

Comprehensive social protection for all **ACT Alliance key asks for the post-2015 agenda on social protection**



ACT is an alliance of 146 church and church-related organisations. We work together for sustainable change in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice through coordinated humanitarian, development and advocacy work.

146

members, rooted in the communities we serve

76%
global
south

22%
global
north

2%
global

25,000

member staff and volunteers in

140

countries, working together for sustainable change

ACT Alliance is on the frontlines of addressing systemic poverty; supporting survivors of disasters, wars and conflicts; training rural communities in sustainable agricultural techniques; helping people adapt to environmental change; and influencing governments and other key decision makers to safeguard human rights.



For ACT Alliance 2015 marks an important milestone in the global debate forging the way forward in addressing climate change, promoting the eradication of hunger and poverty, reducing the risks of and increasing protection against disasters, encouraging community resilience and ensuring social protection.

For ACT Alliance, the post-2015 development policy framework needs to support the ability of people to live in freedom, without fear or injustice, enjoying their full human rights within planetary boundaries. It is the common vision of all ACT members to end poverty and to make power accountable.

It is the firm conviction of ACT Alliance that global decision makers need to move away from the belief that economic growth alone will end poverty and broker peaceful societies. In essence, there is a need for a transformation of relationships and institutions that are broken, unjust or unbalanced. In order to eradicate poverty, world leaders will need to transform economies, governance systems and societies so that they foster security of livelihoods, resilience, protection and sustainability for all people and for the planet.

Social protection

Social transfers, social insurance and access to social services such as health care and education – all elements of what is commonly referred to as social protection or social security – are among the most important means to end poverty for all people in all its dimensions. Social safety nets are an important element of social protection, but should not be confused with the more comprehensive and transformative concept of social protection that aims to secure people's livelihoods.

Experience has shown that the global expansion of social protection during the last decade has contributed greatly to advancing several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), although the MDGs contained no explicit reference to it. Social protection has expanded rapidly: by 2010, between 750 and 1 billion people in low income countries lived in households receiving cash transfers.¹ According to a recent estimate by the World Bank, over 1 billion people in these countries participate in at least one social safety net programme. Still, only 345 million of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty are covered by social safety nets.² According to International Labour Organisation estimates, only 27 per cent of the global population enjoy access to comprehensive social security systems, whereas 73 per cent are covered partially or not at all.³

One third of the global population has no access to adequate health care. Older people are particularly at risk for economic insecurity and poverty and disproportionately suffer from a lack of social protection. This is a global phenomenon affecting those experiencing both absolute and relative forms of poverty. Austerity measures following the financial crisis have also drawn attention to weakening social security systems in industrialised and wealthy nations.

At the same time, inequality is increasing globally and within nations (See the ACT Alliance paper on Inequalities).

Social protection in the post-2015 agenda

Social protection measures are essential elements of the policy response to persistent poverty, alongside increasing insecurity and inequality. Countries with strong social security systems can significantly reduce their poverty rates and their level of inequality.⁴ A post-2015 agenda must make explicit provisions for social protection to provide an opportunity for all to live in dignity. The overriding priority and necessary condition for sustainable development – as the outcome document from the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals states⁵ is the eradication of poverty in all its forms everywhere. This includes the provision of social protection for all, including children, youth, and the unemployed, working poor, unpaid workers, persons with disabilities, migrants, and older persons. The post 2015 agenda can also benefit from the significant progress in global consensus on social protection, notably in the adoption in 2012 of International Labour Organisation recommendation 202 on social protection floors.

If social protection systems are designed in a gender-sensitive manner, they can contribute to a transformation of unequal and unjust gender relations and challenge unequal power relations. If, however, proper attention is not paid to gender inequality, there is a risk that women's traditional roles will be reinforced, and that unequal division of labour and access to decision-making will become worse.

ACT Alliance member Christian Aid launched a programme in Sierra Leone with the Rehabilitation and Development Agency (RADA) and The Social Enterprise and Development Foundation (SEND) to use “gender model families” as role models for gender equality.

Like many other countries in Africa, Sierra Leone's government began drafting policies

on social protection after the Livingstone Process facilitated by the African Union in 2006, however the implementation of these policies has been inconsistent and their success is difficult to ascertain. Regardless, these policies, coupled with programmes that promote social equality, create a landscape where a social protection floor can be created in an environment conducive to the shifting of traditional or introduced negative cultural norms.

