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REPORT

PEER REVIEW MEETING SOCIAL POLICY REPORT NO. 2 - PROPOSED OUTLINE INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES PROJECT BEIRUT, 22 JUNE 2007

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA) is preparing Social Policy Report No. 2 entitled “Operationalizing Social Policy in the ESCWA Region”, part of the second phase of the Integrated Social Policies Project launched by ESCWA in 2002.

A Peer Review Meeting under the auspices of the Social Development Division (SDD) was held in Beirut on 22 June 2007 to review and discuss a proposed outline for that Report.¹ While endorsing the overall conceptual framework of ESCWA on social policy and its country-based projects, delegates from Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) put forward recommendations to further refine the objective of the Report and its thematic focus.

This Meeting Report summarizes the discussions that took place on 22 June 2007, and presents the main conclusions and recommendations which subsequently will be developed into the second Social Policy Report to be finalized at an Expert Group Meeting late 2007.

¹ Background information and documentation available at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=495E>.

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INTRODUCTION

1. This report presents the main items on the agenda and summarizes some of the most relevant points and comments raised during a Peer Review Meeting held in Beirut on 22 June 2007 to discuss a draft outline of Social Policy Report No. 2 entitled “Operationalizing Social Policy in the ESCWA Region”, marking the second phase of the Integrated Social Policies Project launched by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 2002.
2. The Meeting was an opportunity to further redefine the normative work on integrated social policy and to chart a plan of action for the Social Development Division (SDD). It was attended by international and regional experts, as well as academics and representatives of Government and civil society, and sought to reach a consensus on the overall direction of the Report and relevant issues to be tackled, in addition to presenting an annotated outline.
3. This report does not provide a full account of all interventions, but rather attempts to present a summary of the main topics for discussion, as well as of subsequent comments raised during the one-day Meeting. It is divided into five sections, namely, section I, which provides a brief outline of the four main presentations delivered during the opening session of the Meeting; section II, which includes an overview of the main points of discussion on the concept of social policy and the proposed framework of ESCWA; section III, which focuses on the objectives of the Report and presents a summary of the follow-up discussion; section IV, which provides a summary of the specific recommendations made for the proposed outline of the Report; and section V, which presents the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting.

I. PRESENTATIONS

A. INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICY IN THE ESCWA REGION

4. Mr. François Farah, chief of SDD, opened the meeting with a presentation of the strategic vision regarding social policy and the integrated social policy framework of ESCWA. He stressed that social policy sought to influence the broader framework of development and cautioned against a myopic focus on poverty reduction. He also emphasized the regulatory role of social policy to enforce checks and balances and define the “rules of the game”. He stressed that it was the right economic climate to pursue a social policy agenda and confirmed that ESCWA member countries had shown willingness to set social policy priorities. He then outlined a social policy framework constructed around a social contract with the pillars of vision/leadership, shared consensus and social service delivery.
5. Ms. Ramla Khalidi, first social affairs officer of SDD, outlined the development of the ESCWA Integrated Social Policies Project, in particular noting lessons learned from past and ongoing country projects that could be brought to the next phase of the Project, which examines the mechanisms, processes, tools and instruments for social policy in the region.

B. FINANCING SOCIAL POLICY

6. Ms. Katja Hujo, research coordinator at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), gave a brief introduction to the financing of social policy, focusing on options for resource mobilization. She explained how tools and sources of revenue mobilization could be equitable in themselves, and how they in turn promoted social equity. She noted that when financing focused on micro-level concerns of efficiency, it risked neglecting its developmental role. She emphasized the role of economic policies and the macroeconomic framework in shaping the constraints and parameters of choices, or “policy space”, for social policy. Low-income countries faced various challenges in that respect due to, for example, large fiscal deficits, delicate political alliances and pressures of globalization to liberalize markets. She then listed the six main resource mobilization options, namely, taxation, social insurance, pension funds, mineral rents, remittances and aid, highlighting the opportunities and challenges they presented, as well as the relevant research questions they raised.

