

Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals

Analytical Report

Based on the workshop on transformative social policy in South Asia,
held in Kathmandu, Nepal, 24-25 May 2006

sponsored by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA),
the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (IRC), and the
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

August 2006

By

Gabriele Köhler and Jennifer Keane

with thanks to Cecilia Lotse, David Parker, Liz Gibbons, Peter Utting, Katja Hujo, and Karuna Nundy for crucial contributions, inputs and comments, and to all participants for a lively and productive two-day workshop.



Introduction

584 million children and young people live in South Asia¹, the largest number of children and young people under 18 in any region, constituting between 35 to 50 per cent of the population in the individual countries. Paradoxically, the region features several highly successful, technologically advanced economies, but is performing extremely poorly in terms of social development in general, and child development and well-being in particular. Taking the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a point of reference, most of South Asia's countries are unlikely to meet the targets by 2015. Child poverty and deprivation are among the worst levels globally, affecting as many as 330 million children or 59 percent of the child population in the region.² Child malnutrition, infant and child mortality, and maternal mortality levels surpass those of every other region in the world, and school enrolment and literacy rates remain dismally low.³ South Asia averages indicate that 46 percent of children under 5 are underweight, primary school enrolment is at 74 percent, and adult literacy is at 58 percent total and 45 percent for women.⁴ Disaggregation of these indicators by gender, caste, ethnicity, and location within countries reveals even poorer outcomes and attests to the layers of social exclusion that exist institutionally and at the community and inter-personal levels. Social exclusion is seen by some to be the most entrenched in South Asia than in any other area globally and is considered an underlying reason for the failure to meet the Millennium Development Goals.⁵

The governments of the region have made commitments to enhance child well-being, as expressed in human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and their reflection in national legal frameworks, as well as in the Millennium Declaration, the United Nations General Assembly 2005 Summit, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Decade on the Rights of the Child, and in national Constitutions and development plans. There has also been a significant effort in some countries to increase budget allocations for basic social services. However, despite best intentions, the MDGs and other child-related development objectives remain under-delivered in most countries. As a consequence, the rights of the child are grossly violated.

It is in this context that social policy is especially pertinent, and indeed critical, for the achievement of the MDGs and for the wider realisation of child rights. A consensus on the definition of social policy does not exist, but it can be considered a series of public policies designed to promote equitable development. It includes measures that affect people's well-being, through the provision of quality social services, such as health or education, and interventions which impact upon livelihoods more generally. It also comprises social protection measures, through social service provisioning, transfers and social security. Social policy also influences economic development, through productive capacity building and generating

¹ South Asia comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka as per the coverage of the UNICEF Regional Office South Asia. Many of the examples for social exclusion and of policies, programmes, and social policy challenges drawn on in this Report relate to India and Nepal. This should not be misconstrued as a bias on the part of the authors or participants, but merely reflects the fact that many of the participants who were able to attend the workshop had more extensive knowledge on or experience in these countries. Similarly, the Report offers examples from Latin America and Africa, as a result of the particular expertise in the workshop.

² Absolute child poverty incidence in terms of basic needs, as estimated by D Gordon et.al, 2003, *Child Poverty in the Developing World*, Bristol: the Policy Press. Quoted in H Waddington, 2004, *Linking Economic Policy to Childhood Poverty: A review of the evidence on growth, trade reform and macroeconomic policy*. London: CHIP Report No 7., p. 13

³ See UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2006. Excluded and Invisible*. (New York: UNICEF, 2005). And ESCAP, UNDP and ADB, *A Future within Reach. Reshaping institutions in a region of disparities to meet the Millennium Development Goals in Asian and the Pacific*. (New York: United Nations, 2005).

⁴ UNICEF ROSA, *South Asia Booklet on Child-relevant Socioeconomic Indicators*. (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2005).

⁵ See UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2006*, op. cit.

consumer demand; equity, through redistribution and gender justice; social reproduction, by assisting with care; and last but not least social and national cohesion, and the fostering of democracy.⁶

If it addresses these multiple roles, social policy can be considered *transformative*. Transformative social policy aims to enable all people to equally access their fundamental entitlements, secure and sustain a decent quality of life, and realise their full potential. It addresses the root causes and multidimensionality of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Ideally, it is not divisive, but rather fosters an inclusive and cohesive society. Through the creation of new shared values and social norms, it promotes a society founded on gender equality and equality for all, one that is free from all forms of discrimination and social exclusion. Transformative social policy is based on the human rights principles of universalism, equality and non-discrimination, inter-dependence and inter-relatedness, accountability and the rule of law, participation and inclusion, and indivisibility. A human rights based approach to social policy strengthens the capacities of rights-holders to claim their entitlements and duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations,⁷ and is therefore empowering. Lastly, transformative social policy addresses redistributive commitments, considers not only access to, but also the quality of social services, and is both financially and politically sustainable in order to create conditions for longer term change.

Transformative social policy improves the well-being of children by aiming to ensure that basic social services are universal in principle, and are indeed accessible by all in practice. It recognises that some children who are from low income families, live in remote rural areas, or are part of a socially excluded group may require support in the form of “special efforts” to confront the challenges they face in accessing such services as health or education. By making “special efforts” to ensure social inclusion and universal access to basic social services, social policy can create new traditions and values that respect the rights of all – for example, a stipend distributed to all female students can increase female enrollment and foster a positive attitude towards educating girls, or raising awareness among health workers of the need to treat all persons with respect will ensure that women from a so-called lower caste no longer avoid receiving antenatal care from a health clinic because they expect to be treated poorly. Effective social policy also builds the capacity of civil society to hold the government and service deliverers, such as teachers or health workers, accountable for provision of quality services. Moreover, because social policy addresses issues that improve the well-being of families (health, unemployment, housing, access to food), it thereby increases the prospect of a brighter future for children.

Finally, social policy is **critical** for children because their developmental needs are urgent and cannot be postponed.⁸ If a child does not have uninterrupted access to proper nutrition, care and health services in the early stages of life, the detrimental effects are irreversible. If children do not receive a quality education, they are more vulnerable to child labour, exploitation, abuse, and trafficking, and will remain trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty that will easily extend to their own children. It is thus clear that in order to advance progress towards the MDGs and the wider realisation of child rights in South Asia, the time to renew attention to foundation principles and implementation measures of social policy is now.

⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of the role of social policy in developing economies, see Thandika Mkandawire, “Social Policy in a Development Context: Introduction.” In *Social Policy in a Development Context*. UNRISD, 2004

⁷ UNICEF, *The Human Rights Based Approach: Statement of Common Understanding*. Annex B to UNICEF’s *State of the World’s Children Report 2004* (New York: UNICEF, 2004).

⁸ Richard Jolly, “Social Policy with a Human Face - Contributions of the UN to Economic and Social Policy: Lessons from the First 60 Years and Current Challenges for South Asia,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006). Also see video clip, “The Urgency of Social Policy for Children,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

MDG Achievement in South Asia: The Social Exclusion Challenge

Academic literature and UNICEF's work in the countries of South Asia suggest that social exclusion⁹ in the form of factors such as caste, ethnicity, religious affiliation, disability, language group and geographical remoteness, as well as gender, are the underlying cross-cutting reasons for the Millennium Development Goal commitments not being met. It has been argued that social exclusion is more entrenched in South Asia than anywhere else globally. Discrimination has resulted in inequalities in access to land, assets, education, health, and other social services; compulsory occupations; social hierarchical relationships; restrictions on use of public space and public services, and skewed participation in decision-making. While all aspects of social exclusion need to be confronted and addressed, exclusion affiliated with gender, ethnicity, caste, language, geographical remoteness, and income inequality in South Asia repeatedly arose during the workshop.

Caste

Caste-based exclusion and discrimination are not historical artifacts but are constantly reinvented through present day social institutions and relationships. For example, in India, micro level studies in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa and a fairly extensive study on untouchability covering 11 states and 514 villages, done by Action Aid, an international NGO, confirm continuing caste based discrimination and exclusion. These studies found that children who are from the Dalit community – also referred to as the “oppressed” or “untouchable” caste in India and Nepal – are seated separately in schools and treated poorly by teachers, forced to run errands for them and perform menial labour in the schools. In many cases, the school curriculum devalues the culture and experiences of lower caste groups, perpetuating discriminatory attitudes. Additionally, one study found that in 48.3% of schools surveyed, dominant caste parents refuse to let their children participate in Mid-day Meal schemes if the cook is a Dalit¹⁰, just one more example of how deeply-rooted caste discrimination can greatly affect the quality and outcomes of interventions for children.¹¹

Similarly, caste based discrimination persists in the labour market. The Action Aid study found that lower caste groups were denied jobs in agriculture and construction, were prevented from buying and selling milk in cooperatives and from selling in local markets, and were denied access to irrigation facilities and grazing land. In 25% of villages surveyed, members of lower castes received lower wages for their work than other groups.¹² This labour market segmentation also affects prospects of schooling for children who are from so-called lower castes or groupings. For example, in Pakistan one of the lowest ‘biraderi’ (professional) groups is the “sweeper group”. Despite the fact that many have passed their school leaving exams, due to discrimination they are still unable to obtain any other job except that of a sweeper. Thus, it is difficult for many parents and children in so-called lower caste groups to recognise

⁹ In this report, the terms “socially excluded” and “marginalised” are used interchangeably, while “discrimination” may be one experience of those belonging to socially excluded or marginalised groups. Persons who are discriminated against may or may not be socially excluded or marginalised.

¹⁰ The Mid Day Meal Scheme involves provision of lunch free of cost to school-children. The key objectives of the programme are: protecting children from classroom hunger, increasing school enrolment and attendance, improved socialisation among children belonging to all castes, addressing malnutrition, and social empowerment through provision of employment to women. The scheme has a long history especially in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, and has been expanded to all parts of India after a landmark direction by the Supreme Court of India on November 28, 2001.

