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➤ **Featured article:**

The foundation for universal social protection:

Issues, realities and horizons for the MENA region within the Global Coalition, by Driss Guerraoui, Secretary General of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of Morocco, Distinguished Fellow of the ICSW



The international meeting held from 11 to 13 November 2014 in Rabat, Morocco, organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany in partnership with the International Council on Social Welfare and the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, explored the theme "The universal social protection floor (USPF), from idea to practice". The meeting provided an opportunity to shed light on future challenges facing the USPF, introduce the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors in the MENA region and coordinate advocacy measures for this initiative by the members of the coalition in this region of the world.

I- The challenges facing the universalization of global welfare

The issue of social protection is an eminently political and strategic issue. It is at the heart of a fundamental issue that goes beyond the divisions involving private vs. public approaches, or insurance vs. assistance, and calls for all the actors and forces of a nation to shape the society they want to live in: whether an inclusive, integrative and supportive society or one whose guiding principles are ruthless, selective market laws and whose fundamental approach to social protection is based on the funded demands of individual citizens where the supply is covered by competing insurers or managers of social protection systems. Social protection represents, therefore, a choice on the part of society and has, therefore, a cost for the entire community. It represents today the most relevant parameter giving full expression to citizenship. For its existence and the degree of its coverage have an effect on the social sphere

and on life together. Effectively, it guarantees education for all, essential health care, basic income security, decent housing, protection against occupational-, age- and disability-related risks, offering families and society at large guarantees to cover basic needs. These mechanisms, delivering to citizens practical benefits of core social rights, also reinforce people's sense of belonging to the national community.

Moreover, it has even become an economic requirement, since everyone agrees that without solidarity there can be no lasting and sustainable competitiveness and that without a social cohesion made possible through equitable redistribution mechanisms for sharing the gains from growth there can be neither stability of social and professional relationships nor social peace within the firm and society as a whole.

It is also a political imperative, written in the constitutions of some countries, as is the case in Morocco with the new Constitution of July 1st 2011, as well as in international treaties and conventions, as is the case with national universal social protection floors.

However, there is no ideal model or type of social protection. For even if there is a common reference system in international treaties and conventions, every country has its own model of social protection, whose schemes and components are the product of its history, of its traditions of social action and solidarity, and of the genius of its actors in innovation and social experimentation.

II- Some realities of social protection in the world:

That being said, the realities of social protection in the world today shed more light on the future issues and challenges facing this protection. Indeed, these realities, clearly differentiated by country and region of the world, denote social and territorial divisions, and very glaring ones in terms of gender, as far as the volume of the existing social protection schemes is concerned, as well as the quality of services offered and delivered to citizens.

Thus, in terms of quantitative coverage, according to the latest report of the ILO for 2014-2015 (1), only 27% of the world population has access to comprehensive social security systems, while 73% receive only partial coverage or are not covered at all. According to that source, globally, only 2.3% of GDP is spent on social protection expenditure for women and men so as to ensure income security for the working-age period. These figures vary between 0.5% in Africa and 5.9% in Western Europe.

Regarding protection against the risk of unemployment, according to the report, only 28% of workers worldwide have access to benefits under the applicable national legislation. This global average masks large regional inequalities, since 80% of workers in Europe benefit from such protection as against 38% in Latin America, 21% in Middle East, 17% in the Asia - Pacific region and 8% in Africa. As for unemployed workers in the world, only 12% receive an indemnity against unemployment. Such coverage varies from 64% of unemployed workers in Western Europe to just over 7% in the Asia-Pacific region, 5% in Latin America and the Caribbean, and less than 3% in Middle East and in Africa.

Regarding protection in case of work accidents and diseases, 33.9% of the global workforce benefits from such protection. As for disability pensions, only 87 countries have such non-contributory benefits. The same goes for maternity protection, where less than 40% of women with an occupational activity are covered by such legislation under compulsory schemes and 48% if one takes into account voluntary insurance. As for pension schemes, only 42% of the working-age population today can benefit from such protection and the real coverage rate is even lower.

Regarding universal health coverage, if more than 90% of the population living in low-income countries enjoys no right to health coverage, 40% of the global health expenditure is directly assumed by patients, and 39% of the world population does not benefit from any coverage against the risk of sickness. At that level, the ILO estimates that, globally, there needs to be another 10.3 million health-care workers to ensure quality health services for all people in need.

