Social Protection in the Context of Development Strategies

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Introduction

Establishing a theory for social protection systems is not less important than policies, procedures, and execution, forming an integrated unit in the following manner:

1) Theoretical rooting, or conceptual framing, provides immunity against sliding into the prevalent fragmentary approaches and practices, which failed to achieve desired results. Furthermore, it determines the overall direction and final objectives of policies, prior to the practical steps.
2) Policy Making – namely social policies encompassing the policies and options of social protection – is the next phase. Guided by the theoretical-conceptual framework, developmental actors set the intermediate goals, which should be viable, achievable, and contributes to attaining the ultimate goal.
3) These specific policies and options are then translated into executive plans – including timelines, activities, interventions, procedures, delegation of tasks and responsibilities, budgeting, resource allocation, and so on – so that the goals on paper would be realized.

These three levels or phases are closely-knit, whereby policymaking acts as a mediator between theory and practice, setting the stage for their relevance and effectiveness. Without a theoretical framework and a reference to adjust the track, politics will be lost in a labyrinth. Without the appropriate and well-designed executive plans, it will also get lost in a tempest of rhetoric and promises. But the desired social protection system will not see the light.

From Equity to Equality

Needless to say, social protection systems are a single component of more comprehensive plans and strategies to achieve social development and development in general, economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental. This linkage has been demonstrated thousands of times and it is the axiom and starting point adopted by many, including this paper. Consequently, the theoretical framework of social protection is not assumed to be comprehensive or independent, as it falls under the general conceptual framework of development.

Although a little selective, a discussion of the report to the UN Secretary General by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, entitled *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, is adequate enough, as it contains the elements of the theme under discussion.

The report included some new information on the currently used concepts and terminology. Earlier literature on development published by the UN System used the term "equity". Lengthy explanations were included to justify its usage instead of the term "justice", to avoid ideologically charged terms, focus on inputs instead of outputs, opportunities rather than results, and so on. This was with the exception of the question of gender, using the term "equality" explicitly and unequivocally.

The term justice (development justice, social justice) was brought back during the preparations for the Rio+20 Summit and the Post-2015 Agenda recently and the Rio+20 documents did not even mention equity. The new analytical framework for development in the *Realizing the Future We Want for All* report is also a big step forward, in its direct usage of the term "equality", making equality one of the three core principles of (human) development, next to sustainability and human rights. However, the main text (especially items 60 and 62) does not include a theoretical

rooting of this transformation in terminology and concepts. In the text, equality is introduced from the perspective of rejecting exclusion, aiming towards inclusion and non-discrimination against particular groups (women, youth, poor, disabled, minorities, etc.). The most prominent example relates once again to gender equality, calling to address the structural causes of discrimination.

Thus, the report seems to suggest that the changes were merely in terminology. This does not represent a radical transformation in the concept (from equity to equality), as much as is meant to put an emphasis on disparities and the need to remove discrimination-generating mechanisms. However important this may be, it fails to set solid theoretical foundations for the idea of equality and retains a disparity between the theoretical and practical levels, which muddles the grasp of this change and appears in the next level of analysis, related to shaping this understanding into policies.

Inclusive Social Development

This term seems to be inappropriate, especially when used in conjunction with the terminology of "inclusive economic development", as the two concepts represent the social and economic components of development (in addition to other components, like environmental sustainability, the political level, and culture).

The question of inclusion is especially important, since it avoids the use of terms such as comprehensive or totalitarian. The term "inclusive" suggests movement and dynamism; it means the achievement of development requires a continuous expansion of its base of participants and beneficiaries together (the same applies to inclusive economic development). This dynamic and wide perspective would also mean that social development would not be limited to one group at the expense of another, including the poor. It is meant to reach all segments of society, with the poor and most deprived being its starting point or focus in terms of allocations and priorities, but without exception of any other social segment. This is consistent with the human rights approach, also integrated in the development perspective.

These elements are particularly crucial to the philosophy of social protection systems, as they are closely linked to the debates on universal vs. targeted systems, the right to know vs. a very narrow need-to-know basis, inclusion (of the poor and deprived) vs. exclusion, and whether fighting poverty should be incorporated into development or independent from it.

Going back to the aforementioned report, the section regarding "inclusive social development" (paragraphs 66-71) was very traditional and inconsistent with the title and its connotations, as explained above. These paragraphs continue to focus on traditional services and sectors (health, education, job creation, provision of water, and so on) and to tackle results and impacts, rather than causes and macro policies. However, this engenders a utilitarian view of social development as a means to another purpose, despite being closer to the concept of comprehensive development than any other component.