¹¹ Annie Namala, “Children and Caste-based Discrimination: Policy Concerns,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹² Ibid.

the merits of investing in an education if it does not yield increased opportunities for livelihood improvement.¹³

In addition, violence against members of so-called lower caste groups is prevalent. In India, for example, over 33,000 crimes against Dalits were registered in 2001 alone; these were serious abuses such as rape, murder, abduction, kidnapping, burning of houses, and boycotts from villages. There is a very broad national framework of constitutional and legal remedies such as the right to equality, prohibition of the practice of untouchability, and prohibition of discrimination but implementation and monitoring of these remedies has been very weak. This atmosphere of impunity fosters a culture of silence, as groups that are discriminated against refrain from speaking out about abuses due to a fear of reprisal.¹⁴

Gender

South Asia has among the worst indicators of gender disparity in the world. In some regions, disadvantage starts even before birth and it remains pervasive from birth onwards. For example, in India,¹⁵ the mortality rate among children ages 1-5 is 50% higher for girls than for boys. If India closed this gender gap, it would save an estimated 130,000 lives, reducing its overall child mortality rate by 5%.¹⁶ Discrimination on the basis of gender poses a threat to girls' education, nutrition, protection and survival. Its effects extend well beyond the childhood years, and often persist throughout the lifecycle. Moreover, the impact of gender discrimination tends to be intergenerational, as girls denied their rights as children become women with daughters and granddaughters whose potential also remains unfulfilled. Gender inequality affects all women and children, but it affects the economically poor and socially excluded disproportionately and gender oppression and discrimination increase and are compounded with exclusion.¹⁷

Geographical remoteness

Rural-urban disparities persist in South Asia. A recent study on social exclusion in Nepal by the World Bank and DFID found that there are urban/rural differences in access to markets, services, information and political influence.¹⁸ In India, extreme poverty is concentrated in rural areas of the northern poverty-belt states and at the national level, rural unemployment is rising. In Pakistan the rural-urban gap in school attendance is 27 percentage points, and as expected, indicators are even lower for those who are females and live in rural areas: the school attendance gap between rural girls and urban boys is 47 percentage points.¹⁹ There are often less schools and health clinics in rural areas along with a lack of health workers and teachers, as many prefer to work and live in urban areas than in remote locations.

¹³ Naila Kabeer, "Past, Present and Future: Child Labour and the Inter-generational Transmission of Poverty," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹⁴ Namala, op. cit.

¹⁵ See for example Planning Commission, Government of India, *Towards Faster and More Inclusive Growth: An Approach to the 11th Five Year Plan*. (Delhi: Government of India, 14 June 2006). 7f

UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005*, (New York: UNDP, 2005) 61-62.

<<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>> accessed: 7/8/2006

¹⁷ UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 2007: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality*, (New York: UNICEF, forthcoming).

¹⁸ DFID and World Bank, *Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal*, (Nepal: DFID & World Bank, 2006).

¹⁹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005*, (New York: UNDP, 2005) 60.

<<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>> accessed: 7/8/2006

Income Inequality

In addition to horizontal inequalities such as discrimination, vertical inequalities are prevalent in the region.²⁰ As a result of economic growth in the past decade, South Asia has experienced increasing income inequality within countries.²¹ In Sri Lanka, the benefits of growth have not reached most of the population outside the capital city of Colombo and its surrounding areas. In India, uneven growth has increased disparities between fast-growing states in the South and West and lagging states in the North.²² Rising inequality also compounds social exclusion, as socially disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India, the rural landless in Pakistan and Nepal or the plantation workers in Sri Lanka, are deprived of the benefits of economic development.²³ Groups such as these, who were already economically disadvantaged, face persistent poverty and are less able to afford costs associated with health care or education services. Additionally, income inequality is a problem because unequal opportunities make it much more difficult for people to realise their full potential, including economic potential that could help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.²⁴

Key issues in social policy thinking and practice for attaining the MDGs

Social Norms and Social Processes

Discrimination and social exclusion are very much outcomes of social norms. While there is a need to formulate *policies* that address and redress the effect of social norms on disadvantaged groups' access to quality social services, assets and markets and their ability to actively engage in political processes, there is also a need to promote progressive longer-term *behavioural change*. This would include discursive processes to question and gradually instil changed attitudes and values, so that social norms and institutions at the personal, household and community levels move in favour of children, and in favour of socially excluded groups. This is a highly delicate and complex process.

The fundamental legal basis of rights as well as legal frameworks and processes can play an important role in codifying, guiding and/or challenging social norms. To use an example from Latin America, the effort to reform national legislation to meet the minimum standards established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Guatemala proved to be a catalyst for social change in favour of children and has fostered progressive social policies consistent with international human rights law. For example, the reform of the juvenile justice system in accordance with human rights principles stipulated in the CRC, radically altered a culture in which children could be jailed indiscriminately "for their own protection" because of "anti-social behaviour" or because they were "abandoned", i.e. could not demonstrate adequate material resources. New legislation and processes of implementation can also serve

²⁰ As Jomo Kwame Sundaram stated in the opening session of the workshop, "On the questions of distribution and redistribution, we should not resign ourselves to the inequality which exists in the world today, both at the international and national levels. The great inequality which exists today is of fairly recent origin, as most of these inequalities have grown in the last two centuries." From Jomo Kwame Sundaram, "The UN and Social Policy," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

²¹ World Bank, *Economic Growth in South Asia*, (Washington: World Bank, 2006).

²² See for example Planning Commission, Government of India, op. cit., p. 8

²³ World Bank, *Economic Growth in South Asia*, (Washington: World Bank, 2006).

²⁴ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Economic and Social Survey 2006: Diverging Growth and Development*, (New York: DESA, 2006) < <http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wess2006files/wess2006.pdf> > accessed: 7/8/2006

to reduce exclusion from the social and economic benefits of citizenship, not only of children, but of other marginalised groups as well.²⁵

In order for national legislation founded on human rights principles to have the potential to transform social norms, however, civil society must be aware of its rights and have the power to claim them. Awareness and action to claim rights is a political as well as a social process, requiring social mobilisation and effective accountability mechanisms. When information campaigns inform citizens of the government's commitments, through media and mobilisation, this can then create a "social ethic."²⁶ Violations of such an ethic would then help create a demand for government accountability and corrective action.

Changing social norms also requires attitudinal and behavioural change towards marginalised groups at various levels. Service providers, such as health workers and teachers, should be trained and sensitised on the need to treat all persons with respect, regardless of caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, geographical origin or income. In Nepal, when UNICEF started supporting maternal health issues, initially less than 3% of women who needed obstetric emergency care went to clinics to receive services. Interventions introduced to change the behaviour of health workers increased women's use of these services to 25% in two to three years.²⁷ Another example comes from Guatemala but also offers insight for South Asia. After the peace accords, there was an enormous effort to extend the primary health care system into indigenous areas by constructing new health clinics, but attendance was extremely low. The government assumed this was because indigenous groups did not value health care. Yet, when a team of foreign doctors under a foreign assistance programme assumed management of these health clinics, they were suddenly flooded with clients because the foreign doctors displayed a more positive attitude towards indigenous patients.²⁸ Universalism of services, therefore, means making services available to all on terms that respect their dignity. Social policy is thus not simply about having policies in place for universal access but about changing attitudes, practices and behaviours within society.

To achieve universalism of services, attitudinal and behaviour change is also required at the household level. In South Asia, most societies are patrilineal and so men exercise a great deal of decision making power within families. There is however an increasing recognition of the importance and implications of the "politics of the household". It is acknowledged that women have generally been far more responsible than men in managing household budgets responsibly and equitably, and this needs to be kept in mind as it has important implications for children's well-being.²⁹ There is also a growing perception of the need to focus resources on changing not only men's attitudes but also their behaviour in relation to women's health. A study in India showed that young wives' access to health services was dependant on the awareness of other family members, particularly husbands, about

²⁵ Elizabeth Gibbons, "The Convention on the Rights of the Child and Implementation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Latin America," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006). Nepal. Official publication details: Gibbons, Elizabeth D. "The Convention on the Rights of the Child and Implementation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Latin America", *Derechos economicos, sociales y culturales en America Latina: Del invento a la herramienta*, Yamin, Alicia E. , ed. (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdes, Forthcoming, 2006).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Suomi Sakai, "Aspects of Reaching Users: Considerations from Nepal," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

²⁸ Comment by Elizabeth Gibbons, Chief, Global Policy Section, Division of Policy and Planning, UNICEF Headquarters, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

²⁹ Jomo Kwame Sundaram, "The Case for Transformative Social Policy," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

the need for care. Intervention programmes aimed at influencing the extent of men's knowledge and participation in their wives' maternal care were associated with their wives' increased use of antenatal care services.³⁰ Similarly, programmes that focus on child mortality need to address the importance of investing equal time and household resources in girls. In Bangladesh, the Female Secondary Stipend Programme has created a positive attitude among communities towards female secondary education and enrolment has risen so much that girls are now in the majority at the secondary school level.

The engagement of religious leaders, stakeholders and advocacy groups can also be valuable in developing new social norms, both within households and in society at large. A recent high level meeting of religious leaders in South Asia on HIV/AIDS (Compassion and Breaking the Silence) made a significant contribution towards generating awareness, opening debate, and developing a new way of thinking about this issue in the region³¹. Building on this example, it would be beneficial to mobilise religious leaders and enlightened thinkers in South Asia to develop a strategy for addressing social exclusion more widely.