Qualitatively, social protection in low- and middle-income countries remains a fundamentally urban phenomenon and is concentrated in the main industrial centers of those countries that have a social protection system. Also, a large majority of rural people, who still represent more than half of the population in most countries of the South and much of the population in suburban areas, do not benefit from any protection.

Moreover, social protection in those countries is mainly for employees of the private and public sectors, and these are countries - need I point out - where being an employee is already a privilege. Therefore, craft workers, farmers, professionals, freelancers, and other sections of society such as students, abandoned women, people with special needs and all categories operating in the so-called informal sectors generally do not have a social protection system of their own.

Even where social protection systems exist, they are selective in that they do not cover all risks and do not cover the family members of the beneficiaries. Furthermore, those systems are often burdened by multiple deviations, including non- or under-reporting, additional management costs, deficient health-care provision and its unequal distribution on the spatial level, under-equipment, inadequate management, multiple difficulties regarding access and the lack of the necessary human resources.

Moreover, other realities give rise to new challenges. The first one is related to a population dynamic marked, especially in the Southern countries, by the rapid pace of growth in the number of older people, who tend to live longer and face insecurity, poverty, exclusion and disease, and simultaneously the massive arrival on the local national labor markets of young working-age populations, people who are massively unemployed. Such a reality is all the more disturbing in that the vast majority of these countries do not have a compensation system for the unemployed, or a minimum income aimed at enabling them to face the vagaries of life, including food and decent housing. The second challenge is the emergence of new forms of pandemics and social-health risks relating to the frequency and unpredictability of natural disasters and to practices with regard to production and consumption that generate malfunctions that are increasingly harmful for the health and general well-being of entire populations, whether they live in the North or the South of our planet (obesity, AIDS, Ebola, etc.). Finally, the third challenge lies in the emergence and development of a new generation facing poverty and unemployment and, correspondingly, of precariousness, vulnerability and exclusion stemming from economic and social models that are not only non-inclusive, but generate social and spatial inequalities.

The messages emanating from the international community, including the International Labor Organization, have resulted in the belief that social protection should be seen as a fundamental human right, reinforcing the already existing norms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, along with the norms contained in the International Covenants on Human Rights. They have also created a dynamic within civil societies around the world that has resulted in a growing awareness of the need to make social protection a strategic objective of their future actions in the fight against poverty and inequality in the world. This realization led to the creation of a global coalition for the generalization of universal social protection floors.

III - Horizons for MENA: What roles are emerging in the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors?

The Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors is a movement that brings together more than 90 non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and citizens who have decided to join forces to develop a common platform that can serve as a framework and basis for the post-2015 development agenda (2).

It reflects a citizens' universal raising of consciousness that rests today on the importance for citizens of the world to recover their basic economic and social rights. It is the voice of organized civil society aimed at strengthening advocacy for the implementation of ILO Recommendation 202 adopted in June 2012 by 184 countries of the United Nations family.

As was reported in the December 2013 and February 2014 issues of the ICSW Global Cooperation Newsletter, that recommendation is based on the heart of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Articles 22 and 25, and the heart of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, particularly Articles 9, 11 and 12. It includes a number of guarantees corresponding to basic social rights, especially basic health care, including maternity care, which should meet the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality, as well as the right to food, education and health for children, the right to health insurance, to unemployment benefits, maternity and disability, and the right to an income for the elderly.

The objective of the Global Coalition is to achieve the universalization of those guarantees by 2030. This target is linked to the strong belief of the Coalition that national universal social protection floors that guarantee those rights are closely connected to economic growth, social equity and sustainable human development.

Given this central issue of the realization of social equity at the global level and the fight against poverty, exclusion, vulnerability and marginalization in the world, the Rabat meeting was an important moment in the context of the advocacy promoted by the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors in the MENA region.

