SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN

BRINGING EQUITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

PUTTING SOCIAL ISSUES ON THE MAP

What is social policy?

Social policy is an instrument applied by public authorities to regulate and/or supplement institutions and social structures.

Why is social policy important?

Effective social policy in any country is an intrinsic element for social justice, inclusion, redistribution and protection of human rights. Successful social policies aim at the following: (a) enhancing investment in human capital; (b) promoting more productive employment; (c) increasing domestic demand through better incomes; and (d) enhancing the political support of citizens.

Ensuring an effective policy process

In order to be effective, social policies have to be articulated in an integrated manner and need to be supported by a coalition of social and political forces or social pacts, involving Governments, the private sector and civil society. The process needs to be legally binding, sustainable and harmonized in order to be successful.

Prioritizing social issues on national agendas

Social programmes that address the needs of citizens require targets that are identified and mapped by Governments in addition to the full participation of stakeholders, elaborated in the form of "social contracts".[1]

PINPOINTING SOCIAL INEQUITY: THE NEW DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

What is social equity and its opposite, namely, inequity?

The most universal understanding of social equity is based on human rights premises that are acknowledged internationally and that highlight the need for all citizens to be provided with equal opportunities in order to enjoy a fair share of development dividends. This implies the ability of citizens to participate in all sectors of society, enjoy both self growth and personal satisfaction, and live ultimately a decent life of their choosing with dignity, regardless of race, religion, gender, social background or geographical location. This definition and the methodology of measuring inequity in the region at the community, national, regional or international levels are often ambiguous.

Disparities of access to sanitation in rural and urban areas in selected ESCWA member countries (2003 and 2004 estimates)

Sources: ESCWA, "Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region" (2005); and the World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2006*.

Note: Four ESCWA member countries, namely, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, were excluded from this analysis owing to the partial or total lack of relevant data on some indicators. The analysis revealed that the most obvious disparities were in the poorest member countries, chiefly Iraq and Yemen.

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[1] I. Ortiz, "Social policy" (14 September 2006), which was presented as a draft policy note to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

Why is measuring inequity so difficult in the region?

The dearth of information, especially disaggregate data on the social situation, represents a serious impediment in the assessment of equity/inequity, development and growth in the region. More attention is required to highlight the importance of human development indicators that reflect the manifestations of inequity, including, for example, social exclusion, poverty, unemployment and gender imbalances.

> "There is a critical need to clarify what social policy is and what its objectives should be in order to understand how and through what process it is designed, applied, coordinated and evaluated".
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> *Source*: Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, during a speech delivered to the forty-third session of the Commission for Social Development (New York, 9 to 18 February 2005).

USING INDICATORS TO MEASURE INEQUITY: WHY ARE THEY SO IMPORTANT?

How important are indicators in shaping policy options?

Comparable social or human development indicators, which are essential components of national surveys, are vital to map equity/inequity in countries. Indicators reflect variations in living standards between citizens and provide policymakers/practitioners with the tools for assessing which areas of development require more attention and intervention, thereby resulting in better targeting of resources and, consequently, in successful crafting of policy initiatives. These tools indicate the following: (a) geographic disparities in human development between and among regions, countries and areas; (b) the extent of poverty in order to show female-male and rural-urban divides or income polarization; (c) discrepancies in efficiency, cross-sectoral synergies and distribution of benefits; and (d) communciate relevant information to policymakers.

What are some of these indicators?

These indicators are as follows: (a) *health-related indicators*, which include, where available, rural-urban and male-female data on access to improved sanitation facilities, public expenditure on health, access to hospital beds and physicians, life expectancy at birth, births attended by skilled health staff and infant mortality rates; (b) *education-related indicators*, which include male-female and rural-urban gross enrolment ratios and illiteracy rates; and (c) *other indicators*, including the percentage of the population below the poverty line, mortality rates, maternal mortality ratios, unemployment and fertility rates, and income shares.

Qualitative versus quantitative indicators

Qualitative data reveals whether inequity has decreased or increased over time as well as whether there are geographic variables in social inequity within a country. On the other hand, *quantitative* poverty comparisons provide information on the magnitude and impact of policy on poverty and social inequity.

