

ILO Conclusions Inter-regional Tripartite Meeting on the Future of Social Security in Arab States, Amman, 6-8 May 2008

1. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to concretise the recommendations of the ILO Asian and African Regional Meetings (in 2006 and 2007) on social security and provide orientation for the action of the International Labour Office in the framework of its Global Campaign for the extension of social security till 2015. The following paragraphs summarise the main elements of the discussions and the consequential action that the ILO suggests as a follow-up of the discussions.

Brief summary of the discussions

2. The discussions during the three days of intensive deliberations on the identification of a set of policy approaches within which participating countries can pursue effective and progressive extension of the scope and coverage of social security, in particular to women, to the unemployed and to workers in the informal sector, and strengthening the governance of their social security schemes, based on the experience of the countries in the region, can be summarized as follows:
 - Recent developments in the region show that most countries have been working towards the extension of coverage of social security (including social assistance), extend the range of benefits and ensure good governance and financial stability. There is a widespread recognition that schemes still face problems in achieving full population coverage, and some in achieving good governance and abolishing some design flaws.
 - Seeking to extend at least a minimum set of social security guarantees to all is one of the core components of the ILO's Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All. This is also a component of the Social security floor that the office is promoting following its mandate to "further among the nations of the world programmes which will achieve ... the extension of social security measure to provide a basic income to all in need of such protection and comprehensive medical care"¹ that was formulated in 1944 and reaffirmed by the International Labour

¹ ILO constitution, Annex (The Declaration of Philadelphia), 1944

Conference in 2001² and recommended also by the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation³.

- For all our constituents social security is a social and economic necessity - a sine qua non of national and international development. It also ensures social and political stability. There is ample evidence that social security systems in the region have played a major role in social and economic development.
- However, no system is perfect and no system will perform well if not constantly adapted to changing economic, demographic and political challenges. Systems in the Arab states of the Middle East and North Africa are making honest and pragmatic efforts to reengineer schemes that seem to require improvements. In this meeting we have reviewed and confirmed the supervisory and executing roles of the state as the central guarantor of social security, we also discussed the continuing importance of the participation of the social partners in the design, reform and governance of social insurance schemes. The meeting also pragmatically accepted the co-existence of different social protection schemes in the countries of the region provided that coherence in the objective of full population coverage is ensured.

Future ILO activities in the region

3. In the framework of the Global Campaign for Social Security and Coverage for All, the ILO is committed to support national efforts towards full coverage and improved governance of social security in the Arab States of the Middle East and North Africa as a matter of priority in its Decent Work Country Programmes. The ILO will continue to advocate early investment in the development of social security systems in order to enable countries to grow with equity.
4. Ensuring that policy responses are well adapted to the national context, the ILO Campaign focuses on outcomes rather than process. No time will be wasted in debating the advantages or disadvantages of certain methods to deliver social security. Six pragmatic questions will guide ILO support in the context of the Global Campaign
 - Do the schemes reach out to all? In particular to informal sector workers, women, unemployed persons and the poor?
 - Are the benefits effective in lifting people out of poverty?
 - Do they provide adequate, reliable and sustainable benefits to people?
 - Is their design conducive to achieve higher levels of employment and good economic performance in general?
 - Is the system/scheme making efficient use of workers' and employers' taxes and contributions?

² ILO: Social Security: A new consensus, Geneva, 2001 p.1

³ World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation: A fair globalisation: Creating opportunities for all, Geneva 2004, p.110

- Are the schemes designed, managed and governed with the adequate and fair participation of the government, employers and workers on the on the basis of social dialogue and national consensus?

5. There is a set of concrete measures that are being implemented or we hope to implement along the lines of the recommendations of the African and Asian Regional Meetings held in 2006 and 2007. They range from the creation and dissemination of the knowledge base to the provision of advisory services and the monitoring of progress and hopefully to a very concrete programme of technical co-operation:

a. Knowledge base

With the new Social Security Inquiry we are making a tool available that helps the countries to monitor their progress in a comprehensive fashion and at the same time benchmark themselves against other countries in the region. We would like you all to sign up to this Inquiry as a regular monitoring instrument.

We would like all countries of the region to sign up to the web-based interactive learning platform on the extension of social security (GESS) that the ILO is about to launch, This will ensure a constant exchange of experience and ideas between individual countries and between the ILO and its members.

b. Capacity building

The extension of coverage, the provision and good governance of the institutions, require well qualified staff. The ILO is ready to continue organizing training for its tri-partite constituency on: legislation, policy design, actuarial, financial and statistical matters and administration, in coordination with the Turin Centre and its partner universities.

c. Policy development

We will continue providing advisory services aiming at strengthening the institutions involved in the planning and implementation of social security covering, inter alia

- legal, managerial and supervisory aspects,
- the mainstreaming and safeguarding of social security objectives in the wider national legal and economic and fiscal policy frameworks,
- actuarial, financial, fiscal and social budget analyses

This should ensure that the progress towards wider and better coverage is compatible with economic and fiscal capacity in each country.

We will continue to invite and technically support countries to ratify ILO social security conventions. We will also focus on assisting the countries in closing coverage gaps notably in the informal economy, by establishing a basic social security floor for all, i.e. access to

essential health care for all, income security for children, social assistance for unemployed and the poor, income security for the elderly and disabled.

Some of the above elements have already been identified as priorities in the Decent Work Country Programmes in the region, and the ILO stands ready to support these elements in the DWCPs of further countries.

d. Monitoring of progress

Countries should subscribe, with the support of the ILO, to a review system that allows them to self-monitor progress with respect to population coverage and good governance. Without such a self-binding mechanism progress might not be as rapid as it could be.

e. Method

The vehicle for the support listed above should be a regional advisory and capacity building facility that can flexibly react to the very heterogeneous demands from the region. We will develop a blueprint for that facility within the next weeks and then seek funding for it within and outside of the ILO. We will also seek hosts or collaborative centres for it in one or two countries of the region.

6. We have participated in a very encouraging debate. We know that the ILO's Global Campaign and the Decent Work Agenda and, in particular, the African and Asian Decent Work Decades are in good hands in the region. The Strategy for Social Insurance of the Arab Labour Organisation supports these objectives and we trust that the joint efforts of ALO and ILO in the Arab Region will contribute to reaching these objectives. The representatives of the World Bank and the ISSA have agreed to seek co-ordination of their workplans with that of the ILO. Wherever possible joint work should be pursued.