C. POLICYMAKING PROCESSES

7. Ms. Hania Sholkamy, researcher at the Social Research Centre (SRC) at the American University of Cairo, presented a case study on the realities of delivering equitable social protection in Egypt. She noted that while the political will to provide social protection existed, the difficulties lay in developing the tools to deliver and implement it in an equitable, efficient and redistributive manner. She reiterated that in that regard, Egypt had been keen to deliver social protection, but had not paid due attention to the processes and principles upon which they rested. Thus, there was a need to revisit those principles to ensure they provided a coherent framework and guidance for viable processes with the participation of all stakeholders. She also focused on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in delivering social services and observed the fragmentation of a collective vision and the division between application and policy of social protection. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of building a repository of experience in that area, based on bottom-up empirical evidence in different sectors to support policy choices.

D. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN POLICY FORMULATION

8. Mr. Nader Said, director of Birzeit University, Palestine, spoke on the complex and evolving role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in a conflict situation such as Palestine. He noted how environmental factors had shaped the scope for CSO activities, in particular where the role of CSOs had been confined to “weaker” interventions in humanitarian relief and with limited developmental impact. He noted the weak influence CSOs had on local Government, further exacerbated by their different, and at times contradictory, legal frameworks; and he stressed the importance of considering the weakened CSO status when addressing social policy.

9. Mr. Said also examined the ways through which the Palestinian Authority and Government ministries engaged with CSOs. A main channel through which the Palestinian Authority consulted with NGOs was through workshops and meetings. However, he said that such interaction was neither sustainable nor consistent; furthermore, it lacked follow-up. In contrast, sectoral NGOs and Government, for example the ministries of agriculture, education and health, enjoyed a stronger relationship in implementing and complementing the proposed programmes. Geographically, CSOs in Ramallah, the West Bank, were perceived as having a more direct influence on Government than those elsewhere in the occupied Palestinian territories. He identified three main types of CSOs and highlighted their respective influence on social policy: (a) charitable organizations that had no role in social policy formulation; (b) political organizations that confronted Government policy, but did not necessarily provide input to it; and (c) unions that tended to have a stronger political than social agenda. His conclusion was that the CSO landscape was fragmented and had limited input in policy formulation and implementation.

II. DISCUSSIONS ON FRAMEWORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

A. SOCIAL POLICY

10. A greater focus and further research on programmatic tools and solutions in social policy formulation are needed, with an emphasis on “how”, rather than “what”.

11. Countries have varying degrees of understanding of social policy. In Lebanon, for example, the Government equates its commitment to social policy with the sum of State expenditure on social centres. The strategy for social development prepared following the Paris III Conference, held to raise support for Lebanon after the July war of 2006, is restricted to providing social safety nets.² In Egypt, on the other hand, the Government has recognized the importance of adopting a holistic social policy and an integrated social policy framework. Although it may not have articulated social policy in the same way, the Government has

² Paris III International Conference for Support to Lebanon: recovery, reconstruction and reform (Paris, 25 January 2007).

expended much effort through such entry points as tax and labour market reforms and the social contract initiative formulated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).³ The objective is no longer awareness-raising, but about bringing all players grappling with integrated social policy into a cohesive process of social policy formulation and to provide tools for implementation.

12. Social policy cannot be formulated in parallel with the political debate. It is important to engage social policy in the wider political arena through public debates, which in turn are key bargaining processes in the strategy of formulating and evolving social policy.

13. Social cohesion should be an integral aim of social policy. It fosters the sense of belonging and having a stake in society; thus promoting engagement and active participation.

14. Social policy should have a dynamic role in social change. That approach is captured by such institutions as UNRISD and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) under their "transformative" social policy. Social policy should not be restricted to segmented and fragmented interventions, focusing only on poverty reduction; it should address the way in which visions are developed, as well as being the guiding principles to the implementation and delivery of those policies and processes. Social equity should be mainstreamed throughout all policies.

