduce inequality in income, and improve opportunities for girls and women of all ages;

Social Protection Floors initiative should be embraced by all countries, adapted to specific national circumstances and consistently implemented at the national level.

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➤ **Interagency cooperation on social protection: SPIAC-B meeting in New York**

The 6th meeting of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) took place on 3 February 2015 at the UN Headquarters in New York. Co-chaired by ILO and the World Bank, it was attended by 53 participants representing 28 international organizations, bilateral development agencies, social partners, and civil society organizations. The agenda included the following key items: (1) Social Protection (SP) targets in the Sustainable Development Goals: Measuring and Monitoring progress; (2) cost of the implementation of the SP outcomes and methods of its financing; (3) Supporting the achievement of the SP targets: tools and country operations.

General discussion revealed a strong appreciation that SPIAC-B members had come a long way to build a rapport in higher spirit of cooperation. The implementation of the Post 2015 sustainable

development agenda represents an important opportunity to enhance policy coherence, improving cooperation and coordination of social protection actions at global, regional and national levels. A clear mandate expressed in target 1.3.1 has been given to the international community on the extension of coverage of social protection systems, including social protection floors. It was agreed that as the leading global issues-based coalition on social protection, the SPIAC-B is well positioned to provide support in the framing, monitoring and implementation of these aspects of the new agenda. The UN System, including international financial institutions (IFIs), should be ready to act together in delivering on the SDGs from its onset.

Much discussion was revolving around the above mentioned target 1.3 of the SDGs. Target 1.3 calls for universal social protection (“implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors”) and brings a time-bound SP coverage objective (“by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”). The definition of “substantial coverage” should be done at the country level according to national priorities and possibilities. The language used (social protection systems, measures and floors) is broad enough to allow for country-specific solutions applied at the national level. But internationally agreed instruments such as the ILO Recommendation 202 on National Floors of Social Protection should be used as guidance for supporting Member States. Linkages between the normative and operational frameworks should be enhanced.

Some participants emphasized that more ambitious outcomes on universal social protection could be pursued to ensure that a dream of “no one is left behind” is realized in practice. While universality has been fully accepted as a core principle for health and education, it is not yet accepted for social protection. It was noted that although included under the Poverty SDG, target 1.3 should also be assessed based on its contribution to achieving the other Agenda goals, in particular reducing inequality and promoting decent work for all.

Implementing the target 1.3, it would be important to focus on broad and systemic social protection programmes that effectively deliver “access to adequate and predictable cash benefits in case of need and access to health services” rather than short-term social protection projects delivering cash transfers for a limited group and over a limited time period (a “safety nets” approach).

The issue of global indicators was discussed at length. As stressed by many participants possible global indicators to frame the protection target should address both coverage and adequacy of

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<sup>1</sup> Outcome document of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals - SDG 1 on “Eradicate Poverty in all its Forms”; Target 1.3: “Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable solutions”.

social protection systems and floors. The SP coverage indicator should measure effective coverage (i.e. number of persons receiving a benefit/service) disaggregated by sex, with breakdowns by children, unemployed, old age, people with disabilities, pregnant women/newborns, work injury victims, the poor and vulnerable and other relevant factors to the extent possible. The indicator operates at the system level, i.e. how many persons receive benefits and are covered in case of need across all programmes and schemes, including social assistance and social insurance. The SP adequacy indicator would measure the social protection transfers as percentage of income / or poverty line and capture the impact of social protection on poverty reduction.

While administrative government- supplied data of social protection schemes remains the primary information source for the coverage indicator, household survey data is fundamental to measure adequacy and to calibrate the overall global assessment of coverage performance. It was agreed that global data bases containing relevant data to monitor the SP target should be enhanced.

A limited set of global indicators could be complemented by a much more refined dashboard of national indicators, including also impact, efficiency and quality social protection indicators at country level. Participants felt that it was of utmost importance to strengthen national statistical capacities for the measurement of progress towards the SDGs at the country level and to feed global datasets. It was agreed that SPIAC-B secretariat will provide updates on proposals of global social protection indicators.

The financing of social protection has been considered as one of the core issues under deliberation as part of the discussions on Financing for Development and preparations for the Addis Ababa conference (July 2015). While domestic financing is still considered the primary source of funding, official development assistance and in particular technical assistance/capacity building also have a fundamental role to play in some developing countries.

SPIAC-B members strongly called for a systematic change in language used in various documents on SP, emphasizing that social protection spending is "investment" rather than "costs". It was noted that "affordability" is often in the eye of the beholder and is determined politically, depending upon prevalent perceptions. All in all, political commitment drives the creation of fiscal space.