However, development is a key-component of strategies related to poverty eradication, a more comprehensive social development, and development in general, as will be described below.

Fighting Poverty: Exposing the Myths

Progress in the design of comprehensive, effective, rights-based social protection systems requires dispelling the prevailing myths in the fight against poverty, particularly the following two fallacies.

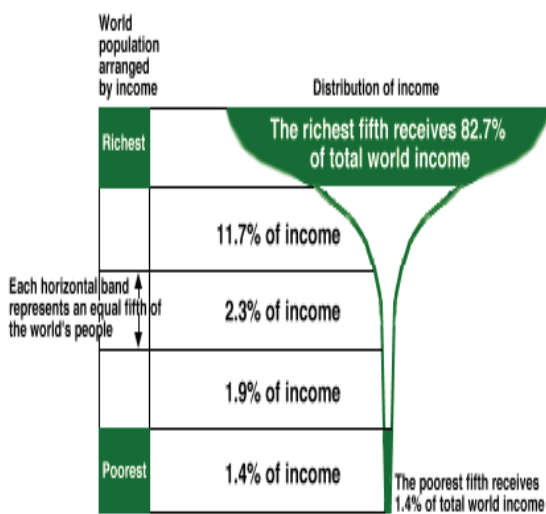**Myth One: 20% of the Global Population is Poor[1]**

This myth assumes that the poor make up around 20% of the global population. In the poorest countries, this figure could be as high as 40% or 60%, while dropping to 5% and 10% in medium development or better-off countries. All the prevailing poverty eradication strategies and policies revolve around this magic number: 20%.

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1- Some ideas in this and the following section were introduced in the Regional Conference on Social Protection Floors, organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the International Council on Social Welfare, and the ILO in Rabat between 11 and 13 November 2014.

However, the world currently includes a much higher number of poor people, which could be perceived by looking at the world's GDP and wealth distribution.
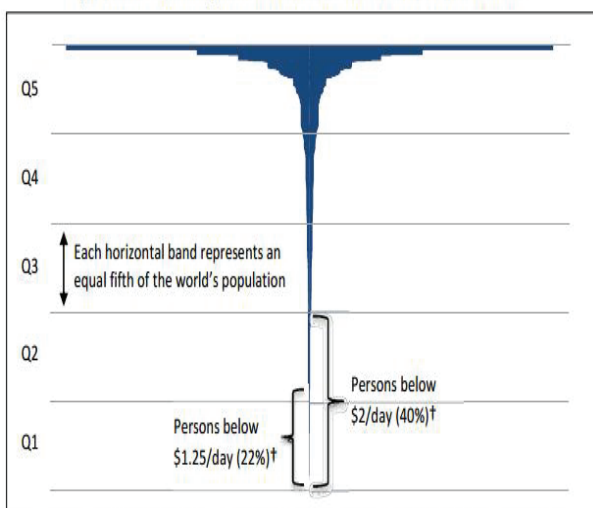
Since issuing the Human Development Report in 2002, with the famous cover of the distribution of the world's wealth on population segments (5 segments of 20%), the distribution did not actually change. On the contrary, global disparity grew and distribution deteriorated somewhat, keeping in "champagne glass" shape.

Figure 3: Global Income Distribution

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report 1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Global Income Distributed by Percentiles of the Population in 2007 (or latest available) in PPP constant 2005 international dollars*

Source: Adapted from UNDP (2005) using World Bank (2011), UNU-WIDER (2008) and Eurostat (2011)
* According to the global accounting model
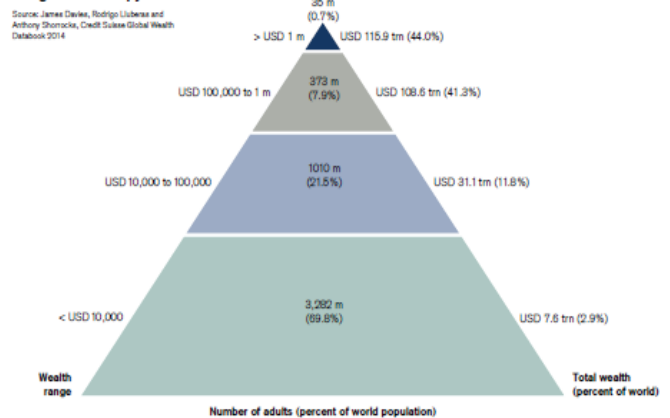† Based on Chen and Ravallion (2008)

In brief, the share of 60% of the population with the lowest income ranges between 5 and 6% of the world's wealth, representing, without doubt, the percentage of poor people on the planet. On the other hand, Credit Suisse's annual Global Wealth Report provides similar, even more polarized results calculated on the basis of the share of adult individuals of the total wealth.