NGOs can also play a role in fostering conditions for collective action that lead to new social norms.³² The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which provides group credit and employment opportunities for women, has strengthened their bargaining power in the household and the community. Moreover, through collective action, women successfully persuaded community elders to refrain from criticizing and ridiculing women who work outside of the home.³³ This has contributed to new norms of gender relations. According to these women, respect no longer depends on being in seclusion but instead on being an income earner, working outside the home, and being mobile.³⁴

Even children's groups can play a role in creating new norms. Children have been involved in changing attitudes by drawing attention to issues like child marriages and trafficking.³⁵ In the Baluchistan province of Pakistan, 20,000 Boy Scouts devised motivational and communication strategies to strengthen girls' education and health. In a short span of one year, girls' enrolment and immunisation rates, as well as women's and girls' access to toilets, improved dramatically as a result of this programme.³⁶

Thus, the involvement of respected community and religious leaders, stakeholders, and advocacy groups can be instrumental in fostering social processes that remove attitudinal barriers and promote recognition, respect, and tolerance.

³⁰ Alka Barua, et. al. "Caring Men? Husbands' Involvement in Maternal Care of Young Wives," *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 25, 2004, 5662-53.

³¹ Comment by Anoja Wijeyesekera, Representative of UNICEF in Bhutan, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

³² Louis-Georges Arsenaault, "Civil Society and Public Policy in Bangladesh," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

³³ Bina Agarwal, "Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household," March 1997, <<http://www.ifpri.org/divs/fcnd/dp/dp27.htm>> accessed: 3/3/2006

³⁴ Economic and Political Weekly Commentary, "Micro-Finance: Transforming the Economic Ethic," *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 22, 2005.

³⁵ Save the Children, *UN Study on Violence Against Children, 10 Essential Learning Points: Listen and Speak Out About Sexual Abuse of Girls and Boys – Executive Summary and Main Recommendations*, (Norway: Save the Children Norway, 2005) 19 http://www.redbarnet.dk/Files/Filer/Rapporter/UNStudyOnViolence_Summary.PDF accessed: 7/8/2006

³⁶ UNICEF, *Analysis of Programs to Build Partnerships with Men and Boys to Promote Gender Equality in South Asia*, (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2002).

In addition to considering social norms and contributing to the creation of new norms, social policy also needs to build on an understanding of social processes – how discrimination develops and reinvents itself and how this affects marginalised groups. The tendency for marginalised groups to develop a culture of silence and a fear of reprisal, as well as to internalise dominant images also has implications for policy and programme design.³⁷

Social Policy Approaches

Combining universalism with “special efforts”

Universalism, equality and non-discrimination are central pillars of rights-based policy. The principle of universalism stipulates that all citizens and residents are entitled to and covered by – at least basic – social services, and their needs are addressed in public policies. Under universalism, the entire population is entitled to social benefits as a basic right.³⁸ This is in tune with tenets of international law which prohibit discrimination in the enjoyment of human rights on any ground, such as ethnicity, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, and is also reflected in the constitutions and legal provisions of the countries of South Asia.³⁹ Social policy accordingly strives to provide basic social services and equal access to opportunities for all persons.

However, in societies with pervasive processes of social exclusion, many groups may face special challenges in accessing services and opportunities that in principle are available to all. For example, simply the provision of schools may not lead to an increase in female enrollment rates, as other factors impede girls’ educational access, such as opportunity costs associated with girls’ domestic duties, low social value placed on educating girls, early marriage, a lack of female teachers, and concerns about girls’ safety while walking to school. Therefore, to increase universal access, affirmative action or “special efforts” are required to address inequalities and social exclusion experienced by particular groups.

These “special efforts” must be distinguished from targeting, which in contemporary discourse refers to social policies that single out groups who are considered and classified as vulnerable. Such targeting tends to become project-ised and micro-ised and thus undermines the principle of universalism.⁴⁰ Contrary to the rights based approach of universalism, exclusively targeting certain sections of the population has in the past often been donor-driven, or promoted by single-issue civil society organisations.⁴¹ Without the support of the general citizenry who are called upon to finance targeted programmes, these programmes are often not politically sustainable and because they exclude large segments of the population, they can also be divisive. Conversely, policies that incorporate “special efforts” would be geared to promote universalism, as opposed to partitioning, undermining or unraveling it. As universalism does not dictate uniformity, “special efforts” ensure that programmes with universalism as their goal incorporate a

³⁷ Namala, op. cit.

³⁸ See Thandika Mkandawire, “Social Policy in a Development Context: Introduction.” In *Social Policy in a Development Context*. (Geneva: UNRISD, 2004). Also see Thandika Mkandawire, “Targeting and Universalism in Developing Countries,” UNRISD Discussion Paper, 2005
<<http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/2005/docs/Mkandawire.pdf>> accessed 7/8/2006

³⁹ Gabriele Köhler, “Concept note: UNICEF ROSA, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre and UNRISD Workshop,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006). Also see SAARC Secretariat, *Review of the Decade of the Rights of the Child*. (Kathmandu: Forthcoming 2006).

⁴⁰ For an insightful discussion on targeting and universalism, see Thandika Mkandawire, *Social Policy and Development*. UNRISD Discussion Paper No 23. January 2006.

⁴¹ Peter Utting, “Social Policy in a Developmental and Political Context,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

concern with difference and diversity and are appropriately tailored to different population groups in order to ensure that all persons have access to, and can make use of, social services.

A focus on universalism does not simply imply equal access to services, but equal access to *quality* services. In Sri Lanka, primary school net enrollment is near 98%, but learning outcomes vary greatly, with children in the conflict affected North performing much worse than children in more affluent parts of the country.⁴² An analysis of programmes in Uttar Pradesh in India reveals that focusing solely on improving access to education cannot be successful if the education system is not already providing quality education.⁴³ In addition to quality, the relevance of services must also be taken into account. For example, the school curriculum for children in rural areas must not be geared towards middle class urban elite but must be pertinent to those children's particular life experiences and life choices.⁴⁴ Similarly, services offered at health clinics must be relevant to the population group that they serve and as long as they are not harmful to the clients' well-being, values and customs, such as traditional birthing practices or separate examination rooms for women, should be respected so that people feel comfortable accessing the services that are available to them. The provision of quality services that are acceptable and relevant to all persons is thus a key component of universalism.

Political and Financial Sustainability

In addition to promoting universalism with "special efforts" to ensure universal access, social policies need to be politically sustainable, motivated and supported in the long term by a powerful coalition of social and political forces or social pacts involving the government, political parties, business, labour and other social groups.⁴⁵ If "special efforts" are needed, it is important to sensitise groups who might feel adversely affected by the intervention in order to foster political sustainability and support. In India, for example, affirmative (reservation) policies in politics, public employment and education are designed to promote equity but have met with much opposition from those segments of the population who feel that these policies put them at a disadvantage. If no effort has been made to prepare and sensitise the larger group that feels negatively affected by the policy, it is impossible to expect that the policy will achieve maximum results and be politically sustainable.⁴⁶

Clearly, then, social policies must not be divisive but rather foster social cohesion. India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, adopted in 2005, might be seen as a large scale example of a policy that is designed to be inclusive, as it is open to all rural households - every rural household is entitled to 100 days of paid work per year.⁴⁷ Earlier similar schemes, it has been argued, had divided communities. An example might be the Indira Awas Yojana scheme in India, which had allocated funds for construction of new houses to members of Scheduled and Non-Scheduled Castes and rural poor living below the poverty

⁴² Comment by Dorothee Klaus, Planning Officer, UNICEF Sri Lanka, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁴³ Santosh Mehrotra, "Caste, Health, and Education: Why Uttar Pradesh is Not Like Tamil Nadu," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁴⁴ Comment by Suomi Sakai, UNICEF Representative, Nepal, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁴⁵ Utting, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ratna M. Sudarshan, "Gender Sensitive Macroeconomics and Impact of Public Policy on Social Inclusion and Social Transformation", *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁴⁷ Shri R. Bandyopadhyay, "National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA)," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

line. As a body affiliated with the local government was responsible for selecting beneficiaries from a list of eligible candidates, the majority of candidates believed that in order to get a grant, it was necessary to “hob nob” with politicians and bureaucrats. This led to competition among the poor that severed horizontal linkages within the community and instead built up vertical patron-client relationships.⁴⁸ Only policies that refrain from fracturing communities and instead foster social cohesion can be politically sustainable. In post-conflict societies, for example in Nepal after the social/political protests of spring 2006, the need to foster social unity becomes even more obvious - and urgent.

In addition to being politically sustainable, transformative social policies must also be financially sustainable, which may require a mix and balance among financing sources. If policies and special efforts go beyond the financing capacity of government, communities, NGOs, or available donors, this will lead to strains in the body politique. If the incidence of financing falls exclusively or primarily on an identifiable socio-economic group who feels they are not benefiting from the fruits of this expenditure, it will lead to resentment and have various walk-out effects.

Social protection as a key component of social policy

Social safety nets and other protection measures form a key component of social policy. They can encourage willingness and ability to take risks, which can increase employment and reduce loss of human capital. They can prevent people from falling into poverty as a result of financial or economic shocks, such as sudden loss of income opportunities, or sudden health care costs. Studies cited by the Asian Development Bank have also shown that countries with more effective social protection programmes exhibit higher productivity.⁴⁹ Finally, depending on how they are administered, social protection measures can also promote social cohesion.

