



ESCWA

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC & SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

For Regional Integration

The Social Policy Report II: From Concept to Practice

Aide Memoire for the Expert Group Meeting
Amman, 17 January 2008

Summary

The Social Development Division (SDD) at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is finalizing work on the Social Policy Report II: From Concept to Practice. This report comes as the Integrated Social Policy (ISP) project enters its operative phase, and is designed to serve as an advocacy tool providing practical direction for social policy makers and practitioners in the region.

To review and validate the draft report, SDD is planning to hold an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on 17 January in Amman, Jordan. The meeting will bring together between 20 and 25 regional and international experts to review the first draft of the report, and provide input and comments prior to its finalization. The EGM will also be an opportunity to review with the group options for follow-up activities to the report.

Background

An initial draft outline of the Social Policy Report 2 was the subject of deliberations during a Peer Review Meeting (PRM) on 22 June 2007 in Beirut, Lebanon. Based on the recommendations of that meeting, SDD amended the initial outline and further narrowed the scope of the proposed report in an effort to achieve a practical product that is of value to social policy makers and practitioners in the region. Working with an international development consultant, SDD has elaborated the first draft of the report which is being submitted to the EGM for review.

Report Objectives

The Social Policy Report II is primarily an advocacy tool; a succinct document of no more than 50 pages that can be used to promote a new way of articulating and designing holistic, integrated social policy. It is written in a lucid practical style that is appealing and accessible both to public policy makers and senior civil servants in the Arab world. Without over-simplifying the complexity of the issues facing Arab countries, the report presents evidence-based arguments related to the importance of an integrated approach to social policy using illustrative examples, boxes, and graphics wherever possible. It demonstrates the need for countries in the ESCWA region to adopt an integrated approach to social policy, not as a matter of charity or good will, but rather as an economic, political, social, and cultural imperative. Ultimately, it is hoped that the report can be used by policy makers and practitioners in the region to bring about change and reform in the way social policy is approached by government and stakeholders.

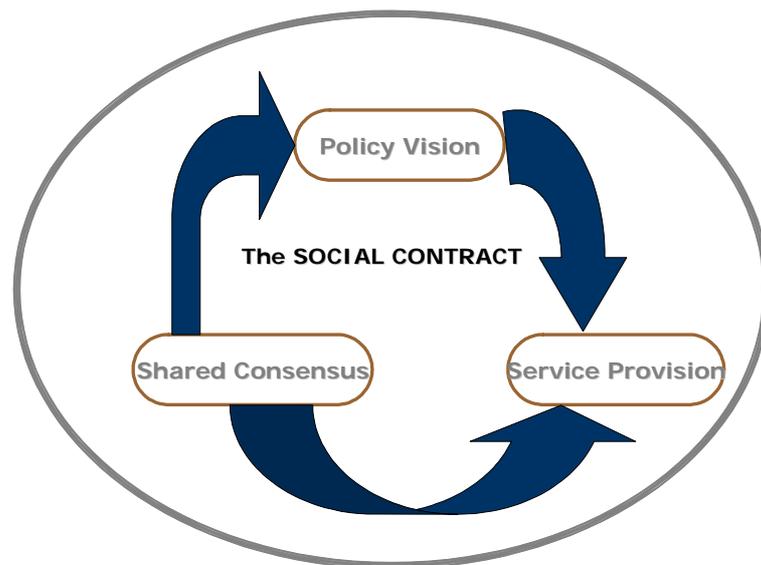
The publication of the report is not an end in itself, but rather part of a process of knowledge generation, advocacy and dissemination. It is expected that this report

will be part of a series of studies aimed at clarifying the understanding of social policy and the available tools and instruments to operationalise it. In addition, SDD will undertake a number of parallel activities such as the holding of a regional forum, the dissemination of good practices from the region and beyond, the establishment of virtual discussion networks and so on.