According to the 2014 report, around 70% of the global adult population shares less than 3% of global wealth, while the richest 0.7% own 44% of that wealth.

According to both sources, between 60 and 70% of the global population appear to be poor.

Of course, there is no need to argue here that poverty – including absolute poverty – is a historical and relative concept or that the poor are not only those who live in misery and famine, depicted in the media in refugee camps, or the displaced and victims of wars.

So where does the figure 20% come from? Most likely, the number was predetermined based on political considerations. As the rate of poverty around the world and in the concerned countries must be reduced whenever possible, the lower figure is utilized to give grounds for poverty eradication policies, which merely addresses the results. They are based on the concept of isolating the poor into a unique segment of the population (or dividing them up into subgroups: very poor, vulnerable, and so on), to target them with specific policies that do not involve the rest of the population.

Needless to say, this approach does not ad-

dress poverty mechanisms and causes. It fails to recognize that poverty is an outcome of the overall economic and social performance and is not particular to only one segment of the population. However, this segment will bear the brunt of the failures or deficiencies in overall policies imposed by the rich and powerful, to begin with, and paid for by the poor and vulnerable from the beginning to the end. Further justification is found in tampering with the definition of poverty and calculating poverty lines, veiled in a scientific package of complicated terms, statistics, definitions, and so on, which baffle most of those who consume them.

Myth Two: Narrow Targeting and Safety Nets

It has been many years since the world dismissed the idea that "the nearest path to a goal is the shortest" or that "the shortest distance between two points is a straight line." Rather, it seems that straight lines do not exist and are merely an illusion. If this is true for the hard "factual" sciences, it should be even more relevant in humanities, economics, sociology, and political sciences, where subjective human factors, choices, and wills play a crucial role.

This "myth" is closely linked to the first one and serves as its source and conduit at the same time. In relation to the subject of this paper, it means the whole package of concepts and tools and the traditional toolkit of anti-poverty plans. However, it ultimately leads to delinking anti-poverty policies from development and to address the poor with generally isolated policies and plans. This always leaves intact the mechanisms of the economy itself and addresses the outcomes of economic choices, including poverty and deprivation, without touching the roots and causes. Consequently, the narrow targeting approach and safety nets are promoted as the most effective manner to fight poverty, in order not to duplicate efforts or lose sight of solving the problems faced by the poor.

However, policies, which separate the poor from the rest of the population gives the impression that the causes of poverty are constrained within the circle of the poor themselves, not that it is a social construct of the overall socioeconomic system. It also means separating the outcomes from the causes, the isolation of poverty from impoverishment and its mechanisms, and removing the link between poverty and inequality. These all lead to localized policies, which fail to eradicate poverty.

The 2011 UNRISD report on poverty and inequality was "critical of current approaches to poverty reduction that treat the poor as a residual category requiring discrete policies. When a substantial proportion of a country's population is poor, it makes little sense to detach poverty from the dynamics of development. For countries that have been successful in increasing the well-being of the majority of their populations, long-term processes of structural transformation, rather than poverty reduction per se, had been central to public policy objectives."

While China is often mentioned as a best practice in reducing poverty rates, this occurred through public state policies "before there were specific poverty alleviation programs in existence." After their adoption, poverty reduction actually stagnated, since they distracted from public policies.

The report *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, on the other hand, emphasizes that "[continuing] along previously trodden economic growth pathways will exacerbate inequalities, social tensions and pressures on the world's resources and natural environment. There is therefore an urgent need to find new development pathways that encourage creativity and innovation in the pursuit of inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth and development."

These statements entail a radical critique of past trends, responsible for the failures and crises.

The causes and factors of such erroneous tendencies must be identified beyond superficial criticism, which often leads to the same mistakes or maintains the flaws in administrative and implementation processes. Only then, one could speak of new developmental paths, which are neither just a reproduction of previous trends or merely improved versions of the same old policies.