Micro-credit schemes can generally be understood as instruments of social protection, rather than poverty reduction or income redistribution instruments, because they provide access to low-cost credit in times of household financial crisis but do not necessarily change the structural income constraints. Examples of microfinance programmes in the region include the Pradhan self help group approach, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Grameen approach. Microfinance programmes that develop collective capabilities and combine a concern with economics, livelihood, social action and citizenship, are much more likely to be effective and have community wide impacts than programmes that do not incorporate these elements.⁵⁰ The Nepal Para-Legal Committees at the village level are another example of an initiative that evolved out of a micro-finance scheme and is now helping empower women and local communities.⁵¹

Despite the general success of such schemes, social protection programmes confront challenges in reaching disadvantaged groups. In the current context of privatisation, decentralisation, and quasi-markets within services, social protection is meant to ensure that social services are extended to the very poor and vulnerable. However, there are people even within marginalised groups, such as migrants, bonded

⁴⁸ Comment by Naresh C. Saxena, Advisor, UNICEF India Country Office, at workshop on “Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁴⁹ Axel Weber, “Comprehensive Social Policy: Addressing Poverty and Human Development,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁵⁰ Comments by Naila Kabear, Institute of Development Studies, at workshop on “Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁵¹ IRIN, *Nepal: Grassroots Justice Makes a Difference*, 29 May 2006

< <http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=53576&SelectRegion=Asia&SelectCountry=NEPAL> > accessed: 7/8/2006

labourers, and those who have been trafficked, whose needs cannot be met through normal forms of social protection because they are not considered citizens.⁵² Social protection schemes also confront challenges in reaching those who work in the informal labour market.⁵³ Thus, strategies for formal and informal sectors need to be adapted and refined and in general, mechanisms by which social protection can reach people who are considered outside the mainstream in terms of poverty or vulnerability need to be further examined.

Research conducted by the Asian Development Bank found that all countries in Asia have some type of social protection scheme.⁵⁴ Social protection is even designated as a sector in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.⁵⁵ However, levels of protection vary, and at times, governments themselves might not be sufficiently aware of all the protection measures in place within their country due to a lack of coordination and communication between institutions and programmes. The ADB is currently piloting a “Social Protection Index” to assess social protection performance across countries in the areas of labour markets, social insurance, social assistance, schemes to protect communities, and child protection.⁵⁶

In conclusion, there is much evidence that social protection helps people in crisis but it does not prevent the underlying causes of crisis, demonstrating the need to forge a stronger connection between social protection and social development in order to realise transformative social policy.

Social Service Delivery

Globalisation, neo-liberal reform and the post-Washington Consensus have led to a reconfiguration of the relative roles and responsibilities of international organisations, central and local governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions and the private sector.⁵⁷ This has occurred through three avenues: privatisation of public services, the channelling of development assistance through NGOs, and decentralisation.

While privatisation is an option for service delivery, research that UNRISD has conducted on health care provisioning and urban water services reveals that privatisation has often had “perverse” effects in terms of equity because priority to efficiency concerns early on in the privatisation process meant that regulatory dimensions were often marginalised and pricing or delivery commitments had to be frequently renegotiated due to a tendency for companies to increase prices.⁵⁸ With regard to public-private partnerships in other areas, however, the Asian Development Bank has documented innovative experiences of collaboration between private insurance companies and social protection institutions. A programme in India which obliges private insurance companies to offer micro products to the poor is one example that offers lessons for other private-public partnerships.⁵⁹

⁵² Comments by Naila Kabeer, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, at workshop on “Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁵³ Weber, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Laylee Moshiri, “Programme Vision, Positioning and Practical Steps Towards Social Policy in a Humanitarian Emergency Setting,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁵⁶ See Asian Development Bank, *Social Protection Index for Committed Poverty Reduction*, Axel Weber, ed. (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2006)

⁵⁷ Utting, op. cit.

⁵⁸ Ibid and UNRISD Project on Commercialization, Privatization and Universal Access to Water, <[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/\(httpProjectsForResearchHome-en\)/E8A27BFBD688C0A0C1256E6D0049D1BA?OpenDocument&panel=team](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/(httpProjectsForResearchHome-en)/E8A27BFBD688C0A0C1256E6D0049D1BA?OpenDocument&panel=team)> accessed: 7/8/2006

⁵⁹ Weber, op. cit.

Even within the public sector, private commercial or not-for-profit enterprises are playing a far more prominent role and are engaging directly in providing essential public services. Due to poor quality of public services in many countries in South Asia, there has been an increasing trend toward non-state providers for health and education services, especially in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Low income groups are increasingly opting for private providers, which further depletes their meager incomes.⁶⁰ Similarly, in Bangladesh, due to the deteriorating public opinion of government health services, more people have been turning to private unqualified practitioners - an additional cause for concern.⁶¹

In many countries, NGOs comprise a significant percentage of private sector providers. While NGOs can contribute significantly to service provision and advancing progress toward the MDGs, their role must be further examined. If they dedicate their time and resources to social service delivery, their part in public policy debate and in supporting communities' collective capacities may be seriously hampered as has been observed in Bangladesh.⁶² In addition, if the government is not following through on commitments to deliver social services, donors may choose to focus on NGOs rather than trying to strengthen and build the capacity of the government. Moreover, there may be little NGO accountability towards communities. Governments need to regulate NGOs and ensure that they are providing services of a certain standard and in accordance with international human rights principles. Ultimately, the government must be accountable for service provision.

A recent report titled *A Future Within Reach: Reshaping Institutions in a Region of Disparities to Meet the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific*⁶³ found that to achieve the MDGs, it is necessary to mobilise all means available and broaden the range of service providers to include not only the central government, but local government, the private sector, civil societies, and communities. The report also presents examples of how the informal sector and small scale and medium size enterprises can be effectively supported to deliver services to low income groups.⁶⁴ Ultimately, when analyzing the role of non-state entities in social service provision, it is important to consider whether they are providing services that are in line with a human rights based approach to social policy, i.e. that they advance progress toward universal coverage, are empowering, and make the social services system more accountable.

Decentralisation can be considered another mode of service delivery and there is a general trend on the part of governments and UN agencies in South Asia to support it as a means to improve equity and efficiency of social service provision. The four types of decentralisation and their possible outcomes are as follows:

- 1) Political decentralisation can promote participation by the poor and thus enhance national cohesion. It can also trigger more frequent elections and stimulate the presence of NGO and Civil Society Organizations, factors which strengthen participation and could thus help improve quality of services. However, there is a risk of power capture by local elites and the emergence of ethnic or regional platforms.

⁶⁰ UNDP, *Pakistan National Human Development Report 2003*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 31.

⁶¹ Kamran Abbasi, *The World Bank and World Health, Focus on South Asia I – India and Pakistan*, *BMJ* 1999; 318:1132-1135 <<http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/318/7191/1132>> accessed: 7/8/2006

⁶² Arsenault, op. cit.

⁶³ ESCAP and ADB, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Yap Kioe Sheng, "Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Progress and Challenges in South Asia," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

- 2) Administrative decentralisation can promote local orientation and monitoring, but corruption and elite capture are also possible, as are diseconomies of scale and increased bureaucracy. Management issues may also arise. Necessary interventions include capacity development and area focused approaches.
- 3) Fiscal decentralisation can promote expenditure efficiency and relevance and regional revenue and subsidies. Generation of tax revenue at the local level is a requirement. However, implementation of country-wide coordinated tax reform is difficult once authority has been decentralised to the local level.
- 4) Market decentralisation engages the private sector and employs cost sharing and user fees. It can also result in sub-national economic development disparities.⁶⁵

Due to the varied effects of decentralisation, its implementation in South Asia needs revisiting. Data, although limited, shows mixed results regarding resources, cost saving, corruption, democratisation, empowerment, quality, and accountability. A review conducted by the UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), for example,⁶⁶ found mixed outcomes of decentralisation of basic social services, which merits further research.⁶⁶

When considering decentralisation as a tool to enhance service delivery, it is suggested that four prerequisites be kept in mind: 1) Functions have to be devolved 2) Staff need to be re-assigned 3) Relevant funds have to be devolved 4) Spending authority needs to be decentralised – albeit with clear and transparent rules. This requires capable local governments to which resources and staff are devolved, and mechanisms to allow for meaningful community participation.⁶⁷ With respect to devolution of financial resources to the local level, de-centralising tax raising and tax collection functions to the local level could facilitate accountability. Fiscal decentralisation, however, highlights the need for measures to equalise financial resources across provinces or regions, as a core element of national policy. Therefore, a capable central government is a prerequisite for effective decentralisation.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Mahesh Patel, “Effects of Decentralization on Primary Education, Phase I: A Survey of East Asia and the Pacific Islands,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Comment by Santosh Mehrotra, Regional Economic Advisor -UNDP, Regional Centre in Bangkok, at workshop on “Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁶⁸ Comment by Santosh Mehrotra at workshop. And Naresh C. Saxena, “Bridging the Gap Between Economic Growth and Social Outcomes in India: Cross Sectoral Issues and the Role of Donors,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

A Rights-Based Approach to Social Policy

A transformative and rights based approach to social policy incorporates the principles of universalism, non-discrimination, indivisibility of human rights, participation and empowerment, and accountability.

Transformative Social Policy through Application of Human Rights Principles

We aspire to understand, promote and partner with others to leverage transformative social policy that ensures fulfilment of the rights of children and women, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and World Fit for Children (WFFC) goals in a sustainable, inclusive and integral manner. Transformative social policy depends on the creation of a supportive macro-economic and global economic environment, which - through economic development, equity through redistribution, and social services aimed at universal enjoyment of the rights to education, health, protection and social security - helps to create a cohesive society of equals.

The levers of social transformation are (a) commitment to the principle of progressive realisation of universal and non-discriminatory access to social services and decent employment, and to quality services which ensure inclusion of marginalised groups through special efforts to address the obstacles which may prevent their access; (b) an integral policy approach that consciously links economic and social /MDG objectives and plans accordingly, and that takes measures for attitudinal and behavioural change needed to accompany progressive and inclusive laws, social policies and institutions so that social relations are transformed; (c) participation by citizens in design of social policy, and their empowerment to successfully monitor its effective implementation and to seek improvements in social outcomes by claiming their rights through individual and collective action to secure effective response from the State and society; (d) government accountability for results in social policy, particularly as relates to social services that should deliver results for MDG and WFFC commitments. In short, the application of human rights principles in a comprehensive human-rights based approach to development is the instrument for transformative social policy.