The meeting took note of the differentiated nature of the development of social protection in the region. According to the latest report by the International Labor Office for 2014-2015, total expenditures on social protection in the MENA region are estimated at an average of 9.5% of GDP in 2009. Country's expenditures in 2011 reached 13.21% of GDP in Egypt, 12.11% in

Jordan, 11.44% in Kuwait, 10.40% in Tunisia, 9.73% in Algeria, 6.57% in Morocco (2010 figure), 6.55% in Libya and 4.87% in Mauritania. Lebanon, Qatar, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman are the countries that spend the least on social protection, given that they devoted only 1.12%, 1.74%, 1.91%, 3.80% and 3.64% of their GDP on social protection in 2011 respectively. In Iraq, despite the effects of the war, the country was able to record an expenditure for social protection amounting to 11.65% of GDP in 2010.

Although there are other reasons, that rather low level of social protection in the MENA region has remained a source of the insecurity and instability in the region. It feeds the feelings of frustration, injustice and assaulted human dignity felt by entire groups in Arab societies, particularly among youth and women, pushing them to protest, revolt, instigate revolution, and sometimes even embrace a culture of violence, terror and even death, that is nourished, developed and manipulated by ideologies relying mostly on religion, nationalism, tribalism, regionalism and populism.

Such realities undo social cohesion and thwart initiatives that states and civil society organizations in some countries are trying to undertake, which delays the whole process of the generalization of social protection floors in the MENA region. For all of these reasons the Rabat meeting recommended that the Global Coalition strengthens advocacy and awareness actions regarding the future challenges facing universal social protection floors in the region. It also suggested that ICSW, in partnership with Friedrich Ebert Foundation, could work together to achieve that goal in order to open new horizons for action in the key area that is the realization of peace, stability and sustainable security in the MENA region.

In this perspective, it appears more and more urgent that the international community create a "Global Fund for Social Protection", as was suggested by the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on extreme poverty and human rights and by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food (3). Such a fund, which could be part of the post-2015 development agenda concerning Sustainable Development Goals, could be used as a basis for aid to finance the extension of social protection, especially in countries experiencing extreme poverty.

Such a mechanism could be based operationally on the "20/20 initiative" initiated by UNDP when the Millennium Development Goals were launched. That would represent joint funding and a partnership effort between the governments concerned and the United Nations system.

Beyond the issues of technical, financial and managerial feasibility, the establishment of such a fund ultimately depends on the political will of the rich countries of the planet to engage with the United Nations system, and through it the international community, in a true global strategy for making social protection floors available to everyone.

Sources:

(1) **ILO report** on social protection in the world 2014-15, Towards economic recovery, inclusive development and social justice, Geneva, June 2014.

(2) **Global Cooperation Newsletter ICSW**, December 2013 and February 2014 issues, New York.

(3) **Olivier De Schutter**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, and **Magdalena Sepulveda**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; Underwriting the Poor, a global fund for social protection, October 2012.

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

➤ ***Conference of young parliamentarians speaks up on major challenges facing youth worldwide***

The alienation and radicalization of young people, as well as a quest for more effective policies to solve a range of youth-related problems, became some of the key issues under discussions in Tokyo on 27-28 May at a major international conference of young parliamentarians convened by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Japanese Parliament.

The Conference made a series of recommendations aimed at addressing some of the biggest challenges facing the world's 3.5 billion youth population. These include unemployment, discrimination and conflict.

During the conference deliberations, the young parliamentarians affirmed their belief that despite disillusionment, apathy, political disengagement and unrest, the world's youth aspired to live in democratic, peaceful and prosperous societies and their inclusion in decision-making was critical.

The Conference underlined the need for a comprehensive rights-based framework of action against radicalization, such as guaranteed free education, including anti-violence and conflict-management programs, laws to criminalize hate speech, and the involvement of young people in all decisions relating to counter-terrorism. It also called for policies to curb the alienation of youth, including the creation of targeted opportunities to contribute to campaigns, programs and projects at the community level.

On another key area of concern – youth unemployment - the Conference recommended wide-ranging new action, including quotas to advance the equality of opportunities in the job market. It called for education to be better adapted to the needs of the job market, youth empowerment initiatives in business, better access to loans for young entrepreneurs, and action to ensure that the rights of young migrant workers and first-time workers are respected.

The Conference called for parliaments to craft pro-employment policies that help create good jobs for young people. Parliaments should hold governments to account for their action on youth employment. The Conference urged young MPs to act as advocates for youth-friendly policies, and recommended that they work together across party lines to achieve the best outcomes for young people.