Traditional Social Safety Nets

As evidenced by many experiences, the social safety nets approach has had a limited impact in the fight against poverty. Moreover, the success of some experiments in a number of countries only took place in the context of robust and effective public policies, in parallel with a decisive political will to eradicate poverty, with governmental institutions in the forefront and an efficient administrative model. Outside these conditions, successes attributed to countries using this approach in a partial manner, had been local in nature and did not succeed in eradicating poverty or reducing poverty rates significantly on the national level. These shortcomings, however, should not be attributed to the failure of states and concerned governments. The approach suffers from a structural defect from the source and at the core of its policies, programs, and implementation, usually steered by international institutions providing financial support, technical advice, and, in many cases, their direct leadership of the programs.

Prevention from Falling into Poverty

Regarding prevention, there is a big difference between the traditional safety nets approach and the approach recommended by this paper. It is rooted in the belief that social protection systems must offer protection for people from falling into poverty, meaning it must prevent their impoverishment and not merely protect them when they fall into poverty, due to an accident or event. Hence, social protection systems should enhance people's ability to confront problems and shocks, and protect them from becoming exposed to the risks, in the first hand, through providing decent work conditions and other basic principles of social and economic activity. When people are forced to walk a tightrope, they are likely to fall off and would need a safety net underneath.

Deficiency in Coverage

The traditional approach puts too much focus on the principle of efficiency in allocation of resources and to avoid the targeting of non-beneficiaries. Yet, anxiety about limited resources, and technical concerns in auditing, targeting, and

specialization, in addition to avoiding universal coverage from a rights based perspective and so on, are practically leading to deficient coverage, in more than one sense:

- First: They limit the categories receiving coverage into a narrower margin.
- Second: They limit the number of actual persons receiving coverage.
- Third: They limit the areas covered by protection even further.

Consequently, coverage will suffer a triple failure resulting in weakening the developmental impact, including the impact on poverty eradication. Often, a specific number of families in a particular region are selected to be covered by social safety nets based on certain benchmarks; they are then provided with a specific model of cash or material assistance, in a particular field exclusively. This does not create the desired

impact, since deprivation is multifaceted and poverty itself is multidimensional. Ignoring other factors, which may overlap and intersect with any of the dimensions of the protection system, could cause a fault that would bring down all the effects of protection or dramatically reduce their impact. Universal coverage or that of broad categories based on the population and social groups or geography, in addition to diversifying protection to encompass all the basic intertwined dimensions of poverty and deprivation, would be immeasurably more effective.

Proportional and Real-Time Intervention

Another deficiency in traditional approaches is the disproportion between interventions, their frequency and speed, and the magnitude and intensity of problems. One example is the great disparity caused by mass layoffs or deteriorating working conditions due to privatization or economic transformations leading to many people losing their old jobs and limiting the prospects for many newcomers in the labor market, on the one hand, and the other hand traditional safety net measures, which see the solution in rehabilitation programs targeting a limited number of people and does not aim to rehabilitate beneficiaries to return to the job market under similar or better conditions than in the past.

The key-problem here is that the approach does not address the problem at the source and does not attempt to introduce any amendments to mitigate the negative impact of so-called economic reforms. In addition, it does not include any accountability for private sector companies and organizations, which are not expected to play any essential role, except some support for rehabilitation programs, for example. All the while, the largest burden falls on the governmental and civil society and the more serious repercussions impact those pushed outside the job market, with less capacities and opportunities, becoming yet another generation in need of assistance and aid.

In the Time of Major Crises

Social safety nets interventions are often called "tranquilizers" or "cosmetic procedures" by their developmental critics. This applies to most so-

cial safety nets measures in regular situations, let alone in exceptional situations, such as occupation, war, civil strife, or cases of severe conflict combines with state failure. Needless to say, the situation would become more complicated in emergency situations, especially due to the displacement of people and severe shortcomings in the work of state agencies to maintain social services, the basic infrastructure, security, and so on.

All this adds to the need for prompt emergency intervention, on one hand, and introduces the need to identify the moment of extreme interdependence of all aspects of deprivation, between the humanitarian and the human rights aspects, the need to confront the direct problem, and the need to establish solutions, especially when the crisis is long-term – which is the prevailing feature of the Arab region.

