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Reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion through social protection

- Promising approaches at local, national, regional and global levels

What I can share is based on my 40 years' experience in global development, 20 years in social protection (here 'SP') and most recently on my 4 years of close cooperation with 11 low-income countries in Africa and Asia, in the context of the [EU Social Protection Systems Initiative \(EU-SPS\)](#), co-financed by EU-DEVCO, OECD, and the Governments of Finland and Germany.

I am going to talk about the following:

- (1) SP as an instrument for realizing Human Rights and Inclusive Growth;
- (2) National SP-systems, not only cash transfer programs;
- (3) SP for All, i.e. universal SP by 2030 (USP-2030), not only SP for top/bottom 10%;
- (4) SP for the informal majority of populations, i.e. for the missing middle – this work has been coined by the African Union (AU) as 'SPIREWORK (= SP for informal and rural economy workers);
- (5) Capacity Development (CD) for SP which is a necessary condition for sustainability. I am going to share experiences from African and Asian countries' efforts, supported by the EU-SPS/Finland, to develop multi-disciplinary SP curricula for pre- and in-service training at national universities, TVET institutes and other permanent national and regional training institutes;
- (6) SDG 5.4., i.e. the social protection and care work performed in all societies by women, without a pay, especially in societies with under-developed formal SP and care systems. This is the priority theme of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 2019, and provides important opportunities for synergies and cooperation between the global gender and SP communities, between CSW and CSocD, and for...
- (7) ...boosting the CSocD's work in support of the commitments made at the Copenhagen Social Summit 1995 – for instance by arranging a New Social Summit, e.g. in 2020 or 2022.

The priority theme of UN-CSocD 2019 – Inequality Reduction, incl. through social protection (SP) policies - is timely: Still in 2000 when the Millennium Development Goals were agreed upon, SP was not mentioned even once. Now SP is implied as a key strategy for reaching 5 of the 17 SDG-targets: Poverty eradication (SDG 1.3.), Universal Health Coverage (SDG 3.8.), Care work (SDG 5.4.), Decent work (SDG 8.5.) and Reduction of Inequalities (SDG 10.4.).

(1) SP as an instrument for realizing Human Rights and Inclusive Growth;

SP is both a human right and an economic necessity for the development of sustainable economies.

The right to social protection – broadly speaking - is anchored to the key UN and regional human rights instruments, e.g. Articles 22-28 of the UDHR and Articles 9-12 of the ICESCR. Most recently the African Union has prepared [a draft](#) AU Protocol on the Right to Social Protection and Social Security, which is currently under [public consultation](#).

The fundamental function of SP in the human rights agenda is its capacity to empower all women and men to meaningfully participate in social, political and economic life of their societies, which is a pre-condition

to the realization of nearly all other human rights. SP is key also in the promotion of children's rights and the rights of persons with disabilities and in old age. It can break the inter-generational poverty cycle and secure at least a minimum level of protection – a decent Social Protection Floor – for all, thereby constituting one of the fundamental pillars of a Social Contract of the society.

It is important to recognize also the contribution that SP can make to sustainable and inclusive economies by empowering also the poor, women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth. Thereby investments into SP help the national economies to tap into all talents of the society, creating social mobility and enhanced innovation and entrepreneurship. SP counteracts irreversible asset depletion among the vulnerable households at times of distress. It increases aggregate demand in the economy and broadens the tax base.

(2) National SP-systems, not only cash transfer programs

SP has been one of the success stories of official development assistance (ODA) during the 3rd Millennium. Cash transfers have been increasingly adopted by low- and middle-income countries (LICs and MICs) as central elements of their poverty reduction and social protection strategies.

Unlike much of other ODA, cash transfer projects have effectively reached the intended beneficiaries, i.e. the children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities in the poorest households and communities of the low-income countries. Impact evaluation studies e.g. [by Unicef and FAO](#), and [ODI](#), have provided impressive evidence of benefits for the intended beneficiaries, and minimum negative unintended impacts.