Elizabeth Gibbons, Chief, Global Policy Section, Division of Policy and Planning, UNICEF Headquarters

Universalism and Non-Discrimination

The principles of universalism and non-discrimination are at the heart of social policy. They direct the government's attention to guaranteeing that all citizens are covered and to ensuring the provision of services for excluded groups and vulnerable children and their families who are living at the margins of the mainstream. Programmes that integrate these principles inherently contribute to reducing social and economic exclusion and help to foster social cohesion, and democratic dialogue and participation, which can render the country less vulnerable to conflict and family and community breakdown.⁶⁹

A positive example of employing the principles of universalism and non-discrimination comes from Chile but can be of interest in the South Asian context. Extensive education reforms took place in Chile in the late 1990s making primary education free and compulsory, culminating in a Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing all children the right to 12 years of free education. When UNICEF called attention to the fact that one third of adolescents never entered or failed to complete secondary school, debates among educational stakeholders and policymakers, and the media helped to create support for inclusive secondary education among grassroots organizations. Research revealed that 70% of school drop-outs were from Chile's poorest families, so the government launched the "Secondary School for All" programme (*Programa Liceo para Todos*), which focused on schools identified as those with the highest drop-out rates, and the "Rural Education" programme to improve the education of rural youth without removing them from their culture and traditions. This rights-based approach, applying the principle of universalism, led to an increase in overall school enrolment rates by more than 17% and a decline in drop out rates by one third to 7.5%. This example offers insight on the importance of incorporating the principles of universalism and non-discrimination in social policies and programmes.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Gibbons, op. cit.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Indivisibility of Human Rights

Applying the principle of indivisibility of human rights leads to social service programmes that recognise the multi-dimensional and inter-related causes of socio-economic problems and social exclusion and thus address the inter-connected rights of the whole person.⁷¹ For example, inclusive programmes aimed at increasing girls' enrolment in primary school would not only focus on the provision of schools, but would also address the societal attitude towards girls' education, opportunity costs and school fees (formal or indirect charges) that may inhibit girls' attendance, availability of separate latrines for girls, the presence of female teachers, teaching quality, and the gendered nature of the curriculum. Most likely, a variety of partners and actors would be involved in addressing these issues, for example: parent-teacher associations and school committees in keeping track of teacher attendance and quality of teaching; government policymakers in guaranteeing an appropriate curriculum, reducing financial constraints, and increasing the number of female teachers; human rights groups and civil society organisations in changing communities' attitudes towards girls' education; and government officials and lawmakers in making education compulsory and allocating sufficient resources.⁷²

Accountability

As part of a rights based approach to social policy, all users must be able to hold governments accountable for providing quality social services, including marginalised groups. If accountability mechanisms are lacking, quality and access to services are likely to deteriorate. In a culture of impunity, teachers may not show up to school and health clinics may be closed, dysfunctional, or lack qualified professionals or medical supplies. UNICEF India has indicated that in 2003, absence of primary school teachers or primary health care workers exceeded 20% in 12 states in India, and 40% in six states. In the state of Bihar in 2003, 50% of the primary school teaching posts were vacant and of the 50% of posts that were filled, 39% of those teachers did not show up for work. Additionally, of those who did report to work, only half were conducting education related activities.⁷³

Similar to India, students in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan are increasingly shifting from public to private schools due to problems of teacher quality, absenteeism, and poor school infrastructure and even low income groups are turning to private health service providers.⁷⁴ Those who are unable to afford private providers are forced to forego education or health care services. In this context, accountability becomes even more important for ensuring that all persons have access to quality social services.

Applying principles of accountability in social service delivery can take several forms. Establishing laws that protect and fulfil human rights standards is a first step for citizens to claim their rights. Administrative measures that establish systems of sanctions when civil servants fail to fulfil their obligations - whether it is by not showing up for work or by misusing funds - enable citizens to hold government agents accountable. Information campaigns, whether organised by civil society, the media or the government, can also play an important role in ensuring accountability by informing citizens of the government's performance against its commitments.⁷⁵ This requires that sufficient time and resources be spent on measurement of outcomes, quality, reliability of services and level of use and satisfaction. An analysis of benefit incidence assessing the net benefits and which groups are funding the services can also

⁷¹ Gibbons, op. cit.

⁷² See for example UNICEF & SAARC, *State of the SAARC Child 2005*. (Kathmandu: UNICEF ROSA and SAARC Secretariat, 2006).

⁷³ Robert Jenkins, "From Outlays to Outcomes: Child Budgeting Approaches in India," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁷⁴ Jennifer Keane, Overview of Social Policy Interventions in South Asia (Draft), May 2006, " *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁷⁵ Gibbons, op. cit.

make accountability more objective. It has been suggested that donors should spend more resources on such measurements and analysis, which can then feed into policy advocacy, including opinion building and knowledge management, research studies, platforms for collective analysis, and initiatives to disseminate lessons learnt from programme implementation.⁷⁶

The importance of measuring outcomes to enhance accountability is exemplified by poor education quality in India. Despite a massive increase in the Indian central government outlay for primary education, from the equivalent of US\$ 600 million to 4 billion, the quality of education has remained uneven across states and generally extremely low.⁷⁷ In Uttar Pradesh, a World Bank study found that most children in classes III, IV and V were not able to read fluently from their textbooks in the local language or solve simple addition or subtraction sums. Measuring such outcomes and making the results widely available could foster public debate and encourage civil society –parents, teachers, and even children - to demand information about how funds are being used.⁷⁸ Finally, applying the principle of accountability means citizens should have the legal right to challenge the government in national court, and where national courts are unresponsive, citizens should be provided the option of pursuing justice in international courts.⁷⁹

There are numerous examples of accountability mechanisms that can be further explored as viable options to improve access to and quality of services in South Asia. As a model of accountability at a national level and from a different region, in Guatemala, media campaigns and mobilisation informed the citizens of the government's commitments and UNICEF made information available on rights at national and local levels, which enabled great debate in media and local forums. Eventually an inclusive ethic emerged.⁸⁰ It has been suggested, however, that in order for a right to information to affect change, local governments need to be functional and able to fulfil their responsibilities as duty bearers.⁸¹

An example of an accountability mechanism at the community level can be taken from Uganda, where due to corruption and siphoning off of funds, only 10% of the public education budget was reaching the local level. After information on entitlements, the budget allocated to each school, and contact points for enquiries and redress was publicly posted at each school, the amount of funds reaching local levels increased to around 60%.⁸²

In South Asia and elsewhere, Parent-Teacher Associations and Village Committees have proven quite effective in actually ensuring that teachers come to school and teach and that doctors turn up at the primary health centres.⁸³

⁷⁶ Saxena, op. cit.

⁷⁷ Planning Commission, Government of India, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Saxena, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Gibbons, op. cit.

⁸⁰ Comment by Elizabeth Gibbons, Chief, Global Policy Section, Division of Policy and Planning, UNICEF Headquarters, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁸¹ Comment by Santosh Mehrotra, Regional Economic Advisor -UNDP, Regional Centre in Bangkok, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁸² Comment by Elizabeth Gibbons, Chief, Global Policy Section, Division of Policy and Planning, UNICEF Headquarters, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁸³ Comment by Santosh Mehrotra, Regional Economic Advisor -UNDP, Regional Centre in Bangkok, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Finally, decentralisation, as mentioned earlier, can serve to enhance accountability. For example, if tax collection were devolved to the local level, communities might be more likely and more able to inquire from tax collectors how their resources were being utilised.⁸⁴

Participation

Principles of participation can lead to programmes that build citizens' capacity to take charge of their own development, protect their rights and fulfil their duties, thereby contributing to a strategy of empowerment. In the area of legislative reform, the principle of participation requires that laws be formulated by parliamentary committees and proactively involve citizens through such instruments as outreach, civic education and policy fora. In fulfilling the right to education, this principle requires increasing communities' capacity to, for example, negotiate with administrations for teachers, facilities, and learning materials, to participate meaningfully in the school's management, as well as to foster student governments within the school, and to demand accountability from teachers.⁸⁵

Additionally all strata of communities should be involved in survey methodology and planning processes to ensure that marginalised groups are actively included and that services are relevant to children's needs and life experiences. Community participation is therefore not simply about individuals having their voices heard; it requires people to become players and implies organised interests.⁸⁶ Support to capacity building of both the government and society facilitates meaningful participation in public policy. There are a number of positive examples of participation that offer insight for South Asian countries. An example of effective participation comes from Nepal, where UNICEF worked with the government to increase enrolment of children from the dalit and janajati (so-called indigenous) communities.⁸⁷ Because of effective involvement of the parent teachers' associations and school management committees – essentially of the communities – enrolment increased by 17% in 2005 as opposed to the normal 2+% increase.⁸⁸ Additional examples are from Latin America. In Ecuador, for instance, during the financial crisis of the late 1990s, UNICEF tracked social expenditures, made budget data accessible and comprehensible, and undertook an ambitious outreach effort, sharing the information with a wide variety of partners, including legislators, business leaders, academics, media representatives, and indigenous, religious and trade union groups. The central issue was to make public spending more equitable. A broad social consensus around the need for more just and equitable public spending policies emerged and helped to spur an increase in government spending on social programmes.⁸⁹

Other examples of participatory budgeting come from India. In Bihar, for example, community participation was key to the success of a malnutrition pilot model, linking feeding centres to the community.⁹⁰ At the federal level, the NGO HAQ first started screening the fiscal budget for its child-related expenditure, and created sufficient pressure for the government itself to now take on such child budgeting.⁹¹ This approach has been adopted by the Department of Women and Child Development of

⁸³ Comment by Naresh C. Saxena, Advisor, UNICEF India Country Office, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Gibbons, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Utting, op. cit.

⁸⁷ For an analysis of social groups in Nepal, see for example Lynn Bennett, *Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal*, (Kathmandu: DFID and World Bank, 2006).

⁸⁸ Sakai, op. cit.

⁸⁹ Gibbons, op. cit.