In such a situation, where people's lives and collective personal security are directly at risk, entails a completely different look at the social protection model, to identify those in need of social protection and are thus supposed to receive services and those who require long-term solutions and protection of all their human rights. These conditions also lead to increasing the links in between situation of neighboring countries or those involved in the conflict and its repercussions, entailing more precise interventions. However, complex situations are often treated lightly, where refugees and host communities are treat-

ed with regular interventions, without scrutiny, creating additional problems and distorting the social work models in those countries.
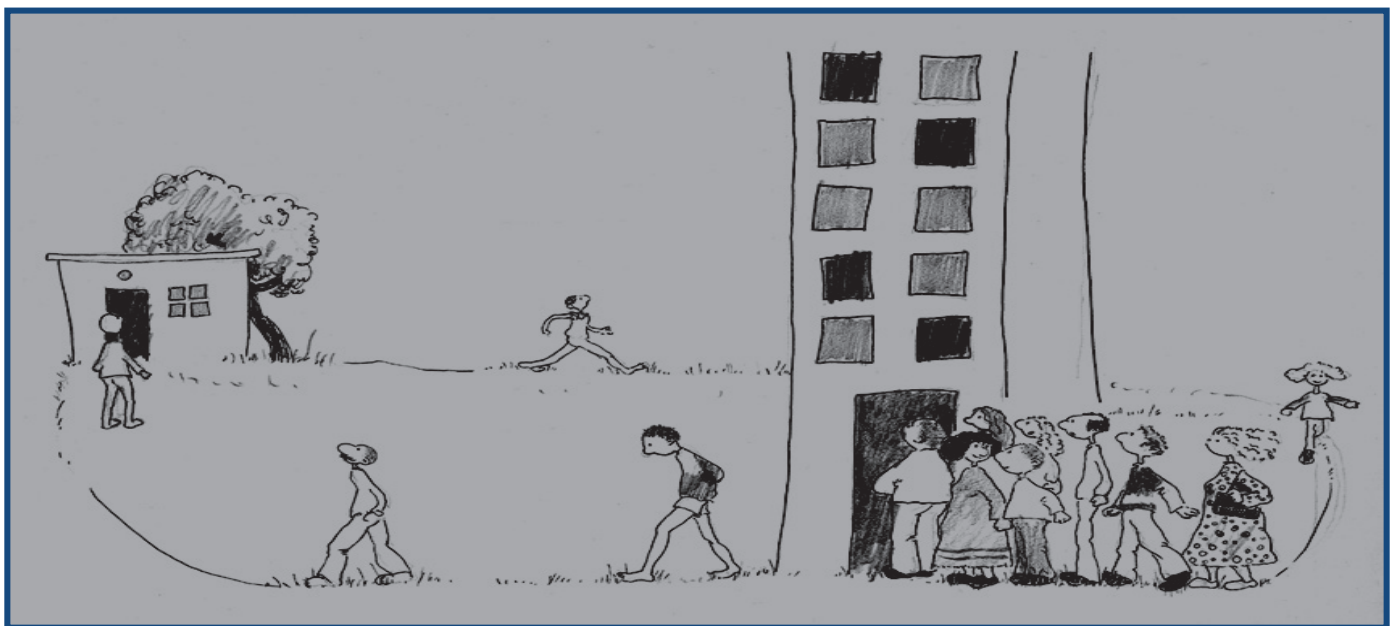
Possible Alternatives

The above detailed critique of traditional approaches (social nets, in particular) was based on analysis and practical examples from around the world. It aimed to convince the reader of their core defect, especially when interventions are isolated from more comprehensive social policies or when applied in an uncritical manner.

However, clear and decisive freedom from the hold of such approaches is necessary to start looking for new alternatives, which are likely to have a different philosophical background, guiding principles, and political orientations, despite some similarities in intervention on the technical or practical levels. Working methods would also be different, founded on genuine partnership with civil society, and involving a balanced role between the government, the private sector, and civil society and between national and international sides, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

Regarding social protection in particular, a special focus should be placed on the Social Protection Floors initiative, not because it is the only alternative for social protection systems, but since it is an actually existing model, with an wide international alliance behind it, led by the ILO, WHO, and other UN agencies. Moreover, it is a tangible initiative, which guarantees viable options for most countries, especially poor ones, in addition to being reinforced with several tools to assist in transforming it into national policies and programs. In short, it should be highlighted as an alternative example, which encompasses the features of a rights-based developmental approach.