The young MPs stressed the need for adolescent-friendly health policies, for supporting youth access to sports and arts, for combating hate messages in the media and on social media. The Conference emphasized the need to include young people in UN peace building missions, cut military budgets and invest in young people's participation in peace building so as to ensure that they are a key part of the solutions to conflicts and are not seen as perpetrators.

On climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Conference called on IPU and the UN to work resolutely to bring a parliamentary dimension to global efforts to build risk-resilient societies. It recommended that this should be done through means such as the Sendai Framework on disaster risk reduction, agreed in Japan earlier this year, and the global pact on climate change, due to be signed in Paris this year.

For more details please see: <http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>

➤ ***Monitoring and follow-up to the post 2015-Agenda: discussions in New York.***

The core theme “Essential elements of an effective and inclusive follow-up mechanisms for the post-2015 agenda” was chosen for the informal discussions on 28 May 2015 in New York between the representatives of the Permanent Missions to the UN member states and some international NGOs. The meeting was co-sponsored by the International Movement ATD Fourth World and the Baha’i International Community. The diplomats and the representatives of several civil-society organizations came to discuss what could be done to set up and strengthen robust monitoring mechanisms at the national and global levels that would ensure that substantial resources being mobilized in support of the emerging Sustainable Development Goals are used with maximum effectiveness. The participants considered the outcomes of the discussions important, not only for the post-2015 agenda but also in immediate terms, in the context of the preparatory process for the Third International Conference on Financing for

Development, to be convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in July 2015. The ICSW Executive Director was invited to and participated in the deliberations.

The discussion reflected several cross-cutting themes. Most participants agreed that establishing an *effective follow-up mechanism* to the SDG Agenda is critical for its credibility. *Capacity development* in a wide range of areas will be integral to the success of the Agenda and achievement of SDGs. *High-quality disaggregated data* is an essential input for smart and transparent decision-making. Greater *transparency* could be achieved by publishing timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information on development activities in a common, open electronic format, as appropriate.

It was underscored that mechanisms for monitoring progress entail a large variety and diversity of institutions and other bodies set up at the national and regional levels. The full engagement of local authorities is indispensable in the review of national strategies and policies to support progress towards the goals, consistent with national priorities. On the other hand, international solidarity and support for national efforts are vital for building or expanding capacities at the national level.

The positive role of peer-review mechanisms was also mentioned by several participants, both diplomats and NGO representatives. In particular, peer learning was singled out as a factor in strengthening regional collaboration. The important role of UN regional commissions in creating or improving platforms for peer-review mechanisms was also highlighted.

The key question recognized by the participants, but left without a convincing answer, was whether the ambitious set of policy goals and daunting challenges of the 21st century, which were well presented by the stakeholders in the preparation of the post-2015 development agenda, are commensurate with the improved but still pretty conventional toolbox at hand planned to be used in mobilizing the means to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

➤ ***Useful resources and links.***

1- Pensions Outlook 2014, OECD, Paris

Published in December 2014 the OECD Pensions Outlook 2014 says that the crisis spurred most countries to speed up reforms to make their pension systems more financially sustainable. These included raising taxes on pension income and pension contributions, reducing or deferring the indexation of pension benefits, and increasing the statutory

retirement age. The Report looks at pension reform, the role of private pensions, and retirement savings. Population ageing and longevity risk are examined, as are the means of increasing coverage and providing automatic enrolment. The volume is rounded out by a chapter on default retirement strategies.

For more details: <http://www.oecd.org/pensions/oecd-pensions-outlook-23137649.htm>

2- The PDRM Project in the Context of the 2015 Finance for Development Debate. UNRISD, 2015

This literature review, done by Nathalie Both, serves as a background paper to the UNRISD project Politics of Domestic Resource Mobilization for Social Development (PDRM). It defines key points made by actors participating in Financing for Development debates, including the World Bank, the United Nations, and developing countries themselves. It aims to better understand how their positions on the post-2015 Financing for Development debate, and in particular, on domestic resource mobilization, relate to the aims and findings of the UNRISD PDRM project.

For further details please go to:

<http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/search/0A26B96F35E7BF53C1257E4D0041ADD>
[E?OpenDocument](#)

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