MAPPING SOCIAL EQUITY/INEQUITY: A MEASUREMENT CHALLENGE FOR ARAB COUNTRIES

Heeding the warning signs

Social equity/inequity mapping can be used to inform policymakers and practitioners concerning the type of policy interventions that are best suited to any given social situation. The mapping process, which comprises an analysis of indicators of human welfare and poverty within a region, is critical given that it ensures comparability of variables, thereby allowing for measurement of the extent of inequity.

Can we determine our weakness or measure our needs?

Needs can be measured when there are sufficient and relevant data. Unfortunately, data on human development indicators in the region are weak and scarce, especially with regard to recent disaggregate data that reflect the gaps between different areas or groups, including urban-rural variations in access to sanitation, income discrepancies and gender imbalances. Furthermore, surveys and data collection methods are often unavailable or unreliable. There is a vital need to make available more accurate and accessible data that are comparable across countries and at the national and local levels. Without this knowledge and in the absence of information on the impact of public expenditures on poverty and effective programmes to upgrade data collection methods, policy initiatives in the social domain will remain untargeted. This weakness will in turn continue to manifest itself in social inequity, poverty and social exclusion.

What should be done?

There is a need to assess the specific types of public spending and the distribution of total Government expenditure among the different sectors, and to prepare relevant situational analyses.

INCOME SHARE QUINTILES FOR SELECTED ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

	Poorest 10%	Poorest 20%	Richest 10%	Richest 20%
Jordan	2.7	6.7	30.6	46.3
Yemen	3.0	7.4	25.9	41.2
Egypt	3.7	8.6	29.5	43.6

Source: The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2006*.

Note: The calculations are based on data for the following years: 2002-2003 in Jordan, 1998 in Yemen, and 1999-2000 in Egypt. Calculations refer to expenditure shares by percentiles of population ranked by per capita expenditure. As indicated, the most wealthy citizens enjoy the largest share of income earnings (highest 10 and 20 per cent of population), while the poorest groups earn the least.

ESCWA'S SCOPE OF WORK ON SOCIAL POLICY

In the area of social policy, the work of ESCWA aims at the following:

(a) Providing a clear definition of the social policy concept and practice;

(b) Presenting and using best practices in social policy;

(c) Enhancing the need to integrate social and economic development;

(d) Identifying the roles of stakeholders and enhancing their interaction in the policymaking process;

(e) Enhancing in-depth knowledge of the policy environment and providing practical guidance for effective policy practice;

(f) Emphasizing the need for more accurate and extensive social policy analysis, research and data collection;

(g) Linking research to policymakers in order to promote better informed policies;

(h) Encouraging more efficient use of financial and human resources;

(i) Empowering civil society and strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in policy initiatives.

WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A WATERSHED IN THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT

The World Summit for Social Development, held in March 1995, and the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action highlighted the need for countries to undertake the following: (a) to encourage sustained economic growth and development; (b) to eradicate poverty; (c) to enhance productive employment and reduce unemployment; (d) to foster social integration; (e) to exercise human rights and fundamental freedoms; (f) to enhance positive interaction between environmental, economic and social policies; and (g) to create a healthy environment for both State and society.

IMPLEMENTING THE 20/20 INITIATIVE: ACHIEVING ACCESS TO UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES

What is the 20/20 Initiative?

As an outcome of the World Summit for Social Development, developed and developing countries pledged to allocate 20 per cent of their national budgets and 20 per cent of their official development assistance (ODA) to ensure efficient, sustainable and universal access to basic social services, including contributions through multilateral organizations and NGOs.

What is the impact of the 20/20 Initiative on service delivery?

This Initiative promotes and better targets resources for basic social service delivery. It implies that the most poor and vulnerable segments of populations must have adequate access to education, healthcare, safe water and sanitation services. The main obstacle to monitoring this is the dearth of data on the allocation of funds to basic social services from national budgets and donors. This information can be used to alert policymakers when extra efforts and reforms are needed in certain areas; and to help policymakers to conduct more meaningful policy dialogue, especially regarding the allocation of resources.