15. Processes for social policy cannot be rigid and static. Instead, they are an outcome of negotiation between different constituents and interests and they should respond to emerging trends.

B. FRAGMENTED GLOBAL SOCIAL POLICIES

16. The 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) Plan of Action provided a holistic road map to integrating the concern for human development throughout policymaking.⁴ However, the follow-up was not as consistent as for other global conferences, for example those on women, HIV/AIDS and sustainable development. That is seen as symptomatic of a fragmented approach to social policy at the global level. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate what the integrated approach failed to launch, its constraints and the lessons learned.

17. WSSD proposed a series of global initiatives to finance social policy. However, at Copenhagen + 5, those diverse financing mechanisms and resources were essentially reduced to Millennium Development Goal No. 8 on global partnerships for development.⁵ As a result, the framework for financing for development was addressed separately from that for social developmental goals and focused on such issues as trade, debt and aid as 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Thus, financing for social policy is seen mainly through the framework of allocation and efficiency, rather than addressing the content and processes of the social developmental agenda and impact of financing mechanisms, resources and redistribution.

C. SOCIAL POLICY AND POVERTY REDUCTION

18. Poverty reduction policies risk being too narrowly focused and neglecting the long-term developmental role of social policy. Thus, while economic growth and poverty reduction are important goals, the ultimate target for social policy goes beyond GDP growth and raising individual income.

³ UNDP, *Egypt Human Development Report 2005 - Choosing our future: towards a new social contract* (UNDP, 2005).

⁴ United Nations World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995).

⁵ United Nations General Assembly Special Session (Copenhagen + 5), *World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for all in a Globalized World* (Geneva, Switzerland, 26-30 June 2000).

D. SOCIAL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

19. A major obstacle to effective social policy in the Arab region is weak democratic processes. For example, the effective implementation of social policy requires functioning accountability mechanisms, checks and balances, and a context of good governance. Moreover, social strategies, political will and national choices cannot be separated from governance and accountability. Thus, social policy is interlinked with processes of democratization and governance.

20. Clientelism is another barrier to effective social policy and the efficient delivery of social services.

E. SOCIAL POLICY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

21. Although the social policy framework identifies civil society organizations as vital actors within the implementation of social policy, it was noted that CSOs are not a homogenous entity and their scope should be elaborated beyond that of service provider. The framework should thus clearly identify the different types and roles of CSOs.

F. TOOLS OF SOCIAL POLICY

22. Targeting is often not the most effective tool for resource allocation and can have a negative impact on other non-targeted segments of the population, as well as create competition for resources. Nevertheless, the choice between targeting and universality is not mutually exclusive and, at times, a combination of the two is effective. Detailed policy advice regarding concrete policy choices and scenarios is needed to assist Governments when deciding which form of expenditure will best achieve equitable and efficient reallocation of resources for a specific policy outcome.

23. Ms. Sholkamy presented an example from Egypt, where a conditional cash transfer policy was in effect translated into a targeting tool on the ground. That project, in a Cairo slum area, seeks to build a framework and vision of social protection based on bottom-up, empirical evidence. She argued that there was an urgent need to fill the empirical evidence on the impact of social protection on different population groups and the necessary policy choices to reach out to them. The outcome of such a bottom-up approach has the potential to influence a change in the principles of social protection provision by accumulating solid evidence based on participation and mutual responsibility.

24. When identifying social policy designs, there is a need to retain and document various initiatives. To date, there is no repository of experience in the Arab region that records success and failure in social policy implementation. As a consequence, each initiative bases activities on either assumptions or normative values.

III. THE ROLE OF THE REPORT

25. It was agreed that the Report should be dynamic and have a two-pronged aim, namely, to clarify the concept of integrated social policy, including advocacy and awareness-raising, and provide tools for translating that vision into concrete action. Many countries in the region have expressed a need for such further clarification, while the latter is crucial since it represents the aspect that has proven the most challenging. Thus, the aim is to produce a practical document that can serve as a useful guide to policymakers.