Overall, [the evidence](#) reflects that cash transfers can be a powerful policy instrument for the reduction of inequalities, vulnerabilities and poverty. The evidence highlights the range of benefits on expenditure on food and other household items, access to schooling or use of health services. Importantly, cash transfers are shown to have impacts on a range of outcomes simultaneously, for instance greater school attendance is consistently accompanied by a reduction in child labour. There is also robust evidence that cash transfers can increase savings, productive investments e.g. in livestock and agricultural inputs, and further diversification of livelihood strategies, suggesting that cash transfers can play a role not only in reducing poverty by redistributing resources to the poor, but can also foster their economic autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Social assistance through cash transfers is, however, but one of the several pillars of an effective social protection system. A large number of LICs and MICs have put in place National SP Strategies (and implementation plans), based on a comprehensive multi-pillar understanding of universal SP, seeking progressively to cover all key poverty risks of all residents in their all life cycle situations (e.g. pregnancy, childhood, ill health, old age, and disability).

For instance in Tanzania, the multi-pillar SP strategy consists of the following four pillars: (a) Social assistance, (b) social insurance, (c) access to social services and (d) productive inclusion. In Zambia (e) disability has been included as a 5th pillar.

The conclusions of the [meta impact evaluation studies](#) further strengthen the case for moving from fragmented cash transfer programmes only to a systems approach to social protection, with the ability to provide comprehensive and multi-sector protection to all.

(3) SP for All, i.e. universal SP by 2030 (USP-2030), not only SP for top/bottom 10%

In most African countries only a small minority of people (e.g. 10%) are covered by formal employment related (*contributory*) social insurance schemes. Also the (*non-contributory*) social assistance cash transfer

programmes typically cover only 10-20 per cent of the poorest. This structure leaves the large majority of populations behind – although in the SDGs governments committed to leaving no-one behind. The ‘Missing Middle’ – often up to 80% of the people – are not ‘poor enough’ to benefit from the SP floor provided by the poverty-focused (often donor funded) cash transfers but also not ‘formal enough’ to have access to social insurance benefits.

Therefore – while most important from the human rights point of view – a SP Floor is not enough: Several of those in the ‘Missing Middle’ majority are almost as poor and vulnerable as those selected into the group of cash transfer beneficiaries. Besides, the real poverty status of individuals and households fluctuates seasonally, or from year-to-year. Thus, someone identified as poor during the beneficiary identification process may move out from poverty while their neighbors – originally in the ‘missing middle’ - may fall into poverty.

A universal SP system, therefore, should gradually include all residents of the nation, and be agile enough to respond to the livelihood risks and situations of them all. This is also of essence for the political and financial sustainability of the SP system: All residents who know and trust that the SP system can support them in situations of hardship can be convinced to pay – through tax or contributions - into the common risk management system.

Social pensions, child grants, maternity benefits and social health insurance are ‘categorical universal’ SP schemes that commit to supporting all residents who e.g. reach a certain politically defined minimum (pension) age or pregnancy week.

USP-2030 (see below) is a global campaign for all governments and agencies in all world regions in support of universal social protection by year 2030.

(4) SP for the informal majority of populations, including the African Union (AU) campaign for ‘SPIREWORK (= SP for informal and rural economy workers)

Work in the informal economy (I.E.), is, by definition, work with no social protection. The lack of social protection is a key defining characteristic of the I.E, as well a critical aspect of social exclusion. Less than 10% of workers in Sub-Saharan Africa have access to social security (employment related contributory social protection), while in other developing countries between 10% to 50% of workers are able to access social security.

In developing countries the most common categories of informal workers include the following working groups: *self-employed, micro-entrepreneurs, home-based workers, unpaid workers, wage workers and apprentices.*

The working conditions of most informal economy workers are particularly hazardous, and yet these very vulnerable workers are least able to access any form of social protection under current social security schemes. Many of them are not able or willing to contribute a significant percentage of their incomes to finance formal sector social insurance benefits that do not meet their priority needs.

For countries and regions with large informal economies, such as Africa, one of the highest priorities is social protection for the workers in various informal sector jobs. Basic safety measures and human relations management can quickly produce tangible results in terms of productivity and profits and help the workers to move to the formal economy. The Conference of African Union Labour and Social Affairs Ministers has laid down a strategy for ‘SPIREWORK’. This is an acronym for: ‘*SP for Informal and Rural Economy Workers*’.

The AU Heads of State have confirmed the priority of SPIREWORK for Africa, calling for *“improving and strengthening the existing social protection schemes and extending them to workers and their families currently excluded, as well as occupational safety, health and hygiene”*. The AU SPIREWORK Plan of Action targets the workers in agriculture and in the heterogeneous informal economy. The goal is to offer a minimum package adapted to each segment of the I.E; the minimum package should include coverage of health care, old age, maternity protection and, according to the branch of activity concerned, occupational hazards.