The Main Messages of the Report

International experience shows that where countries have achieved significant realignment between economic and social policies they have primarily done so through a coherent institutional framework that is consistent with the policy vision. This is particularly so where the vision rests on the principles of human development, human rights and social equity. Conceptualizing public policy in an integrated and holistic manner is central to this approach. At one level, this means that examination of social consequences of various economic policies must be an ongoing, systematic and inseparable part of economic policy formulation. At another level, this means demonstrating that sustainable economic development is greatly enhanced by citizen involvement and empowerment; citizens who are regarded not as passive recipients of services but as active participants in social and economic development. An integrated approach to social policy posits that reducing disparities, affording access and opportunities for all and promoting greater equity contribute to meeting overall government priorities for economic growth and development.

The report elaborates a normative framework in which integrated social policy is deliberately and consciously designed to reflect interrelatedness and interconnections at three distinct levels: Vision, Service Provision and Shared Consensus. This three-tier framework is best understood within the framework of a social contract that defines the economic and social relationship between the state and other actors.



(a) **Vision:** Vision requires first and foremost strong leadership to espouse it and ensure that it informs all policy making. This leadership has to be informed by high level analysis and that analysis has to have at its core the interdependence of economic and social objectives. The task of planning is a decades-long task and the mechanisms that support high level economic and social policy planning need to be embedded in institutional structures.

(b) **Service Provision:** A holistic approach to service provision is integral to economic planning and implementation and should reflect attention to the underlying social relations and institutions of any national development. Service provision is no longer a by-product or consequence of economic development but is integrated into a total vision of development that is demonstrated to enhance productivity, growth, stability, and social well-being. A Social Action Plan can translate a national Social

Contract into the national and local levels in a way that integrates delivery of social policy and achieves effective and efficient targeting as well as greater quality.

(c) **Shared Consensus:** Institutional space is required to enable community dialogue to evolve. This dialogue is needed to forge a common understanding and mutually reinforcing commitment to a new paradigm based on the social contract. Citizens active in voicing their needs, participating in their own development (as local communities, CSOs, etc) are the essential link between economic and social sectors and their enhanced participation is both key to formulating and implementing an integrated social policy and ensuring its contributions to wider economic goals and priorities.

Through an expanded elaboration of the framework, the report should provide policy makers and practitioners with a clear understanding of the “big picture” and a frame within which to locate the different sectoral initiatives and actors. The report will also address the elements necessary to bring about reform and change within government to adopt a new vision for social policy. It will seek to identify the basic conditions that must be met in order to initiate a process of change in social policy thinking drawing on lessons from ESCWA's experience and beyond.

While laying the foundations of a new normative framework, the report also aims to move beyond conceptual approaches, outlining a preliminary design or blueprint for an integrated social policy approach that includes practical considerations and relevant mechanisms that may be adopted in this effort. Such an effort includes an analysis of the contributions and benefits of an integrated social policy and demonstrates how it benefits countries in achieving their priorities and objectives. The benefits of an integrated social policy are also examined from a practical standpoint as part of national strategic development plans to demonstrate how they can be planned and implemented practically, effectively and efficiently and without breaking the budget or completely overturning a society's basic foundations.

Finally, the report will touch upon some of the processes and instruments that have been successful in other countries in the region and elsewhere in bringing about positive social change and a reduction in poverty, exclusion and social tension. This section of the report will raise the most salient questions for further research in the future.

Expected EGM Outcomes

A thorough review and critique of the draft Social Policy Report II will be undertaken by international and regional experts attending the EGM on 17 January 2008. Participants will provide ESCWA with a review of the report's technical soundness as well as its ability to convey and effectively advocate for an integrated social policy approach in the Arab region. The input at the EGM will be incorporated into the final Report which is expected to be ready by the end of the first Quarter of 2008. In addition, participants at the EGM will be expected to give input to the follow-up plan of action, commenting on proposals for activities related to the launch of the report and its promotion in the region.