



CHILD POVERTY INSIGHTS

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Social Protection for All – An Agenda for Pro-Child Growth and Child Rights



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Is Social Protection a high priority on all development agendas today?

Yes it is. The single most remarkable shift in the global poverty reduction agenda of the new millennium is indeed the emergence of *Social Protection* as a top priority for most international organizations and development agencies. Ten years ago, when world leaders agreed on the **UN Millennium Declaration** and in the **UN MDG-Roadmap of 2001**, social protection was not even once mentioned. Now in 2010, at the **UN MDG Review Summit**, world leaders agreed that promoting national social protection *systems* that reduce inequality and social exclusion is essential for MDG-progress. They recognized the need to start by providing social protection *floors* for all, as a human right, and to continue towards progressive realization of comprehensive national systems of social protection that provide universal access to essential social services and income/livelihood security for all.

World leaders also reaffirmed the need to create full and productive employment and decent work for all. The **G20 Leaders Declaration** (Nov-2010) recognized the importance of addressing the concerns of the most vulnerable by providing social protection and decent work in low-income countries. The African and European Heads of State, representing more than 1.5 billion citizens at the **AU-EU Summit** in Tripoli 29-30 Nov, 2010, committed themselves to the promotion of “the Global Decent Work Agenda, with a special focus on more, more productive and better jobs, and the link to social protection.” The **European Report on Development 2010**, the new ‘Flagship Report’ of the European development cooperation is entitled “*Social Protection for Inclusive Development: A new perspective of EU cooperation with Africa.*”

Another forthcoming EU-Guideline on “*Social Transfers in the Fight against Hunger*” emphasizes that global food security can never be achieved only by increasing agricultural production: Too many people in the world are food insecure because they do not have enough incomes to buy food. Therefore, social protection must always be recognized as an essential instrument in the fight against hunger.

Furthermore, the African Ministers of Labour and of Social Development in their recent meetings in Yaounde and Khartoum, respectively, emphasized social protection. The Yaounde Tripartite Declaration of governments, employers’ organizations and trade unions “recognized the urgent need for all African Member States and Social Partners to start the effective and rapid implementation of a Social Protection floor to all Africans.” The African Social Ministers emphasized *social protection* as one of the four key functions of the African Social Policy Framework Implementation Strategy – the other three functions being production, reproduction and redistribution.

Finally, it's also worth noting that the African Development Bank (AfDB) is now developing an AfDB Social Protection Strategy in order to use social protection instruments for: (a) income poverty and risk vulnerability reduction in Africa; (b) national capacity building; and (c) enhanced food security.

Why does the OECD-POVNET argue for Social Protection as a key element of Pro-Poor Growth?

OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is the donor governments' joint think-tank. POVNET is DAC's *Poverty Reduction Network - a tool for policy discourse and interaction*. The first POVNET Guidelines on Poverty Reduction (2001) were instrumental in creating a consensus among development partners about the *multi-dimensionality* and *context-specificity* of the poverty challenge. That was a remarkable vote-of-no-confidence to the overly economic and 'one-size-fits-all' doctrine that the World Bank and IMF had been imposing on poor countries – and on bilateral donors – through the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s and 1990s. The POVNET Poverty Reduction Guideline showed that poverty has multiple and interlinked causes and dimensions: economic, human, political, socio-cultural and protective, and hence needs a broad range of proactive and interlocking policies to tackle it.

Between 2003-06, the POVNET focused its work on the most controversial of the poverty dimensions: the economic. That was regarded as an area where much re-thinking would be required if the poverty reducing impacts of development in 'productive' sectors, e.g. agriculture, infrastructure and private sector development, was to be increased. POVNET concluded that *'just any'* GDP-growth would not reduce poverty: There were – and are – too many examples of countries that have achieved rapid rates of GDP-growth, yet failed to reduce poverty and inequality and to provide decent work and social protection to the majority of women and men, children and the elderly. If we are serious about reducing poverty, POVNET concluded, we have to achieve a *pro-poor pattern* of growth, i.e. an inclusive, equality-enhancing and employment-intensive pattern of growth, where poor people can participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth.

Livelihood insecurity and lack of reliable social protection make it difficult, however, for poor people to participate in and contribute to growth. They know that by moving from low-productivity crops to higher yielding crops, or from un-profitable to more profitable micro-businesses they could increase their productivity and incomes. But they often decide not to do so, i.e. not to improve their businesses and move forward in life, due to the high risks of falling into destitution if the new crop or the new micro-business fails.

A reliable 'social protection floor' for all citizens can transform such a vicious circle into a virtuous one. It can secure access to health services as well as to social assistance in the case of accident, sickness, or old age and thereby promote socio-economic security and predictability. Moreover, it can 'unlock' the human capabilities and entrepreneurship of millions of poor people. Mothers and fathers will dare to take initiative and risks in their income-generating activities today, knowing that if the venture fails, reliable last resort support will be available from social protection to make sure that the family will not go hungry next week and the children need not drop out of school. The POVNET Guideline on Social Protection provides also other good arguments that can be used to show to Ministers of Finance why social protection is not only a human right, and morally right, but also good economics and good for the economy.