Inspired by – and in support to – the AU SPIREWORK Plan, the Governments of Zambia and Finland – and ILO – agreed in 2017 to launch an action research project until 2020 to identify, negotiate and test feasible approaches to SPIREWORK, tailored to the annual cycles and income patterns of various informal sector workers and self-employed micro entrepreneurs, including small-holder farmers. This was in follow-up to the first pilots on tailoring contributory SP for informal construction sector workers under the Finnish-funded and ILO-executed ‘Green Jobs Project’ in Zambia 2012-18.

Most informal sector workers and micro entrepreneurs are linked to some formal sector partners, who are the ‘de facto’ employers of these workers in the value chain. Although they are not officially the employers, they could be made to perform the ‘employer functions’ in terms of social insurance contribution collection. For instance, if there is sufficient trust in a contract farming relationship between a ginnery - or a sugar factory - and the hundreds of nearby small holder farmers supplying all or most their produce to the factory, the small-holder cotton or sugarcane farmers could agree to receiving only less than 100% of their sales proceed, so that the ginnery/sugar factory could deduct and contribute e.g. 2% of its purchase price into the national social security fund, as a social insurance contribution on behalf of the small-holder farmers. The small contributions from a large number of informal cotton or sugar farmers would be pooled with contributions from other in-formal (and ideally also formal) sector workers, so that they could then be used protect the informal workers’ incomes e.g. during sick-days or maternity leaves, and - over the long term – even as old age pension.

From the AU’s point of view the Zambia-Finland SPIREWORK project provides an interesting opportunity to test the feasibility of contractual arrangements among informal and rural economy workers and their ‘de-facto employers’ in the formal sector. The African Union Commission would be keen to identify also other international partners – besides Finland (THL) and ILO – to support a larger 5-year project aimed at extending the action research pilots to at least four other countries: Tanzania, Kenya, Cameroon and Senegal.

A similar feasibility study / action research process is on-going between Finland/EU-SPS, ILO and Cambodia NSSF – among domestic workers, construction workers and Tuk-Tuk (motor cycle taxi) drivers.

(5) Capacity Development (CD) for SP as a necessary condition for sustainability. Experiences from African and Asian countries’ efforts, supported by the EU-SPS/Finland, to develop multi-disciplinary SP curricula for pre- and in-service training at national universities, TVET institutes and other permanent national and regional training institutes;

International development partners typically spend large amounts on short (crash) courses training partner country officers on the administrative routines related to project management, such as data collection for project monitoring purposes. However, much less has been invested into the systematic development of SP related professional capacities and identities. Hence, sometimes very large SP-projects and complex social policy development processes are being managed by national professionals who have never really had an opportunity to study social policy and social protection systematically.

An extremely expensive approach to professional SP training has been to send some most promising (or fortunate) SP staff members for short or long courses at universities or agency training centres in Europe, USA or other countries with more advanced social protection systems. Understandably, only very small numbers of staff can benefit from such an approach to training. In order to provide systematic SP training to sufficiently large numbers of national SP officers (or to-be officers), the training has to be integrated into the permanent national universities, colleges, TVETs and other training institutes.

The Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare, THL (EU-SPS), has over the past 3 years partnered with national universities, colleges and TVET institutions in Zambia, Tanzania, Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan and Ethiopia, providing them opportunities to systematically assess the relevance of their existing training modules and courses for the learning of those skills and competencies that are required in the management of the rapidly growing social protection systems in their countries.

The University of Zambia (UNZA) and the Tanzanian Institute of Finance Management undertook a SP Curriculum Assessment where they both were positively surprised to find that a good number of social protection relevant courses were already being taught by a promisingly high number of competent national lecturers in the various departments of UNZA, IFM and their neighboring universities. No-one had just ever thought of combining courses from the departments of sociology and social work, economics, statistics, health and nutrition, psychology, law and public management science etc. into a multi-disciplinary study specialization on social protection – as SP is by definition a multi-professional field of work.

Both IFM-Tanzania and UNZA engaged in a close dialogue with the national authorities in charge of managing the national SP programmes, and identified – of course – also gaps, i.e. topics and skills that none of the university departments were teaching although the national SP authorities regarded them as highly relevant for the management of modern SP programmes. New SP Curricula including new modules and course contents have since then been developed by Tanzanian and Zambian university professors, lecturers and other SP experts, and through peer-to-peer learning with Finnish and German peers.