Guiding Principles

Social protection systems are based on three critical guiding principles:

Principle One: Social protection should be considered a human right, along with the commitment to universal coverage rather than narrow targeting. Social protection policies should be integrated in the framework of a broader strategy for social development, since no single social protection program would lead to a strong developmental impact on its own and without being part of a coherent system.

Principle Two: Key-aspects related to the various facets of life, activities of individuals, and population groups and ages. The question here is not delivering aid to the destitute and very poor, but the protection of wide sections of society through job opportunities, multifaceted insurances, protecting the unemployed, and the inclusion of entitled population groups, such as

children, the elderly, or the disabled. Sectors covered by protection should include health, education, work, and unemployment, all as part of comprehensive developmental strategies.

Principle Three: Progress should be made on the level of multidimensional poverty and inequality, which must be tangible and measurable on the national level, and, above all, stable, sustainable, and not a temporary statistical improvement or limiting benefit from aid or social nets to a very limited segment.

Elements of the Global Initiative for Social Protection Floors

The Social Protection Floors Initiative (SPF-I) calls for the adoption of an interventions and policy package, guaranteeing the following:

● Universal access to essential health care for all;
● Basic income security or the provision of needs for all children, through a benefits system for children;
● Income security accompanied by hiring guarantees, through public works programs geared towards poor persons in active age who are unable to

secure adequate income in the job market;
● Income security, at the minimum, through basic pensions funded through taxation and targeting the elderly, the disabled, and families who lost their primary breadwinner.

There is no need to get into the details of the initiative, as they are covered in other sections of the Arab Watch Report. However, their main characteristics could be delineated as follows:

● They are established on a rights-based approach, meaning they will need legislative and institutional measures, in addition to guaranteeing continuous benefit from services as established rights, which are not impacted by political and institutional changes or shocks and conditionalities of any kind.
● They are built on the principle of universal coverage, rather than limited targeting. Even in the event of gradual implementation, for practical reasons or loss of resources, this would be in the direction of universal coverage. Gradualism, however, should not en-

tail indirect or practical targeting; rather, it should mean the application of the universal coverage principle on a particular segment or region.

- They are based on an integrated package of interventions, delivered at once to the related segments, regions, or households; they are managed and implemented in a joint and unified manner and would avoid sectoral division and isolated interventions.

These principles provide the initiative with the key conditions to be considered a suitable and adoptable model, which could be translated into practical policies on the national level.

Overall Situation in Arab Countries

Most of the Arab countries, except the least developed ones, arrived to universal education and achieved advanced stages of primary health care for women and children, with some countries registering advanced figures in other areas of health.

Regular systems to support poor households do exist in some countries (Tunisia, Jordan...), while others have progressed on the level of integrated social policies and regional interventions in a decentralized manner (Morocco). Countries with abundant funds also maintain support systems for the disabled, the elderly, women heads of households, youth entering into the business sector, and so on. Some countries adopted systems to protect the unemployed (Bahrain, Algeria...) and others play a role in housing, while some leave it up to the private sector, etc.

This is a very partial list of social protection interventions in the Arab countries, which will be detailed for some countries in this report. In general, however, Social Protection Floors components are not far from social policies implemented in the region. Yet it is not a question of a particular measure or intervention, but the system as an integrated whole. Nonetheless, none of the requirements of social protection systems, similar to Social Protection Floors, exist in Arab countries. Thus, it would be difficult to say that any of them adopts this approach in a systematic manner.

The situation varies according to country. While some countries with ample financial resources are offering services packages, which are more generous that Social Protection Floors, they are limited to the basics services. However, these countries are not necessarily in line with this approach, as the question is not merely of services, but providing qualitative elements, especially the human rights perspective, universal coverage, and integrated packages.

Thoughts on the Features of Social Protection

In terms of social protection, Arab countries can be classified in four categories:

1. Resource-rich welfare states,
2. Countries with a medium level of development,
3. Less developed countries,
4. Countries living through occupation or extremely harsh war situations.

1. Resource-rich Welfare States

They include the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Algeria, which are welfare states in the patriarchal traditional style (GCC) or statist in nature (Algeria). Their financial resources are based on oil. Coverage systems in those countries are sometime very "generous" (especially in the GCC), encompassing all levels of education, health, housing, and assistance for various segments (families in need, women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, etc.) regardless of poverty.