For more on ACT Alliance's gender equity work visit www.actalliance.org/resources/publications/ACT_Gender_Good-Practice-Report_2012.pdf

Human Rights Approach

Social protection is a human right. It is guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (article 22), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (article nine). The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has elaborated the right to social protection's normative content as well as the core obligations of States parties in respect to social protection: “To ensure access to a social security scheme that provides a minimum essential level of benefits to all individuals and families that will enable them to acquire at least essential health care, basic shelter and housing, water and sanitation, foodstuffs, and the most basic forms of education” (GC 19, article 59a). Furthermore, the ICESCR in (article two) states that the full realisation of the rights recognised in the Covenant shall be achieved inter alia through international assistance and co-operation. Therefore, to provide social security to all is an international responsibility as included in the extraterritorial obligations of States (ETO).

The right to social security is critical to improving people's living conditions through basic income security and the right

to education and healthcare, which greatly facilitates access to adequate, nutritious food, housing, water and sanitation, and to democratic, social, and economic participation. Hence, social protection contributes to the realisation of a number other social, cultural and economic rights. Social security is an individual right not linked to any role and function in society. It is universal and does not depend on conditions.

ACT member RDRS has been working in poor and vulnerable communities in northern Bangladesh since the early 1970s. In its rights-based work to empower people and strengthen local democracy, it is creating local community organisations, “federations,” that work on a number of issues, according to their own priorities.

RDRS’ advocacy policy from 2011 identifies social safety nets as one of their priorities:

“There remain major challenges and weaknesses of safety net programmes currently in operation including inadequate budget, coverage, poor targeting, corruption, leakage in selection, distribution and implementation and others. As a result many deserving and vulnerable extreme poor, who should be benefiting from this provision are excluded. Despite risk and sensitivities involved, greater efforts are needed by civil society and RDRS to ensure these programmes function more fairly, transparently and effectively.”

While inadequate, there are a number of government programmes in Bangladesh that promote social security. Most programmes are targeted, which often means there is a risk that eligible individuals are erroneously excluded. In this context, civil society monitoring at local level can make a great difference.

There are at present 375 Federations with altogether about 318,423 members. About two thirds of these carry out advocacy on

social safety nets – monitoring the local government’s implementation of various programmes, and helping people to get access to benefits they are entitled to. In 2013, advocacy by Federations resulted in 887 persons receiving support through Vulnerable Group Development (means-tested food and cash support for women), 5054 persons receiving support through Vulnerable Group Feeding Scheme (means-tested food aid), 267 persons receiving Old Age Allowance, 195 persons receiving disability allowance and 158 persons receiving support through the Assistance Programme for Widows and Destitute Women.

For more on RDRS visit www.rdrsbangla.net/

Universal access, targeting poverty and vulnerabilities

People living in poverty must not be seen as a distinct group that is fundamentally different from, and have different needs than, the rest of a population. Poverty is dynamic: people who are living in poverty today are not necessarily economically insecure tomorrow. Even when fairly stable statistics on poverty levels are collected, they often hide the fact that while many people move out of poverty; others enter or fall back due to disasters at household level, such as sickness, disability and unemployment, or due to disasters at the societal level. Life-cycle and gender-related vulnerabilities play a very important role in this regard, since poverty tends to be much more widespread among children, families with small children, female headed households and older persons. Hence, actions to reduce poverty must include measures to increase security and support resilience.⁶ Social protection plays a key role in this regard.

Experiences show that the best way to make sure that no one is left behind is not to focus on programmes targeted specifically at the

poorest. Instead, focus should be on tackling specific situations evolving in relation to life-cycle vulnerabilities (in accordance with the recommendation on social protection floors) and guaranteeing non-discrimination through making sure no-one is excluded and denied rights and access to social protection, including income security and right to social services. Targeted support measures may be needed, but should remain add-ons.

In the words of Amartya Sen

“Benefits meant exclusively for the poor people often end up being poor benefits.”

Livelihood security and eradication of poverty

The focus of social security policies should be on the protection and preservation of livelihoods and contribution to full and productive employment and decent work for all. Social protection can have preventive effects by supporting structures and conditions to withstand shocks and contingencies; reduce the risk of impoverishment, and to sustain livelihood security and support a self-managed and autonomous lifestyle.