As a result, the University of Zambia is going to have two new Curricula, one for MA in Social Protection and another for BA in Social Policy. Similarly, the network of Tanzanian (including Zanzibari) universities, coordinated by the Institute of Finance Management IFM), is going to have two new social protection Curricula, one for executive MA and another for a Professional Proficiency Certificate on Social Protection, for those professionals who have already taken their BAs or MAs in other subjects but who have become – or would like to become – real social protection professionals, and would want it to be officially certified.

In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) has recently been designated to lead and implement the Permanent Direct Support (PDS) component of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The PDS supports the poorest and most vulnerable households including older and disabled persons and pregnant and lactating mothers. It accounts for up to 20% of the caseload of both the urban and rural safety net programs of Ethiopia. This new responsibility requires MoLSA to develop its social work force – including the training and deployment of 30.000 local (woreda and kebele) level social workers.

EU-SPS/Finland and UNICEF have supported MoLSA in this effort, including: (a) an assessment of the existing social services workforce, (b) an identification of the various social work occupations to be standardized; (c) an evaluation of the capacity of training and certifying institutions for lower level social work occupations.

Additionally, through a pilot in Amhara region this work also seeks to promote team work between the most local level social, health and food security professionals, to generate evidence to support investments into the social care workforce by demonstrating its additional value.

TRANSFORM – The African SP Leadership Curriculum – is the largest of the successful new multi-stakeholder efforts in SP capacity development in Africa. It is in essence an in-service Leadership and Transformation training programme requested by the African Union Commission and UN Economic Commission for Africa, and developed through an inspiring partnership between African SP experts, UN-agencies (ILO, Unicef, UNDP), EU-SPS/Finland and Irish Aid.

TRANSFORM is an innovative learning package on the administration of national social protection floors in Africa. The prime objective of TRANSFORM is to build critical thinking and capacities of policy makers and practitioners at national and decentralized levels to improve the design, effectiveness and efficiency of social protection systems. TRANSFORM aims not only at imparting state-of-the-art knowledge that is appropriate for the challenges faced by countries in the region, but also to encourage learners to take leadership on the change and transformation of nationally defined social protection systems.

The TRANSFORM learning package is organized in a modular structure, and reflects the key building blocks of a holistic and interdependent social protection system. The TRANSFORM modules that are currently available are listed below. Other modules are under development and will be added to the series: (a) Legal Framework; (b) S&I Selection & Identification of Beneficiaries; (c) Administration; (d) Coordination; (e) Governance; (f) Financing & Financial Management; (g) Monitoring and Evaluation.

A Community of African TRANSFORM Master Trainers is available to tailor and facilitate the TRANSFORM trainings in various African (and Asian) countries that the local venue and logistical costs are covered by country level partners. The continental programme is co-financed by the above mentioned partners, who constitute the TRANSFORM Advisory Group, and managed by a small office at the ILO Zambia country office.

At the request of the African Union, the TRANSFORM Curriculum has been turned also into an e-learning format, for continental dissemination (tbc) by the African Virtual University, which is a high priority project of the African Union. The e-TRANSFORM has been designed by the Socialprotection.org office at UNDP's IPC-IG in Brazil, with funding from the EU-SPS/Finland. There are plans to turn the (tutor-led but a-synchronous) e-TRANSFORM also into a self-paced mobile phone learning platform.

In Vietnam, the cooperation between Government, EU-SPS/Finland and UN-agencies focused on the 'Vietnamization' of SP training academy formerly delivered by foreign consultants. This required first a comparative assessment of the technical capacity and political acceptability of about ten potential Vietnamese training institutes. When the ideal institutional home for the 'Vietnamized' SP training programme had been identified the training curriculum and materials were up-dated with the latest Vietnamese contents. An interesting external input was received from the Master Trainers of the African TRANSFORM SP Leadership Curriculum, whose participatory adult learning pedagogic approach was very well received by the Vietnamese SP trainers.