⁹⁰ Jenkins, op. cit.

⁹¹ Ajay Sinha, Abhijeet Nirmal, Minal Manisha, *Says a Child... Who Speaks for My Rights? Parliament in Budget Session, 2005*. (Delhi, HAQ Centre for Child Rights, 2005).

the Ministry of Human Development which has begun producing reports on child budgeting.⁹² Indeed, for participation to be meaningful, the minimum conditions are that the government be democratic and allow public space for participation, that civil society has sufficient capacity to seize and expand that space, and that resources are available for monitoring access and progress.

Democratisation is an important component of applying the principle of participation and is necessary for decentralisation to be effective.⁹³ Democratic institutions and processes can help prevent or check elite capture and support marginalised groups to have voices and be active participants in the process. A human rights based approach to development would integrally strengthen democracy and make the vote have meaning at a level where it affects people's lives by educating and enabling citizens to participate in civic affairs, developing mechanisms to increase transparency and accountability of the government and empowering and directing resources to marginalised groups.

UNRISD research has revealed a positive correlation between social policy and democracy. Critical elements include competitive political systems, an informed electorate, pro-welfare parties capable of winning elections, a relatively high level of interest group organisations (particularly labour unions), and finally, social pacts in which business interests engage in a social compromise with other government actors and comply with the social reforms.⁹⁴

The principle of participation also implies creative interaction with social movements and can serve to deepen democracy. A detailed analysis suggests that Tamil Nadu's success in social outcomes, relative to other Indian states, was largely due to inclusive social mobilisation that benefited everyone, both higher and lower castes. The study also revealed that technical interventions are needed in conjunction with mass mobilisation and that until mass mobilisation happens, the central government should trigger action to empower marginalised groups.⁹⁵ The influence of role models can also support transformation. In many regions of India, the public recognition of the academic and political achievements of Dr. B R. Ambedka, a Dalit leader since the 1920s, helped shaped political awareness and consciousness and has arguably contributed to social empowerment of the excluded.⁹⁶ Moreover, collective action can be fostered and supported if civil society provides citizens with the information and organisation they need to be able to lobby for their rights and their interests. Once social movements occur, connections and linkages need to be established with them to meaningfully engage them in policy processes.

⁹² Government of India. Ministry of Human Development, Department of Women and Child Development Child Budgeting in India. Analysis of Recent Allocations in the Union Budget. Delhi 2006. mimeo

⁹³ Comment by Anoja Wijeyesekera, Representative of UNICEF in Bhutan, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁹⁴ Comment by Peter Utting, Deputy Director, UNRISD, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁹⁵ Mehrotra, op. cit.

⁹⁶ Comment by Santosh Mehrotra, Regional Economic Advisor -UNDP, Regional Centre in Bangkok, at workshop on "Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals", 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Beware of Buzzwords

Four “buzzwords”– rights, accountability, participation, and knowledge – were used freely during the workshop – as in development discourse more generally. It is useful to reflect on these terms in order to prevent them from being diluted.

“**Rights**” – there is a risk that the term “rights” is reduced to the notion that we should recognise and respect rights. What is often forgotten is the empowerment component, i.e. the capacity of weaker groups to exert claims on the powerful.

“**Accountability**” - this term is often reduced to mean answering to different actors and stakeholders. What is often lost is the need for penalties and sanctions for non-compliance.

“**Participation**” – this term is often utilised to mean that weaker groups in society should acquire a voice and should be able to engage in dialogue. Often what is lost is the notion that they should become players, which implies organisation, mobilisation and collective action

“**Knowledge**” – this is often reduced to imply learning from “best practice”, and what is forgotten is critical thinking, including contextualising of experiences.

Peter Utting, Deputy Director, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

In sum, a human rights based approach to social policy incorporates the principles of universalism and non-discrimination, indivisibility of human rights, accountability, and participation, the latter entailing community participation, democratisation and engagement with social movements. Integrating these principles into programmes strengthens the social fabric and reduces potential social discord, thereby contributing to the sustainability of economic and social development.

Financing Social Policy: Revenue and Expenditure Policies

The role of government in the delivery of social services varies among countries, as does the share of the fiscal budget in the GDP. Both elements are shaped by history and by institutions, and often, contiguous geographical regions share a similar approach to the role of government. A “cultural geography” of social policy would compare the form of social services, as evidenced by the European prototype of a government-funded welfare state offering a broad range of public goods, with, for example a North American neo-liberal model favouring the market mode for many social services.⁹⁷

Regardless of the actual position of the government and its financial resources, the argument of fiscal constraints on social policy are rarely, if ever, compelling, since these constraints are relative, and can be addressed in different ways.⁹⁸ The challenge is to identify suitable means in specific country situations and selecting, through professional as well as public discourse, among a set of options: restructuring within a given budget; raising the efficiency of expenditure; increasing tax revenue or tax compliance to enable increased social expenditure; being more tolerant of fiscal deficits; mobilising grants and using financial instruments such as debt restructuring or public borrowing.

⁹⁷ Gabriele Köhler, “An Overview of Inclusive/Transformative Social Policy Initiatives in South Asia,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

⁹⁸ Comment by Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, at workshop on “Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Financing Mechanisms

Sources of finance for social policy includes direct and indirect taxes, cost sharing through user fees or and/or charges, grants in the form of Overseas Development Assistance, loans (whether commercial or from international development banks), and public borrowing in the domestic or international markets. The relationship between the government, the individual and the society is reflected in financing mechanisms, with direct progressive taxes being the most solidarious and user fees being the most regressive.⁹⁹

Direct and indirect income taxation are the classical sources of fiscal revenue in developed countries, while trade taxes - revenues from customs and, earlier on, from export licenses – were the predominant source of government revenue in developing countries, but in the course of trade liberalisation, trade taxes are financing a diminishing share of government expenditure. This opens an opportunity to revisit income and wealth taxation, and notably to use progressive income tax as a way to finance government expenditure and at the same time redistribute income. An interesting new tax for social policy purposes is the cess – a single-purpose additional tax introduced in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its revenues are dedicated to education, or to the national plan of action for children, respectively.¹⁰⁰

User fees are a different modality to finance social service costs. They were introduced on a broad scale during the 1980s¹⁰¹, and were inspired by certain theoretical assumptions and policy principles, attitudes and values, notably a culture of marketisation and commoditisation, and notions of efficiency. They were used in a time of budget cuts, and designed to contribute to the costs and meet resource needs for services used, especially at the local level. It was also felt that user fees would convey a sense of ownership of services, since surveys indicated that users valued a service more when they paid even a nominal amount for it and would be more likely to hold service providers accountable if they had contributed to the cost. However, user fees are not in compliance with universalism and a human rights based approach to social policy, as they exclude low income groups and create undesirable disincentives for using a service, unless provisions are made for effective reimbursement or exemption of low income groups.¹⁰² Along with user charges also comes a lack of transparency, as well as the transaction costs of collecting and administering them. Research has also shown that in the area of health, net revenues generated by user fees are often insignificant.¹⁰³

In South Asia, preliminary research¹⁰⁴ has revealed a renewed commitment to abolish any user fees, including ancillary costs. However, de facto charges as well as informal and out-of-pocket payments continue for a combination of reasons. They include the under-funding of schools and community obligations to support schools with in cash or in kind contributions, the pressure to provide incentives to teaching and other staff, as well as traditions of showing respect by presenting donations. Such payment

⁹⁹ Enrique Delamonica, “Integration of Economic and Social Policies: General Framework and the Role of Public Spending,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹⁰⁰ See Jennifer Keane, Overview of Social Policy Interventions in South Asia, *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹⁰¹ For a long-term overview, see Giovanni Andrea Cornia, Richard Jolly, and Frances Stewart, *Adjustment with a Human Face*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁰² David Parker, “Social Service Financing at the Local Level: The Case of User Charges,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹⁰³ Devi Prasad Prasai, “An Overview of Health Financing: Models and Experiences,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Keane, op. cit.

demands, coupled with poor quality of public services, have led to an increasing utilisation of private providers in both health and education. Payments in the private sector are considered to be more predictable and transparent.

Africa offers some lessons in school fee abolition that deserve consideration in South Asia, and globally. School fees, including tuition fees, and fees associated with books, supplies, registration, and school committees, have been a major barrier to educational access in much of Eastern Africa. To reduce these barriers, several countries, including Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, abolished school fees completely over the past few years.¹⁰⁵ As a result, enrolment soared. However, this was accompanied by a decline in education quality - classrooms were overcrowded, there was a great shortage of teachers and curricula were irrelevant, since provisions had not been made to meet the surge in demand. Attendance gradually declined and drop out rates increased, as the time spent in school was not considered valuable. Building on these experiences, a strategy is currently being designed related to developing systematic guidelines, strengthening public information about school fee abolition, and above all getting the human and organisational resources in place before the abolition to prepare for a massive enrolment increase.¹⁰⁶ Establishing a reliable plan to replace resources lost due to school fee abolition also needs further elaboration.