Social security must be ensured for people who are temporarily or permanently unable to secure their livelihoods and their right to social services. This includes working-age populations who are unemployed as well as those who are underemployed- underpaid and over-worked. In particular, female workers are often severely underpaid or not paid at all, and unpaid domestic and care work still relies primarily on women's labour.

In the highlighted ACT Alliance member programmes, social protection has been shown to play an important role in preventing and reducing multidimensional poverty in all its forms and protecting lives and livelihoods. The multidimensionality of poverty refers to not only income poverty, but poverty as denied or insufficient access to social services; discrimination in regard to political, social and economic participation; and the absence of freedom of choice.

Poverty is to be understood as a dynamic process. Even if extreme poverty often persists chronically over long periods, short-term but recurrent poverty must be considered. Social security must therefore aim to:

- a** prevent impoverishment in the face of individual crisis such as unemployment or sickness, but it may also be scaled up and used as a means of mitigating effects of natural disasters and economic shocks;
- b** support people to escape from poverty; and
- c** guarantee a life in dignity without sustained poverty.

In addition, the causes of impoverishment and chronic poverty must be taken into account. To overcome this, it is necessary to change institutions and discriminatory practices, norms, and social structures that hold people in poverty so as to include those who are “invisible” and not easy to reach.

Reduction of inequality

Inequality is a major barrier to sustainable human development as it has detrimental effects on both individuals and societies, and the overall ability to reduce poverty. The concentration of power and wealth imbalances has deepened poverty and inequalities within and between countries. Inequality negatively affects both the health and socio-economic opportunities of the people living in poverty and in situations of high marginalisation, with a much higher risk of children living in poverty dying from preventable diseases or dropping out of school prematurely.

The World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2014 Global Risks Report identifies severe income disparity as the fourth most concerning global risk in 2014. WEF's Global Outlook report, published in November 2013, warned that inequality is undermining social stability and threatening security on a global scale. Evidence suggests that high levels of income inequality reduce the impact of economic growth on poverty reduction, and undermine

the sustainability and robustness of economic growth in the long run. The new agenda should therefore include targets aiming at reducing social, political and economic inequalities, which should be reflected in national agendas and priorities.

While absolute poverty is decreasing, inequality has increased in most parts of the world. Levels of social, economic and political inequality are in many places extreme. We have moved from a world where, two decades ago, the majority of the world's poorest people lived in low-income countries, to a world where 70 per cent of the world's poorest people now live in middle-income countries.⁸

Social protection can reduce inequality by redistributing wealth and the benefits of economic growth more fairly, fostering social cohesion and inclusion and contributing to state-building. Social protection promotes equality in two ways. First, the social transfers' component of social protection programmes increases the income of the most disadvantaged. Second, the gradual expansion of national taxation which is necessary to finance the establishment of social protection systems will over time lead to a redistribution of wealth. Latin America is the only continent where inequality has decreased the last decade, and the expansion of social protection is believed to be one of the primary reasons.⁹ Social protection is a transformative concept because it aims at changing and transforming structures that cause and stabilise the existence of poverty and exclusion.

Nevertheless, further analysis is needed to ascertain the root causes of structures and processes that lead to the rapid accumulation of wealth. It is not enough to create redistribution mechanisms but it is necessary to challenge the accumulation of wealth and the idea of infinite economic growth.

Integrated policy framework, the responsibility of the nation state and of the international community

The obligation of national governments is to uphold the economic, social and cultural rights of all people. All efforts should be made to secure the necessary funds to finance at least basic social protection. States should ensure the right to social security as a legal, enforceable entitlement to all and should provide adequate budgetary allocations. States should aim to extend social security and progressively ensure higher levels of social protection to as many people as possible. For that purpose, States must progressively build and maintain comprehensive and adequate social security systems.

The right to universal social security/social protection should be part of all development and economic policies and transformative social agendas including international co-operation. National social protection floors and comprehensive social protection systems must be established or improved in all countries and adapted to situations in which the informal and agricultural sector is large. Social protection floors (ILO Recommendation 202, 2012) are a first necessary step towards universal, rights based and comprehensive social protection for all. They must be part of wider and coherent national social protection development strategies under democratic control and include monitoring mechanisms that assure accountability.