In Kyrgyzstan the EU-SPS/Finland inputs into SP capacity development focused on disability inclusion. The care system Kyrgyzstan inherited from the Soviet era considered disabled children and adults as 'medically abnormal' and secluded them into closed institutions. Despite the progress made towards a human rights-based approach and community and home-based care, persons with disabilities still have very little access to infrastructure, education, health and other social services. Even when receiving constitutionally guaranteed public services they often face violations of their rights and freedoms.

In the EU-SPS/Finland programme in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz women with disabilities have played central roles not as objects but as subjects of the programme. Upon request of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MoLSD), the EU-SPS focused on three activities: 1) Trainings of Trainers (ToTs) for university lecturers in disability inclusion and creation of a curriculum and teaching modules on disability inclusion in

Russian, 2) Collaboration on disability inclusion and mainstreaming with EU-Technical Assistance programme related to the large EU-funded Social Protection Budget Support to Kyrgyzstan. 3) Pilot delivery of disability-specific baby-boxes.

In the ToTs and collaboration with the EU programme, women with disabilities were lecturers and experts sharing their profound expertise on disability inclusion and mainstreaming. The pilot project of baby box production and their delivery was implemented solely by a cooperative of Kyrgyz women with disabilities. In these ways, this collaboration project between EU-SPS, Abilis (a Foundation owned by Finnish DPOs), and the Kyrgyz DPO Ravenstvo has exemplified significant, experiential knowledge and expertise that local persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, have for realizing disability inclusion and mainstreaming in Kyrgyzstan.

(6) SDG 5.4: The unpaid social protection and care work performed in all societies by women. This priority theme of the UN CSW-2019 provides opportunities for synergies between gender and SP communities between CSW and CSocD

Social protection exist in all communities of the world. In societies with under-developed official SP-systems, the social protection functions are typically performed by the mothers, grand-mothers and elder sisters. With the SDG-target 5.4. the world community has committed to recognizing, valuing and redistributing this major unpaid care work burden of women in all countries of the world, and especially in those with no public social care services.

In societies such as Finland there are important social protection and care institutions – such as public child care systems, long maternity and parental leaves and right for to return to the same job after such leaves – that make it effectively possible for women to *‘meaningfully participate’* in public life, labour market, and in entrepreneurship. With regard to the gender-responsiveness of the social protection benefits and services there is quite a surprisingly wide variation among the high-income countries. It is, therefore, interesting and important for the low income countries to study the various approaches and analyze carefully their feasibility in their own societies.

Against this background the priority theme of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March-2019 – *‘Social Protection Systems, Public Services and Service Infrastructure’* comes in timely. While several of the SP programmes have already successfully empowered poor women by making them to official recipients of cash transfers, there is a need to gender-review the operational practices of the existing SP programmes. But, probably even more important than that, is to assess the full potential of the broader range of social protection instruments and public care services to reduce the social protection and care burden of the millions of mothers, grand-mothers and elder sisters of the world.

By recognizing, valuing and formalizing care work countries can also create very large numbers of decent formal jobs for women and men in jobs related to the care of older persons, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups of people.

In February-March 2019 the two UN Commissions for Social Development (CSocD) and for the Status of Women (CSW) are going to discuss the very same topics: The potential of social protection and other public services and policies to reduce socio-economic and gender inequalities. This is a historical opportunity to boost the synergies and joint political weight of the two highly related and likeminded Commissions under the UN-ECOSOC.

(7) Boosting the CSocD work in support of the commitments made at the Copenhagen Social theSummit 1995 – by arranging a New Social Summit, e.g. in 2020 or 2022.

The UN Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995 – i.e. almost a quarter century ago - is the high-level political reference point in the UN-system to which the UN-CSocD always makes reference to. In 1995 the world was very different from now, and it would be high time to up-date the global agenda for social development. This is something that has been actively discussed within the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B).

The Copenhagen Declaration makes reference to social protection but in a less tangible way than education and health. For education and health there are concrete global campaigns of like-minded partners promoting “Education for All” and “ Universal Health Coverage”. The members of the SPIAC-B have launched also a global campaign for “Universal Social Protection by 2030” (USP-2030).

The SPIAC-B members are aware that a global USP-2030 must have a much broader membership base and more globally democratic inter-governmental governance structure than the SPIAC-B - an inter-agency forum - has. There is hence a lot of support and energy among the SPIAC-B members for the idea of a New Social Summit – where social protection would take it’s rightful place as one of the key elements of the social dimension of sustainable development, hand-in-hand with education, health, gender, disability and other key elements of social development.