The types of services and level of protection provided by these systems are much wider than what is suggested in Social Protection Floors. However, they are based on distributions through direct government decisions and are unstable, shrinking with decreasing resources and becoming more generous in anticipation of possible unrest or political reasons. Furthermore, they are not necessarily propped by constitutional or legal mechanisms.

The most serious problem facing these countries is sustainability, as they need to respond to the high expectations and constant demands of

citizens who are accustomed to having a patriarchal system committed to caring about them. Thus, government spending and support funds need to be increased continuously, without a specific rule to regulate the matter. While this type of system is quantitatively more generous than social protection floors, it needs to be developed in its grounding, working mechanisms, rights-based approach, constitutionalization, and rationalization, to achieve participation and sustainability.

2. Countries with a Medium Level of Development

These countries are characterized by disparity between policies and the role of the state and other stakeholders (civil society and the private sector). Social protection countries in those counties are varied; some more integrated (Tunisia, Jordan...), others partially (Lebanon), and yet others are doing a mix between various types of assistance and intervention through national or sectoral programs (Morocco). The role of the state varies as well, as some states play an advanced and key role (Jordan, Tunisia...), while other have almost completely withdrawn from planning and rely on the private sector and civil society (Lebanon).

These countries utilize a mix between a partial rights-based approach and a distributive orientation, with a greater role for NGOs in some cases. In other situations, protection programs for specific segments are similar to collective protection floors, including local development programs or social assistance for poor families. However, they are far from being an integrated package and a rights-based approach, in addition to problems in resources and relative dependence on aid.

The suitable approach in this situation would incorporate a sectoral component, due to discrepancy in priorities and unevenness in the development of sectors. Hence, the national package is set differently in each country, with the state playing a key role in providing basic social services for all, especially education and health, a common component in almost all countries in this category. In addition, some segments receive special care (street children, specific rural

areas, particular population segments, etc.). In this group of countries, social protection packages could support a higher level than that in the international recommendation, in particular sectors and for specific populations.

3. Least Developed Countries

The global social protection floor, as a minimum, is highly relevant in this category and this applies to all least developed countries and those that are close to this situation. Sectoral discrepancies are less important here; overall priorities are closely knit and focus on the same population group in the country. Thus, an integrated and executed as a whole implementation would be more relevant. Gradualism also would have a new meaning here, conditional on comparable progress in all the constituent components of the floor, implemented as a whole as much as possible.

In this situation, the problem of reliance on foreign funding is more important and it is necessary to design strategies to mitigate such dependency in the medium run. However, a key aspect of the global recommendation is the ability to apply it and fund it in these poor countries. Lack of wealth is not an excuse for failure to adopt this approach, which is critical for least developed countries, due to the need of wide segments of the population and probably the whole population – with the exception of small segments – for a comprehensive and effective social protection system.

4. Occupations, War, and Severe Conflict

The situation in Palestine is close to that of least developed countries, regarding the almost total reliance on subsidies-foreign funding, with one major difference, which is that society does have the human resources but it is under occupation. In addition to depending on foreign funding, the social protection system in Palestine is a distributive system, which is prone to fluctuations related to availability of resources and other factors (the occupation), which are beyond the grasp of the national authority, although it is a semi-authority with similar responsibilities to governments in normal situations.

In countries facing a situation of severe conflict (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia...), the weakness

or failure state performance, and wide displacement, social protection intersects with relief and humanitarian aid. Yet, it is often the case that these situations would last for years, which demands attention to the question of human rights (including refugees and the displaced) and the adoption of more effective and sustainable mechanisms. The rights-based perspective remains valid here, in addition to addressing the situation through an all-inclusive package of policies and interventions. The logical question here, internationally, regionally, and locally, is why shouldn't there be a social protection floor package for conflict situations, which protects the right to life all the way to the right of return?

Concluding Remarks

Social Protection Floors, particularly in the global initiative, represent the minimum required of a social protection system based on rights and universal access. It should be considered as a key component of national poverty eradication plans. In general, however, social protection floors should go further and contribute to social development and development in general, beyond the fight against poverty.

Social protection floors could serve three functions or levels of functions:

- As components of poverty eradication plans;
- As components of social development strategies;
- As components in economic development strategies and the overall development of society.

The main idea here is that providing an effective social protection system with wide coverage would have a series of impacts, starting with mitigating the effects of poverty, to protection from falling into poverty, to enhancing human capacities, participation, and gender equality, on to bridging social and regional gaps and contributing to economic and political stability.

Such a chance must not be missed.

15 November 2014.