An analogue case is the Welcome to School Campaign introduced by the government of Nepal in 2004. It was a successful drive to draw all children into school. However, teachers were not prepared and classroom facilities and teaching aides were not sufficient, so that the intake in new students outstripped the schools' capacities, resulting in poor learning environments.¹⁰⁷

These lessons reveal that reducing or abolishing user charges, or drastically increasing enrolment by other means, require a clear definition and maintenance of service coverage and quality standards; concomitant government commitment to provide additional public resources; improved financing models; attention to political support and viability; and a focus on protection of vulnerable groups.¹⁰⁸

In the health sector, forms of financing vary, depending on the type of health services covered, users' employment status, locations and other factors. A health insurance system can, notionally, be funded by the fiscal budget or by users' contributions which can be staggered by income group, or a combination of both methods. The insurance model includes low cost high frequency schemes, such as community health insurance, and are used mainly for primary health care services that cover childhood related illness, maternal illness, and disease control. Positive aspects of these schemes are that they entail low administrative costs and are easy to manage, are affordable due to the low premium, are free from claim and reimbursement hassle, cover the informal sector and rural populations, and are related to an increase

¹⁰⁵ Dan Wlwana, "Uganda Hits Universal Primary Education Target," *The East African Newspaper*, Kampala, Uganda, 2001, < http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know_sharing/grassroots_stories/uganda.shtml > accessed: 7/8/2006. Also see Alex A. Alubisia, "UPE: Myth or Reality. A review of experiences, challenges and lessons from East Africa", Report by Oxfam Great Britain and the African Network Campaign on Education for All (Nairobi: OxFam GB and ANCEFA, 2005) <http://www.ungei.org/SFAIdocs/resources/UPE_Myth_or_Reality_East_Africa_2005.pdf> And R. Avenstrup, X. Liang and S. Nellemann, "Free Primary Education and Poverty Reduction: The Case of Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi and Uganda," paper prepared for the World Bank, March 2004 < http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/12/02/000090341_20041202100416/Rendered/PDF/307650East0Afr10ed01see0also0307591.pdf > See also UNICEF and World Bank, "Moving Toward Free Basic Education: Policy Issues and Implementation Challenges," December 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Parker, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Sagun S. Lawoti, 'Welcome to School: Rallying for Universal Access to Education in Nepal,' 7 June 2006, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EGUA-6QKRPG?OpenDocument> accessed: 7/8/2006

¹⁰⁸ Parker, op. cit.

in utilisation of skilled birth attendants and child health related services, thereby contributing to the MDGs. However, they are more difficult to sustain and expand, involve small pooling and a small benefit package, and allow no choice of care providers.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, high cost low frequency schemes, such as voluntary health insurance, focus on secondary or tertiary care and include only hospital based services. These cover mostly the formal sector, are easy to administer, offer a choice of providers, and contribute to health system development and poverty reduction. However, they provide only low coverage, require a co-payment, and exclude low income groups.¹¹⁰

In the health sector in South Asia, 60-70% of health care costs are covered by informal out-of-pocket spending, the highest rate of private expenditure globally. To achieve the MDGs by 2015, 60-70% of costs should be covered by social and community insurance, pre-paid schemes and tax revenue and out of pocket spending should be reduced to just 30-40%.¹¹¹

Various financing mechanisms for social service provision have been examined, including insurance, pre-payment, and user charges at the micro level. To truly transform the financing of social services, a number of operational concerns and challenges must be addressed within these approaches. Fairness (equity), effectiveness and efficiency must be priorities, especially in poor communities. The presence of informal fees or charges and the barriers to access that they create must also be considered. Finally, competition and tradeoffs between public and private sector delivered services must be further examined if universalism is to be reached in the longer term.

Macroeconomics and Fiscal Policy

When considering the financing of social policy, it is vital to revisit the existing macroeconomic and international context and conventional economic wisdom. A new consensus is emerging, recognising the ‘long-lost’ principle that social and economic policy needs to be combined. When they are disjointed, social policy becomes a remedy to correct for market failures and is merely reactive and acts as a safety net. If, however, social and economic policies are integrated, there are positive synergies, with attention to social services facilitating economic development, and a socially-sensitive economic policy generating genuine “pro-poor” growth.¹¹²

After a quarter of a century of experimenting, there is now fairly broad recognition that the Washington Consensus was unsuccessful because it was fundamentally flawed. Very importantly also, the experience of economic liberalisation has largely failed to deliver pro-poor growth. For example, World Bank as well as other research suggests a relationship between trade liberalisation and lower growth, de-industrialisation, and even agrarian collapse. Some IMF research now suggests that financial liberalisation has neither enhanced growth nor reduced volatility.¹¹³ The claim that growth of income will be able to alleviate poverty is misleading. It is very important, therefore, to not only address the question of growth, but recognise that re-distribution remains the fundamental factor to address the gross inequalities present in the world economy. It is essential to broaden macroeconomic instruments beyond the Washington- or post-Washington consensus.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Prasai, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² See for example Thandika Mkandawire, Social Policy in a Development Context: Introduction.” Op. cit.

¹¹³ Peter Heller, *Understanding Fiscal Space*. Policy Development Paper 05/4 (Washington: International Monetary Fund, 2005). < <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/pdp/2005/pdp04.pdf> >

¹¹⁴ Jomo Kwame Sundaram, “The UN and Social Policy,” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGS* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

Secondly, with regard to social policy, it is also important to consider policy space. This policy space should not be seen simply in terms of social policy, narrowly conceived, but of policy space more broadly. For instance, fiscal policy space is a very important determinant of budgets, and hence, of the resources available for social service delivery,¹¹⁵ but policy space also requires the freedom for governments to adapt policy which encompasses income distribution and active labour market policies. Employment policy is crucial - if there is no gainful employment for much of the population then the resources for social policy are severely constrained, effectively limiting space for social policy.¹¹⁶ All three elements of macroeconomic policy – service delivery, income distribution, and employment - combined lead to social development and thus need to be conceived as integrated components.¹¹⁷

Governments need policy space to choose among alternative policies with regard to macroeconomic and to social policy, including sectoral policies. Implicit in the MDG commitments is to establish policies that are organically created and nationally owned – characterised by the exhortation to “put governments in the driver’s seat.” South Asia is a culturally diverse region, suggesting the challenge for genuinely appropriate policies and the need to bear in mind different institutional and political histories and traditions. Context-specific approaches are needed in such an environment.

Developments in the UN System’s processes and instruments at the country levels, such as the Common Country Agreement (CCA) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), flag the importance for agencies and departments engaged in social policy - such as UNICEF, UNRISD or UN-DESA - to be fully involved in and contribute to such discussions. The processes around the MDGs are the first time that all agencies, programmes and funds – the broader UN family, including the development banks and the IMF – are pursuing commonly formulated goals in line with commitments of member states. This is a great step forward. The MDGs are also slowly being brought into the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes. In the first years of the PRS processes, a narrow focus on poverty reduction and reactive safety nets – rather than measures to structurally address poverty – undermined effectiveness. Crucial connections and synergies with other areas of social policy are still missed, and the omission of goals and policies for employment and decent work in the MDG agenda is a critical flaw. As one response, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs is working on guidance notes to provide governments and UN country teams with alternative views and approaches that could broaden the scope and thrust of PRSP discussions.¹¹⁸ Similar requirements hold for processes in support of national PRSPs and national development plans – with the latter becoming increasingly attuned to the logic of the MDGs.¹¹⁹

Policy discussions cannot be approached in a mechanistic way. By providing space for policy options and integrating economic and social development, new and more effective, inclusive and transformative approaches to social policy can emerge. The international and regional financial institutions can be allies¹²⁰ in this process, as they are increasingly revising the stance on macroeconomic policy.

¹¹⁵ Jomo Kwame Sundaram, “The Case for Transformative Social Policy,” op. cit.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Delamonica, op. cit.

¹¹⁸ Jomo Kwame Sundaram, “The UN and Social Policy,” op. cit. And Isabel Ortiz, *MDGs and National Development Strategies: Tackling Policy Gaps and Moving the Equity Agenda Forward*. Social Policy Guidance Note. (New York: UN DESA and UNDP, Forthcoming 2006).

¹¹⁹ See for example, Budget Speech, Minister of Finance of Nepal, July 2006, < www.mof.gov.np/publication/speech/2006/index.php > accessed 7/8/2006. And Planning Commission, Government of India, *Towards Faster and More Inclusive Growth: An Approach to the 11th Five Year Plan (Draft)*, 14 June 2006.

¹²⁰ Comment by Cecilia Lotse, Regional Director, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, at workshop on “Social Policy in South Asia: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”, 24-25 May 2006, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Public Expenditure Framework

Public expenditure frameworks are essential for the implementation of transformative social policy, as they can lead to sound decision making and an outcome-focused approach to public expenditure. Components of public expenditure frameworks discussed at the workshop include the 20/20 Initiative, Medium Term Expenditure Framework, and processes linking fiscal budget outlays and outcomes.

The Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995¹²¹ called for the allocation of 20 percent of the government budget of developing countries and 20 percent of the official development assistance of donors to basic social services (BSS) such as basic health (including reproductive health services and nutrition programmes), basic education, and low cost water supply and sanitation. Hence, it is called the 20/20 initiative/compact. Together with its commitment to increased employment and improved participation and social inclusion, the spirit of the 20/20 initiative can address the worst aspects of poverty in the short term while paving the way for meeting the long-term human development objectives. Interestingly, the 20/20 initiative has been taken up in Nepal and offers an example of budget monitoring and analysis in support of social policy: examining what is required to meet social policy goals, identifying opportunities for restructuring social sector expenditures for greater emphasis on low cost and basic social services, and promoting increased tax and total revenues to finance improved services.¹²²

The most recent study of the initiative in Nepal, conducted by the National Planning Commission, the Institute for Sustainable Development, and UNICEF, recommends that basic social services be used as one of the criteria for prioritising projects and allocating budgets in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).¹²³ Because the MTEF affects children and vulnerable groups both directly and indirectly, it should be an integral component in social policy and MDG advocacy.

Another approach to a public expenditure framework is linking fiscal budget outlays (allocation and expenditure) to outcomes (results), as discussed in the context of India's child friendly budget initiative. There have been very strong commitments to the MDG goals and in the case of some countries this is even expressed in increased budgetary allocations, but still the outcomes in many instances are below expectations. In India, the Ministry of Human Development, Department of Women and Child Development, has been a pioneer in developing child friendly budgets, scrutinising the government's budget in terms of child related expenditure, and being self-critical in terms of promoting a transition from budgeting processes looking at outlays and outcomes. This analysis can be particularly powerful if it adopts a clear, structured results based focus, and incorporates the essential issue of accountability for service delivery.¹²⁴ UNICEF, other UN agencies and other groups need to provide technical support and advocacy in conducting a stepped up examination of what is causing disjunction between outlays and outcomes at varying levels of society, from the national level to the household level.