Social protection policies must also be integrated in a wider context of development policy frameworks which include aspects of access to resources and employment/work/income; political, economic and social participation; empowerment, and capacity building. State driven social security programmes must specifically take into consideration the specific and multiple living conditions and rights of politically, socially, economically and culturally excluded groups. Inclusion in society is the only means to

the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Therefore, a variety of design, mechanisms, policies are necessary to achieve the inclusion of all in integrated systems of social protection. The participation and inclusion of diverse people in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring of social security mechanisms and systems must be ensured.

In addition to the responsibility of the nation state to provide for social protection, the Maastricht Principles¹⁰ explain that, according to international law, “all States have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, both within their territories and extraterritorially.” Against this background, the debate on international financing options should be intensified, including innovative options like a Global Fund for Social Protection and the use of transaction tax for social protection.

Within this context, it is necessary to move away from a donor-led one size fits all approach and towards a greater support for domestically initiated programming within development co-operation. At the same time, increased coordination and harmonisation within the realm of international co-operation is needed.

Without compromising the responsibility of the government, other stakeholders such as CSOs and faith based organisations can play important roles in the expansion of social security by helping people to claim their rights, advocating in favour of the development of social protection, monitoring the implementation of social protection, and participating in the implementation of social protection.

Recommendations

Drawing on this evidence, ACT Alliance has a series of recommendations which should ensure that the rhetoric on improving social protection becomes fully embedded in the post-2015 goals, targets and indicators. Bearing in mind that social protection has wide reaching implications in areas such as food security, health, education, housing, water and sanitation, amongst others, these recommendations sit alongside our proposals on other core values such as equity and environmental sustainability which are addressed in separate papers.

Over all, ACT Alliance calls for an ambitious, universal and global post-2015 development framework which reflects rights-based approach to development.

The post-2015 development framework:

- Needs to address structural, societal and global root causes of poverty, conflict, insecurity and ecological destruction and the key concerns of economically disadvantaged people and communities.
- Must be based on commitments to universal human rights norms and standards, promoting a common universal set of goals requiring action from all countries but allowing national differentiation based on context, capacities and need within globally agreed standards.
- Needs to address inequalities, make power accountable, and create conditions for living within planetary boundaries without fear.
- Needs to have a robust implementation, monitoring and reviewing framework.

Wider inclusion of social protection within the post-2015 framework- recommendations:

- 1** The expansion of social protection floors, as defined in ILO Recommendation 202, should be recognised as a key strategy to obtain the post-2015 targets. Key elements of social protection floors include:
 - a** Access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting essential health care, including maternity care;
 - b** basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;
 - c** basic income security for persons of active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and
 - d** basic income security for older persons.
- 2** It should be recognised that realisation of the human right to social security/social protection is essential for the realisation of a number of other economic, social and cultural rights and for a life with dignity.
- 3** Social protection should be rights-based: benefits should be non-discriminatory, transparent, participatory, empowering and clearly defined in legal frameworks that enable accountability.
- 4** Social protection programmes and policies should be designed in a gender-sensitive manner, in order to contribute to a transformation of unequal and unjust gender relations.
- 5** Floors of protection are a first necessary step towards comprehensive social protection for all. They must be part of wider and coherent national social protection development strategies.
- 6** The role of CSOs in promoting and monitoring the implementation of social protection should be recognised.
- 7** The international community should step up its support to low and medium income countries in establishing and extending social protection programmes, policies, and institutions.
- 8** A Global Fund for Social Protection should be set up in order to facilitate funding of basic social protection floors in low-income countries and provide insurance for countries where existing shock-related risks currently make it difficult for States to maintain their development trajectories.

Footnotes

- ¹ Armando Barrientos, et.al. 2010. Social Assistance in Developing Countries Database Version 5. Manchester: Brooks World Poverty Institute.
- ² The World Bank, 2014. The State of Social Safety Nets 2014.
- ³ ILO 2014, World Social Protection Report 2014/15. Building economic recovery, inclusive development and social justice
- ⁴ ILO 2014, World Social Protection Report 2014/15. Building economic recovery, inclusive development and social justice
- ⁵ OWG 2014, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Outcome Document- Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>)
- ⁶ UNDP, 2014. Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience. Human Development Report 2014.
- ⁷ Sen, Amartya: 1995 The political economy of targeting.
- ⁸ IDS WORKING PAPER 349, DECEMBER 2010 <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Rs349.pdf>
- ⁹ Nora Lustig et al. 2013, Deconstructing the Decline in Inequality in Latin America, Working Paper 1314, Tulane Economics Working Paper Series
- ¹⁰ Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2011.



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