The 20/20 Initiative: an imperative in today's world

This target has become crucial to sustainable development owing to such inadequate social outcomes as high under-five mortality, malnutrition, lack of safe water and sanitation, maternal mortality and lack of education, in addition to deepening poverty and rising debt and shrinking budgets. Building national capacities to better monitor expenditures on these services is therefore a priority for member countries in the implementation of the 20/20 Initiative and, moreover, represents the only way to close the inequity gap.[2]

"Social policy is imperative for strategically opening up economies not only because it provides the human capital necessary for enhancing competitive capacity, but also because it provides the necessary protection for citizens from the vagaries of global markets".[a]

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have little".[b]

"Social policy is not something to engage in only after reaching a certain development threshold and is not an exclusive domain of advanced welfare states. Rather, it is a key instrument for economic and social development".[a]

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[a] *UNRISD Research and Policy Brief, No. 5*, Transformative Social Policy: Lessons from UNRISD Research (UNRISD, 2006).

[b] Franklin D. Roosevelt, former President of the United States of America.

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[2] For more information on the 20/20 Initiative, see the joint publication by UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank, "Implementing the 20/20 Initiative: Achieving universal access to basic social services" (1998).

<h1 style="text-align:center">ACHIEVING THE MDGS IN THE REGION: WHERE ARE WE NOW?</h1>

What are the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?

Drawn from the Millennium Declaration targets and other international conferences held during the 1990s, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were signed by 147 heads of State during the Millennium Summit in September 2000. The eight MDGs are as follows:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education;
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women;
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality;
Goal 5: Improve maternal health;
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability;
Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.

The Goals emphasize that democratic governance, rule of law, as well as respect for human rights and peace are prerequisites for social development to take place in any nation.

Are Arab countries meeting the MDGs?

It is unlikely that the Arab region as a whole will succeed in eradicating poverty and hunger by 2015, particularly in the least-developed countries (LDCs). Despite modest progress since 1990, in 2002 almost 20 per cent of children of primary school age were not enrolled in school, and some 44 million adult women aged over 15 years could not read or write.

While high-income countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are moving positively towards achieving their targets, discrepancies in progress in the ESCWA region are very evident, especially with regard to those countries and territories crippled by conflict and unstable socio-economic conditions, including Iraq and Palestine.

How can we meet our targets?

In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015, the following conditions are required: (a) more effective pro-poor policy reform, investment-led growth and heavy investment in social services; (b) stronger regional partnerships and integration; (c) improved productivity across all sectors; and (d) institutional capacity-building in order to improve the collection, compilation, analysis and use of quality statistics, and the monitoring and reporting of targets and project management.[3]

<h2 style="text-align:center">ESCWA AND SOCIAL POLICY</h2>

Since 2001, ESCWA's Integrated Social Policies (ISP) Project has focused on forging well-informed policy frameworks in member countries in order to enhance national unity and social justice. To that end, relevant publications have focused on analysing policy practices in developed and developing countries, and on country-specific orientation schemes in member countries aimed at promoting national ownership of sound social policy initiatives functioning within purposeful frameworks of policy action.

What do we know about our intrinsic rights?

Aware of the need for an approach to policy practice emphasizing human rights, equality and social justice, Arab countries need to take into consideration the following international covenants when drawing up policies: (a) Universal Declaration of Human Rights; (b) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; (c) International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;

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[3] See ESCWA, "The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2005".

(d) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; (e) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; (f) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and (g) Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.[4]

What are the key challenges facing Arab countries implementing the MDGs?

The key challenges are as follows:

(a)   *Unemployment:* The unemployment rate among Arab youth was an estimated 21 per cent in 2004, which represents one of the highest rates in the world;

(b)   *Gender gap*: Policies are required to close the gap between men and women and to address the continuing marginalization of women;

(c)   *Illiteracy*: Arab LDCs have the highest illiteracy rates in the region;

(d)   *Wars and conflicts*: The cost of wars and conflict in terms of lost lives, displacement and setbacks to development continues to be significantly high.

For further information on the scope of work of the Social Development Division please contact:[5]

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[4] More information on the Programme on Governance in the Arab Region is available at: www.undp-pogar.org.

[5] More information on the Social Development Division's publications and news is available at: www.escwa.org.lb.