In conclusion, when considering financial resources for social policy, it is necessary to address issues of macroeconomic and fiscal policy, as these are the major processes that affect distribution and well-being. The impact of financing mechanisms such as user fees, prepaid schemes, insurance, and different forms of taxation on equity, effectiveness and efficiency must be re-visited, and the public expenditure framework

¹²¹ See Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action from the World Summit for Social Development, < <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/agreements/index.html> > accessed: 7/8/2006

¹²² National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal and Institute for Sustainable Development, *Basic Social Services in Nepal (Brochure)*, April 2006.

¹²³ Eriko Onoda, "The 20/20 Initiative in Nepal," *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹²⁴ Jenkins, op. cit.

including the MTEF, PRSP processes, the 20/20 initiative, and links between outlays and outcomes need to be taken into account.

Transforming the Financing of Social Services

There are a host of emerging practices that seek to address the specific needs of children. They include rights-based, normative *principles*, such as free access to quality health and education services and basic social infrastructure, and legal entitlements to social insurance and social assistance. They include *instruments* such as universal children's benefits, conditional cash transfers and other family related transfers. They also include participatory budget initiatives, which can influence priority setting as well as monitor results. It is necessary to closely examine the specific design of each of these approaches, how they are integrated into the broader framework of social policy, and how they benefit different social groups. In macroeconomic terms, pro-children policies are also those promoting higher well-being at the household level – such as proactive labour market policies which foster employment, higher wages and better distributional outcomes.¹²⁵

Ultimately, social and economic policies need to be addressed integrally, informed by the same objectives and built on the same data.¹²⁶ When considering expenditures on basic social services, it is important to take into account the synergies between income poverty reduction, economic growth and social development and to merge economic and social development and place them within a human rights framework.¹²⁷

Main areas of social policy in the region for which new knowledge – information gathering, research, analysis - is needed

The ideas and analysis from the Workshop contribute to identifying research and knowledge gaps in the area of social policy in South Asia. Addressing these gaps will contribute to more effective social policy interventions in the region, and help improve child well-being. Some gaps outlined below were highlighted during the Workshop, and others are emerging from subsequent research. The following listing is a first overview, and follow-up processes will develop and deepen these proposals.

Social Exclusion

Need for Disaggregated Data

- There is overall an urgent need for improved data collection and reporting on indicators relating to the MDGs. For example, the report “World’s Women 2005: Progress in Statistics” reveals that data to properly assess the situation of women are incomplete and patchy, making it difficult to measure progress.¹²⁸
- Reaching those who are excluded requires sub-national data and data disaggregated by different groups in order to determine progress in MDG performance and to undertake incidence analysis, i.e. examine who is benefiting from interventions and who is financing them.
- A differentiated, sensitive approach is needed to understand and monitor poverty. Poor families include those who are close to the poverty line as well as those who are below it, in differing

¹²⁵ Katja Hujo, “Financing Social Policy in Developing Countries – What are the Issues?” *Social Policy: Towards Universal Coverage and Transformation for Achieving the MDGs* (CD-Rom), UNICEF ROSA (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2006).

¹²⁶ Sudarshan, op. cit.

¹²⁷ Delamonica, op. cit.

¹²⁸ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The World’s Women 2005: Progress on Indicators*, < <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/wwpub.htm> > accessed: 7/8/2006

degrees of severity. The concept of the ‘hard-core poor’¹²⁹ or ‘ultra-poor’ needs to be incorporated in the collection of data.

- For South Asia, consideration could be given to developing an indicator – or even a new MDG – on progress for marginalised and socially excluded groups with respect to the MDG goals and targets.
- There is a need to bring together and identify synergies between the paradigms of human development, human rights, child rights and human security.

Research on Social Inclusion

- There is a need to look at where services are inclusive, in what districts, and what has successfully promoted inclusion. There are interesting examples from many countries in South Asia which could be investigated and brought to the attention of policy makers and civil society.

Behavioural/Attitudinal Change

- More research needs to be done on factors that contribute to attitudinal and behavioural change.
- The power to claim rights is required. What is the incentive for those who have the power to share power? This question suggests a need for an analysis of power sharing, elite capture and other processes that accompany, reproduce and reinforce social exclusion.
- There is a need to bring the “non-official history of marginal communities” into school curricula in order to widen awareness and make these histories visible and valid.
- In depth studies are needed on discriminatory processes in school and out of school and in communities and how these processes impact on children’s self esteem and performance
- There is a need to involve socially excluded groups in the design and assessment of health services, and quality and delivery modalities to help ensure equal access and inclusion.

Recognition of Discrimination/marginalization and social exclusion

- Opportunities should be created for socially-excluded children to share their perspectives and experiences, and have a voice in shaping social services of direct relevance to them.
- A culture of silence, fear of reprisal, and internalisation of dominant images among marginalised groups needs to be recognised and sensitivity and support provided. There is a need to probe to understand levels of discrimination because socially excluded individuals might be hesitant to talk about their experiences.
- Seemingly neutral factors such as physical distance must be looked at from the point of view of individual users of services, including women and girls (physical security), and persons with disabilities (distances can be insurmountable).
- There is significant potential to develop a regional policy on social exclusion
- Time budget studies can help identify obstacles encountered by certain groups in using social services, and in participating in their design.

Social Processes and Transformative Social Policy

- Research is needed on how social movements have historically and conceptually influenced policymaking.
- Examples are needed of creative interaction and engagement with social groups.
- Economic growth does not per se address poverty. Social policy needs to be transformative to address poverty.

¹²⁹ Kabeer, op. cit.

- In discussing social policy, it is necessary to consider how to address the segmentation of the labour market which creates intergenerational entrapment, re-producing social exclusion patterns and becoming a disincentive for children to receive an education.
- The multiple relationships between social policy and economic policy in promoting universal approaches and pro-poor, inclusive, and transformative child-friendly social policy need to be analyzed.

Universalism and Special Efforts versus “Targeting”

- Much effort is needed to promote the principle of universalism and its realisation for children’s rights and the MDGs, including:
 - Right to entitlements (food, health services, education, water and sanitation, social protection)
 - Effective and just forms of “targeting” and their role in promoting universal coverage
 - Linkages between the human development and child rights paradigms in universalism.
 - Realisation of each person’s potential.
- Research is needed to examine ongoing special efforts in South Asia designed to enhance universalism and enable and empower socially excluded groups to access social services.¹³⁰
- Further research is needed on links between environment policy and socio-economic outcomes, and the role of collective as opposed to targeted investments to generate environmental public goods.

Financing

- There is a need to analyze existing financing tools and methods and conceptualise new tools and methods that are applicable in the region. There is also a need to be concrete when dealing with budget and financing. There are many good examples and models on the table for assessment.
- Examples of innovative macroeconomic and fiscal policy - such as new forms of generating revenue for social policy, i.e. cesses - need to be collated and analyzed.
- Specific attention is needed to the role played by user charges – formal as well as informal, and in the public as well as commercial and NGO sectors – in the twin but often conflicting goals of universal access to and financial sustainability of social services. Different approaches are needed for the aims and conditions of different sectors (health, education, water etc) and at different levels (e.g., basic, secondary). In each case, however, better understanding is required of the impact of financial barriers on use of services and of alternative financing modalities that can overcome the negative effects of direct charges that are often experienced by the most vulnerable groups.

Accountability

- There is a need for additional examples and data on promoting accountability of service providers in the South Asia region, beginning in the public sector. This can be done from a positive perspective, examining mechanisms – e.g. community involvement, local management, engagement in democratic processes, the role of the media and public discussion – that support transparent governance and effective performance.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- There is a need for systematic evaluation of programmes across the region and an operational mechanism whereby this knowledge can be fed into policymaking, examining each MDG.

¹³⁰ For a preliminary overview of such interventions, see Gabriele Köhler and Jennifer Keane, Research proposal: Transformative Social Policy Interventions towards Overcoming Social Exclusion to Reach the MDGs, 2006 Available from the authors.

- Regional MDG reporting should emphasise differentiated progress toward the goals, building on and supplementing indicators of whether countries as a whole will meet the goals and which districts/states, countries, regions (including underserved regions that are contiguous across country borders), and social groups are lagging behind or not making progress.

Knowledge Management

- There is a need to document and analyze existing social policies in the region, the extent and nature of their implementation and performance, and gaps and needs remaining at the level of the population. More information needs to be gathered on particular challenges and effective social policy interventions in conflict and post-conflict environments.
- UN agencies should focus more on data collection related to the MDGs (i.e. filling existing data gaps) and disseminating information at the country level.
- Knowledge and information, including lessons learned, need to be made widely available within and beyond the UN system, to practitioners, academics, and policymakers engaged in social policy design and implementation.

Conclusion

The countries of South Asia have taken significant steps toward transformative social policy, as indicated by a trend towards universalism (marked by free basic social services), and such initiatives as outreach health workers, school meals, employment schemes and dedicated taxes to support social expenditure. Despite these positive trends, however, much more needs to be done to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including effectively tackling the issue of social exclusion, which systematically hinders progress towards the MDGs and the wider fulfilment of child rights in South Asia. Key issues and findings highlighted in this workshop report could be synthesised and utilised within the region to promote a wider understanding of social policy priorities and strategies, within and beyond the United Nations, and to identify areas where collaborative action can be taken. When concerted efforts are made to promote, formulate and implement social policies that aim towards universalism, foster an inclusive and cohesive society, contribute to the creation of new social norms that promote an equal society, are financially and politically sustainable, and incorporate human rights principles, social policy in South Asia will be effectively transformative and transformed and will help to improve the lives of millions of vulnerable children.