

Keynote remarks by  
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Salutations

I congratulate my sister, the UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Advisor on Africa, Ms Cristina Duarte for the very successful and substantive 2022 ADS. I also thank Valerie Guarneri, Assistant Executive Director of the WFP for co-leading with the ILO, the successful events under the sub-theme of social protection, resilience and nutrition. This High-Level Dialogue reiterates the importance of social protection systems in enhancing food security and nutrition for greater resilience in Africa.

Our strategic conversation is timely. The impact of COVID-19 on the world of work has been both devastating and far-reaching. According to the most recent ILO Monitor, hours worked declined in Africa by 4.1% from fourth quarter of 2019 to the first quarter of 2022, translating into 16 million equivalent number of full-time jobs. Thereby exacerbating poverty as well as gender, economic and social inequalities.

Recent FAO estimations show that the pandemic pushed 47 million Africans into extreme poverty, increased new poor by 55 million and added 46 million people to those at risk of hunger and undernourishment.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has worsened the food and nutrition security situation of several African countries. Climate change impacts, especially in rural, agricultural and coastal communities, continue to affect livelihoods, food and nutrition security.

These crises continue to expose the glaring gaps in social protection and underscore the worrying consequences of insufficient coverage, particularly for workers in the informal economy (83% of Africans). Social protection provides a crucial buffer by protecting families, enabling women and men to be resilient and to be proactive in rebuilding lives, communities and their societies.

Currently, only 46.9 per cent of the global population are effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, while as many as 4.14 billion people – are left unprotected. In Africa, only 17.4 per cent of the population are covered by at least one social protection benefit, leaving more than 1.1 billion Africans unprotected. This is not acceptable in 2022.

This huge coverage gap is associated with a significant underinvestment in social protection in Africa. The level of average social protection expenditure in Africa was less than 5% of GDP compared with a global average of 8.6% in 2020.

During the ADS conversation last week, a variety of stakeholders including government, workers and employers' representatives and academia, all recognized the pressing need to address the root causes of instability and insecurity, and called for increased investments in social protection, through domestic resources for greater sustainability.

The panel challenged all of us to do more ...to act now... if we are to achieve the aspirations set by the SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063. And indeed, we **MUST** do things differently to move the needle in the direction of social justice and a life in dignity. But what does that entail?

First, it means ensuring universal, comprehensive, and adequate social protection, throughout the life cycle. This should support the inclusion of people with diverse, and often intersecting vulnerabilities and inequalities. As Professor Adesina rightly pointed, this should include considerations on the adequacy of the benefits proposed to reach the desired outcome. This is particularly true when it comes to cash transfers, which often are too little to break the cycle of poverty. We must move from a charity approach to a productive and human right approach.

Secondly, we need to strengthen the governance of social protection systems through institutional leadership, multi-sector and multi-stakeholder coordination and ownership, social dialogue as well as innovative solutions like digital technologies. Only by adopting an integrated approach that builds synergies across sectors – such as employment, agriculture, health, and education – can we enhance coverage, adequacy, comprehensiveness, quality and responsiveness of social protection systems.

This multi-stakeholder engagement and integrated policy approach underlines the UN Secretary General's initiative of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, aiming to support countries in creating at least 400 million jobs and extend social protection to the people currently not yet adequately covered by 2030.

Thirdly, it is crucial to ensure the sustainability of social protection by prioritizing long-term, reliable, and equitable forms of financing, focusing on increased allocations of domestic resources, complemented by international cooperation.

It is also important to underscore that in the face of short-term fiscal constraints that many countries are facing, we must stay the course of adequate and comprehensive social protection in line with international labour standards. We should be vigilant that reform proposals in face of current fiscal, and hopefully transient, constraints do not reverse decades of policy gains. The ILO has a wealth of experience to support countries to build and sustain effective social protection systems.

Mr. Odigie, Deputy Secretary General of ITUC-Africa, reiterated that African governments now appreciate the need to extend social protection, and thus must find innovative solutions to expand the fiscal space necessary to adequately and sustainably invest in social protection. This is possible through for instance combatting illicit financial flows and responsive taxation. He reminded us that during the pandemic, while the fiscal space of countries was shrinking, the 3 richest men in West Africa had their income increased by 17 billion dollars!

Today, all countries stand at a crossroad, facing a choice over the future of their social protection systems.

The Africa Regional Social Protection Strategy 2021-2025 launched last year, provides a clear way forward for the very practical and urgent work that will ensure we leave no one behind in Africa. It aims to support African countries to accelerate social protection coverage, to reach 40% of the continent's population by 2025.

This will require African countries to act decisively on many fronts. Building strategic partnerships at the national, regional and international levels will be key to unlocking policy and fiscal solutions that will reform and transform national social protection systems and achieve the 2030 Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063.

Scaling up action to achieve Universal Social Protection is a now more than ever a necessity, which is clear to all stakeholders. Please recall that universal social protection is a key commitment reiterated in the Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour, adopted last week.

Now is the time to take decisive actions to create the Africa we want - by accelerating social protection and pursuing a high-road policy approach, with vigour towards a renewed social contract for Africa.