

Part two

Policy challenges

Introduction

257. As noted earlier, the terms “vulnerability” and “vulnerable” are often loosely used in policy formulation and have not been subjected to much theoretical rigour or analytical scrutiny. While the analytical use of the concept of vulnerability is largely concerned with situation-specific (risk-specific) vulnerabilities, policy references to vulnerability mainly relate to the attributes of social groups. Thus, children, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous people and migrants are usually considered as particularly vulnerable in view of their high level of social and economic dependency and exposure to specific social risks.

258. Vulnerability initially emerged as a benchmark for social policy interventions in a context in which poverty eradication had become the overarching principle guiding social development interventions. Further, in developing countries, vulnerability has provided the measure and the moral ground for a multitude of community-scale social projects targeting poor and disadvantaged groups through such instruments as social funds.

259. Part two of the report consists of four chapters. Chapter IV deals with vulnerabilities related to employment. A large body of evidence suggests that that form of vulnerability is, across the board, the major claim on society in both developed and developing countries. Three levels of employment-related vulnerabilities are delineated. First, and to a significant extent, concerns with employment reflect a basic economic reality: the persistence of situations of high unemployment in many developed countries; and underemployment and a dearth of decent jobs in most of the developing world. Secondly, the scope of people’s worries about employment goes beyond the critical and pervasive issue of the lack of employment opportunities. Large demographic segments, such as women, young people and older persons and several social groups, including persons with disabilities and indigenous people, have been calling for policies to remove the physical, institutional, cultural and legal obstacles that limit their access to employment. Finally, employment-related vulnerabilities rest on a major policy failure: employment issues have continued to remain peripheral to the overall development policy agenda despite the centrality of employment in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

260. Chapter V highlights the importance of shifting policy emphasis towards social integration, putting it at the centre of social development, as well as the concomitant need for social protection. What is to be gained by promoting the social integration of groups in society — the value proposition — and the importance of doing so are best illustrated by the policy frameworks that are being independently developed in reference to the advancement of persons with disabilities, older persons and indigenous peoples. The chapter focuses on the need for and the challenges of developing approaches that account for both social protection and social inclusion. In particular, in the wake of the recent economic crises that affected several countries in East Asia and Latin America, the issue of social protection is being revisited anew. The fact that large numbers of middle-class workers suddenly found themselves and their families extremely vulnerable to income loss has dramatically

exposed the insufficiencies of existing social protection frameworks as well as the limits of traditional family and community-based support systems. Discussions on such issues as urbanization, family changes and ageing, which until now had been largely held from a long-term perspective, have been given a sense of urgency, with suggestions coming from all quarters that a new approach to the management of social risks is needed.

261. Chapter VI focuses on a rights-based approach to social and developmental issues, which has gained importance over the past decade. According to this line of thinking, social vulnerabilities are viewed mainly as the outcome of a rights deficit. Therefore, ascertaining and promoting the rights of the various social groups is key to their empowerment. Three attempts to develop a rights-based approach are reviewed in relation to the advancement of indigenous people, migrants and persons with a disability.

262. Finally, chapter VII deals with the role of international cooperation in reducing vulnerabilities. So far, reduction of vulnerability from an international assistance perspective has been primarily considered within the context of humanitarian emergencies. However, reconsideration of poverty issues in the light of recent economic and social development points to the relevance of a vulnerability reduction approach as part of international cooperation for social development.