

CSD 46th Session: Decent Work side event 6th February 2008

Presentation by Mrs Erina Bainganina

Title: Decent work and Development cooperation – view of civil society

Intro

I represent URAA - an organisation of older people that is working hard to present the issues and voices of older people in Uganda, long neglected by policy makers.

In Uganda, despite economic growth and development aid our experience is that chronic poverty is enduring; it is not improving; and is experienced disproportionately by older women and men and their dependants.

Chronic poverty in older age in Africa is exacerbated by a failure of development aid and national development programmes to prioritise and to reach the older chronically poor. Older women and men in Africa experience unacceptable conditions of hunger, sickness, poor shelter, lack of health care, violence and unsupported family care particularly in places of high HIV/AIDS prevalence.

In Uganda today 8.4 million Ugandans live in poverty compared to 9.8 million three years ago. Some improvement then! But inequalities are high, as shown by the Gini coefficient which rose from 0.35 in 1997/8 to 0.43 in 2003 and now stands at 0.40 in 2005/06.

The fact is that benefits of the high economic growth have not extended to the bottom quintile of the population who remain in deep poverty. 20% of the households or about 26% of the country's population (about 7 million Ugandans) remain trapped in extreme and chronic poverty.

Of that number many are older people with high levels of dependent children and often with significant levels of disability.

So what do we want from development aid and development partners?

We want universal social protection for our people – their right and their entitlement. By this we mean a system of cash transfers – including social pensions, child benefits and disability benefits – that will directly lift people out of poverty.

Why do we want this? Is this possible?

Our experience in Uganda is that to date development assistance from a range of development partners, including the EU, has been largely ineffective in changing the lives and aspirations of the poorest, women, children, older people, persons with disabilities and people with HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has put intolerable strain on already impoverished people and communities. The numbers of older poor are increasing in the poorest countries of Africa and it is the older population that is a core economic and social contributor to communities and families. They are increasingly carrying the burden of care and economic support for children.

We think that it should be obvious that the increasing numbers of older poor in the poorest countries requires their inclusion in actions to reduce national poverty and hunger levels to help achieve the first millennium development goal. But, we continue to see still institutional and social exclusion of the poorest, including older persons, from development interventions including microcredit.

I want to give you some information about URAA. This is an example of the work we do...

URAA is one of a number of grass roots organisation that work in collaboration with Help Age International. We are looking carefully at best practice for poverty reduction and development interventions for very poor people. We can see how regular cash benefits could have remarkable transformative effects on the lives of poor Ugandans and would also have an important contribution to make to economic growth.

We have now working in Uganda with our government's social protection task force to ensure that a national system of benefits to

the poorest people is put in place and want to see that programme actively supported by development aid.

And, we strongly believe that a pension in Uganda must be given to all older people. Targeting only the poor will be costly, inefficient and, ultimately, will mean that many older people will not receive the benefit as it will be captured by the better-off.

In 2007 we consulted with older people on what they would like to see happen. The response was very clear; greater economic security through social pensions, access to health care and an end to age based discrimination and exclusion from development and social affairs.

So what is the barrier to extending social protection to the poorest countries – after all it is essential to poverty reduction in the Western world?

Is it cost? We are told that these schemes cannot be afforded. But the figures clearly show that a universal pension in Uganda would cost less than 1% of GDP.

Is it effectiveness? All the evidence is that regular cash benefits in the hands of very poor people – especially older women - complement and make more effective existing investment in social and economic development, specifically health, education, water and sanitation and programmes to generate income. Our Minister of Gender labour and Social Welfare said recently in meeting in London that a “A household that has no cash will neither be able to pay for transport fare to a health facility, nor buy scholastic materials for their children in school. Social cash transfers therefore provide the alternative intervention for such households to enhance their access to education, health care and other social services.” She went on to say that that was the driver of Uganda’s current efforts to initiate a process of developing a cash transfer scheme.

Cost is not an issue; effectiveness is not an issue. But social protection is only just coming up the development agenda. It is still an underutilized policy option to support our poor, to promote development, social cohesion and economic growth.

So let's take action now. There is only 7 years to go to halve the poverty and hunger of the 420 million people in the world still in degrading and chronic poverty if we are to achieve the first MDG. Investment in the potential of the poorest people of our planet to deal with their poverty is urgently required. This means investing in women, children, older people, people with disabilities and those with HIV/AIDS. The poor cannot, and should not have to keep waiting for this.

We are pleased that demand for social protection is increasingly being articulated by citizens and governments in Africa and beyond. It is really encouraging that development agencies, development partners and governments, including the G8, have recognised social protection and basic service provision as a development instrument of huge potential, as well as right of all citizens – not just a right for those in the developed world – and are actively supporting dialogue on financing and developing universal access to social protection programmes.

Uraa supports therefore the work of the European commission to further informed dialogue on social protection in the EU and European commission and to encourage the mainstreaming of social protection into EU development cooperation.

So what we want is..

- African Union policy and that of national governments to affirm commitment to furthering social protection as an essential feature of development and growth.
- Real action to increase investment in social protection and social transfers – with financial support from northern donors including the European Union.

Social protection is a pillar of the developing African Union social policy framework. We support the 2006 Livingstone call for Action (2006) which called for costed national social transfer plans to be integrated within 3 years into national development plans and budgets, and reliable long term funding for this from national sources and development partners. We are pleased that the African Union will be following up the Livingstone call with a series of meetings across Africa in the next few months culminating in the first ever regional meeting of Ministers of Social Development.

We in southern civil society are ready and willing to play our part in being 'constructively critical' in supporting design, monitoring and advocacy in the development of national schemes and their financing mechanisms.

But, we want to see the same commitment from international donors and a commitment from them to work in partnership with citizens across Africa.

Thank you etc