26. The objective of the Report should be further discussed, and a clear identification of primary and secondary end-users is required as that influences the structure and length of the report.

27. The Report principally targets policymakers in member States, as well as those stakeholders involved in the advocacy for social policy reform.

28. The criteria used to select what issues the Report should focus on must be clearly stated.
29. The Report should contribute to a policy dialogue and aim at influencing policymaking. Given its regional mandate, ESCWA is well-positioned to play an important role by offering a platform for dialogue and reaching out to other United Nations agencies operating at the national level.
30. ESCWA should build on its role and mandate as a regional organization by tackling the regional dimension of social policy. The Report could address such regional thematic issues as the status of refugees, the status of migrant workers in the Arab countries, and social policies for an integrated market.
31. The Report should adopt a holistic approach in tackling social policy issues. It should consider ways of addressing good governance and its link to economic and social dynamics in the region without getting embroiled in structural issues that are beyond the scope of action of ESCWA. Furthermore, it would be more productive to work with what exists and suggest specific policy choices within the existing context, rather than addressing changes in governance and political structures.
32. The Report should clearly define the role of all players involved in the process and study existing social, political and economic dynamics. That will facilitate contextualized analysis to provide better insight into how to intervene, promote and develop social policy.
33. Evidence-based research was also cited as key to giving added relevance to the Report. In the same way as economic policies are marketed based on facts, policymakers need evidence-based research to make social policy choices.
34. The Report should be part of a larger strategy and plan of action to be implemented through the programme of work of SDD. In addition, the need to get all ESCWA subprogrammes to align within the concept of integrated social policy was emphasized.

IV. VALIDATION OF THE PROPOSED OUTLINE

35. Discussions focused on the proposed structure of the Report in terms of sequence and substance. It should be noted, however, that some of the suggestions may need to be revisited in the light of the relatively short time frame available for completion.

A. SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

36. Detailed and specific suggestions on the initial outline of the Report were made and are set forth below:

- (a) The title of the Report should be changed to better reflect the content, and the term “operationalizing” is ambiguous and should be deleted;

- (b) The introductory chapter should elaborate on the definition of progressive social policy;

- (c) Chapter 3: “Mapping social welfare in the ESCWA region” should include specific case studies and an analysis of what triggers inequity;

- (d) Chapter 4: “Overview of integrated social policies” should project a concrete, rather than theoretical approach;

- (e) Chapter 6: “Social policymaking processes” should stress evidence-based policymaking. In addition, it was suggested to merge chapters 4 and 5 as a separate chapter on processes is not required;

(f) Chapter 7: “Social policy instruments” should relate to public policy, conflict, culture and governance issues, and not only to sectors. The chapter should cover social instruments at both national and regional levels. For example, unemployment and market labour issues cannot be solved at the national level and should be tackled from a regional perspective;

(g) Chapter 8: “Social policy in the context of globalization” should be brought forward as it provides the framework for the Report, and should also include regional integration;

(h) Chapter 9: “Enabling factors and constraints in the ESCWA region” should also be brought forward. Proposals on how to address the factors constraining an integrated approach to development should be covered;

(i) The Case Study boxes should not be limited to the Arab world, nor should they include only success stories, but also examples of where things had gone wrong in order to capture the attention of policymakers;

(j) Two additional chapters should be included to cover the following topics; tools for priority setting and allocation of resources, and integrated initiatives.

37. The Report should address the issue of partnership and assignment of tasks. As well as amendments and additions to the content, a reshuffling of the order of the chapters was proposed. A draft outline is set forth below:

(a) Chapter 2 should include the rationale behind the report;

(b) Chapter 3, formerly chapter 4, should be entitled “Brief overview of integrated social policies: definitional and concepts”;

(c) Chapter 4, formerly chapter 6, entitled “Social policymaking processes”, should cover the issue of globalization, formerly under chapter 8, in addition to regional development and developmental indicators;

(d) Chapter 5, formerly chapter 3, should be entitled “Mapping social welfare in the ESCWA region”;

(e) Chapter 6, formerly chapter 5, entitled “Status of policymaking in the ESCWA region: What is the current situation?”, should discuss social actors and constraints, as in chapter 9 in the initial outline;

(f) Chapter 7 should be added to cover opportunities and lessons learned.

B. GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

38. The Report should avoid a lengthy review of the diagnostics and instead present a specific model or approach backed by a package of interactive evidence-based research to guide policymakers.

39. The Report should make clear recommendations on mechanisms and instruments that have proved successful globally and putting those into the context of ESCWA member countries. Such mechanisms include subsidies for the poor and universalism versus targeting.

40. The Report should have a futuristic approach in the sense that it should identify the changes required at different levels and sectors in order to strive towards a better society.

C. TYPOLOGY

41. In the current outline, typology is reflected under chapter 5. However, it was agreed that the typology used should be clearly highlighted throughout the report. In addition, it should not be solely based on economic classifications, namely, oil economies, diversified economies, conflict-stricken countries and less-developed countries. Consideration should be given to a variety of factors when identifying which typology to use, including the role of the State, the extent to which civil society is active, and the different modalities of financing social policies.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

42. The Social Policy Report No. 2 entitled “Operationalizing social policy in the ESCWA region” is due to be published by the end of 2007. Given the time constraint, not every comment and suggestion will be included in that forthcoming Report; hence, some material may therefore be incorporated in future reports.

43. In that connection, the following steps of action are suggested:

(a) Examine cross-cutting issues that apply to all member countries of ESCWA, since there is a need to move into an integrated social policy of relevance to the region as a whole;

(b) Produce a roadmap once those issues have been identified;

(c) Formulate a five-year action plan accordingly.

44. The various elements of the action plan would subsequently be raised in successive reports.

45. The theme proposed for the forthcoming Report should be: How to mainstream social concerns in policymaking?

46. In view of the comments made during the Peer Review and the limited time frame, SDD will revisit the existing concept note and proposed outline and submit a new version to the participants for review.

47. Based on a revised concept and outline, SDD will prepare the Terms of Reference (TOR) and recruit regional consultants to assist in the preparation of the Report.

48. SDD will also develop a medium-term action plan that includes advocacy activities and initiatives aimed at promoting the Report and its recommendations.

Annex I

PROPOSED OUTLINE

As submitted to the Peer Review Meeting on 22 June 2007

Social Policy Report II: Operationalizing Social Policy in the ESCWA Region

Proposed Outline

- I. Preface**
- II. Introduction**
 - Objectives of the Report
 - Approaches, methodologies, resources and organization of the Report
- III. MAPPING SOCIAL WELFARE IN THE ESCWA REGION**
 - A. Equity/Inequity in the region
 - B. Poverty in the region as an expression of inequity
 - C. Magnitude of mal-distribution: incidence, prevalence and affected groups
 - D. Marginalization and marginalized population groups
- IV. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INTEGRATED SOCIAL POLICIES: DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS**
 - A. The concepts of integrated social policies
 - B. The social policymaking process
 - C. The importance of operationalizing social policy
 - D. Definitions of social policy frameworks and instruments
- V. STATUS OF SOCIAL POLICYMAKING IN THE ESCWA REGION: THE CURRENT SITUATION**
 - A. National social policy plans and initiatives and national development plans
 - B. Institutions of social policy
- VI. SOCIAL POLICYMAKING PROCESSES**
 - A. Social policy analysis
 - B. Policymaking processes
 - C. Constituents
 - D. Engaged governance
- VII. SOCIAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS**
 - A. Social policy instruments and good practices
 - 1. Employment and labour
 - 2. Education
 - 3. Health
 - 4. Social protection
 - B. Financing social policy
- VIII. SOCIAL POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION**
- IX. ENABLING FACTORS AND CONSTRAINTS IN THE ESCWA REGION**
- X. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Annex II

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