A proposal to establish a Social Protection Floors Fund/Facility to support social protection capacity building and start-up in the least developed countries was controversial. Supporting it, some members proposed further discussion, but others disagreed, expressing concerns regarding a proliferation of vertically-siloed funds and calling for integrated approaches.

Broadening “fiscal space” was also addressed. While there is a variety of ways to create fiscal space ranging from the reprioritization of resources, increasing tax-collection efficiency, using reserves, re-negotiating debt, reducing subsidies, fighting illicit financial flows, raising taxes, and so on, there is strong competition with other sectors over funds generated through any of these measures. At least within the domestic social portfolio, integrated approaches should be developed to enhance synergies and complementarities.

In the discussion on removing subsidies, the importance of carefully managing the transition by putting adequate compensatory measures in place (e.g. through an increase in the minimum wage, cash transfers, public transport costs, etc.) before removing the subsidy was emphasized. The present low level of fuel prices present an important window of opportunity for governments to enhance fiscal space and gradually convert subsidies into social protection transfers.

A holistic approach to social protection financing should be considered, taking into consideration a financing mix that includes contributory and non-contributory programmes. For contributory schemes, the importance of ensuring compliance and reducing tax evasion to relieve pressure on the Social Protection budget was stressed.

The mobilization of private sector funding, including from corporations, foundations and non-profit sector should be considered as part of the arsenal of social protection resources mobilization strategies. In the discussion on the role of the private sector, it is important to also consider the supply side (the role of the private sector as service providers) and not only think about the demand side.

The discussions of financing should be linked to measures to reduce fragmentation and improve efficiency and quality while minimizing leakages and errors. A system’s perspective should be adopted, including adequate identification systems, benefit payments and eligibility control mechanisms. A proper administration of social protection schemes is a real investment and can produce substantive gains in the short and long run. It was suggested by the Members that organization of high level conference/event on financing for social protection should be on the agenda of intergovernmental deliberations, as it could provide evidence and present concrete solutions to support the implementation of the social protection SDG target 1.3. Possible dates and location will be proposed by the Board co-chairs. Possible linkages could be explored in connection with the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, next July.

It was stressed that development cooperation in supporting the implementation of social protection outcomes should always be guided by national priorities and constraints. International tools and

approaches should be flexible and adaptable to national circumstances. Regional bodies also play an important catalytic role in translating global policies and agreements into agenda provisions that resonate with national aspirations. These bodies should be informed and supported accordingly.

In the context of the SDG discussion, it became clear that countries are overwhelmed with expectations of what they are supposed to implement – it is therefore important that development partners present a coordinated approach. It is important to send strong messages regarding how SP relates to each of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic (building the investment case, providing evidence on the return), social (including relation with access to services) and environmental (increase resilience, facilitate adaptation and transition).

There are multiple social protection entry-points at country level since programmes can be spread across various Ministries, such as Agriculture, Family, Social Affairs, Social Development, Employment or others. It was agreed that SPIAC-B members therefore need to act as connectors for each other to enable a coordinated approach. The participants briefed each other on the current SP-related activities of their respective organizations. The importance of taking back evidence from country work to global debates and the UN system (Commission for Social Development and other fora) was also underscored.

### ➤ **Useful resources and links**

#### **1- International Migration: Evolving Trends from the Early Twentieth Century to the Present**

This book recently published by Cambridge University Press is written by professor Susan Martin and discusses ways used by governments to address various aspects of international migration in a collaborative way. The book examines how these efforts have evolved from the early 20th century to the present. The scope encompasses all of the components of international migration: labour migration, family reunification, refugees, human trafficking and smuggling, and newly emerging forms of displacement (including movements likely to result from global climate change).

For more details: <http://www.cambridge.org/br/academic/subjects/politics-international-relations/international-relations-and-international-organisations/international-migration-evolving-trends-early-twentieth-century-present>

#### **2- OECD Urban Policy Reviews: Mexico 2015**

## **Transforming Urban Policy and Housing Finance, Paris, OECD, 2015**

This book, published by OECD as part of the Urban Policy Review series, examines how Mexico can develop more competitive, sustainable and inclusive cities; improve the capacities of institutions and foster greater collaboration among them, and how they can better fulfil their pension mandate.

For more details please see: <http://www.oecd.org/publications/oecd-urban-policy-reviews-mexico-2015-9789264227293-en.htm>

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