How does this relate to Child Rights and Child Protection?

We care for children not because it is "good economics" (although it is!), but because it is the right thing to do. The rights of the child are spelt out in a systemic fashion in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF takes a *human rights based approach* to development. So do we at the Government of Finland.

The human right to social security is confirmed in Article 22 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the right to decent work, adequate standard of living and education are confirmed in Articles 23, 25 and 26, respectively. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child the right to social security is stated in Article 26. Dr. Magdalena Sepulveda, the UN Human Rights Council's Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty, has produced an impressive series of reports that provide all the arguments for those who need to convince lawyers and politicians about the human right to social protection.

Child welfare and protection concerns are often at the heart of social protection efforts, since children are the most vulnerable members of society, and the impact of violations of their rights - to food and nutrition, health, education, and to recreation can be irreversible in terms of stunting their prospects in every domain.

There is a growing body of evidence from a range of developing countries that social protection programmes can effectively increase the nutritional, health and educational status of children and reduce their risk of abuse and exploitation, ensuring their rights, and offering long-term developmental benefits. Social protection is also, in a more instrumental mode, increasingly viewed as a key investment in human capital and in breaking inter-generational poverty traps. So there are two intertwined rationales for child rights champions to engage actively in the national social protection planning processes and make sure that children's interests are taken into consideration from the outset.

What does this have to do with UNICEF?

UNICEF plays a key role in informing policy, practice and advocacy in the area of children's rights, welfare and protection. Long considered a privilege of developed countries, social protection is now recognized for the role it can play in addressing poverty and vulnerability in developing countries as part of the essential package of basic social services and transfers ('social protection floor') that the state ought to provide to its citizens.

Together with its international development partners, UNICEF has published a [Joint Statement on Child Sensitive Social Protection](#). According to this highly useful Guide, the best way to promote child-sensitive social protection is not necessarily one that focuses only on children. The best results for children are achieved through an *integrated* approach to social protection, or comprehensive social policy. This means that instead of temporary, narrowly focused projects we should build permanent, sustainable, and transparent national social protection *systems*, with strong mandates, professionalized staff and sufficient budget resources to promote the realization of social protection for children as well as their families and communities.

Concretely, child-sensitive social protection should focus on aspects of well-being that include: providing adequate child and maternal nutrition; access to quality basic services for all, complemented by social inclusion policies and affirmative action to ensure that the poorest and most marginalized have equal quality access as all other groups in society; supporting families and caregivers in their childcare role, including increasing the time available within the household; addressing gender inequality; preventing discrimination and child abuse in and outside the home; eliminating child labour; increasing caregivers' access to incomes for care services, or employment in the labour market; and preparing adolescents for their own livelihoods, taking account of their role as current and future workers and parents.

What is the role of UNICEF partners - social workers and community development officers at the local levels - in social protection?

Social cash transfers have received the most attention in discussions about social protection. Much less has been written and said about the *professionals of care* who will be needed to meet poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged families, understand their diverse life situations in their real contexts, and be inclusive and offer high quality services. Their important work should be recognized and respected.

Cash transfers alone will never solve the problems of poverty. But regular and predictable pensions for the aged and the disabled, as well as child/family allowances can empower the poor if the transfer schemes are well facilitated, predictable, do not stigmatize and are accompanied by accessible and high quality care services.

With the rapid development of ICT-based cash transfer delivery mechanisms (smart cards, biometric identity recognition and cell-phone/SMS-transfers) the social workers/community development officers or other care professionals will be less and less occupied with the physical distribution of cash transfers to recipients. This is wonderful, for two reasons: 1) the fiduciary risks of corruption or dependencies and clientelism in the delivery of social transfers will be minimized; 2) this will liberate these professionals to do what they are meant and motivated to do: provide quality and inclusive care services for children, elderly, sick, disabled, substance abusers, immigrants, and other vulnerable individuals and households.

Care work in most societies falls on women and girl children, as un-paid care work within households and communities. Formalization of care work would be good for both those women who would receive regular incomes (and in due course accrue social security entitlements) from the local government or NGOs, as well as for those women who could engage more actively in other productive work if liberated from their care responsibilities. The new [UNRISD Flagship Report on](#)

[Poverty and Inequality](#) discusses the important aspects of care economy and care work much more widely. I recommend it to all.

Some General Resources

- [UN Millennium Declaration 2000](#)
- [UN MDG Road Map 2001](#)
- [UN MDG Review Summit Outcome Document 2010](#)
- [G20 Leaders' Declaration Nov-2010](#)
- [EU/AU Tripoli Declaration Nov-2010](#)
- [Yaounde Tripartite Declaration on the implementation of the Social Protection Floor](#)
- [European Report on Development \(ERD\) 2010](#)
- [OECD-POVNET Guidelines](#)
- [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty](#)
- [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

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