



Management of  
Social Transformations  
Programme



**Research Meeting**  
**on Social Protection Policies in South Asia**

**18-19 March 2010**

**ICSSR, New Delhi, India**

**Concept Note**

**Organised in collaboration with:**

**Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru  
University, New Delhi (JNU)**

**Institute for Human Development, New Delhi (IHD)**

**Social Protection in Asia network (SPA)**

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## **I Introduction**

The research meeting on social protection policies in South Asia is jointly organized by UNESCO New Delhi and Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR). It is organized within the framework of UNESCO's Management of Social Transformation (MOST) Programme and its flagship activity, the Regional and Sub-regional Fora of Ministers in charge of Social Development, launched in 2001 in Latin America to enhance dialogue between Ministers, researchers and the civil society, and enable the development of high quality policy responses to social transformations.

The objective of the meeting is to provide support material and expertise in view of the next Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development from South Asia, expected to take place in Bangladesh in 2010 on *Social Protection and Safety Nets in South Asia*.

This paper explains the background, context and objectives of the research meeting, within UNESCO's Management of Social Transformation (MOST) Programme and the Fora of Ministers in charge of Social Development.

## **II UNESCO's Programme on the Management of Social Transformations**

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is a specialized UN agency with a multiple mandate and a constituency of 193 Member States. It was founded in 1945 to build peace and mutual understanding by promoting international cooperation through education, sciences, culture and communication.

In 1994, UNESCO launched a Programme for the Management of Social Transformations in 1994. It was recognized that such a Programme could play a significant role in disseminating knowledge to Member States on managing social challenges and transformations. A key objective is to assist Member States with improving the quality of policy-making by encouraging evidence-based policies and research and analysis through dialogue. Therefore, MOST plays a unique role in bringing researchers and policy-makers together to apply research to policy and thereby to improve policy formulation, anchored by international norms and standards. Further, as part of the broader UN system, MOST is called upon to contribute to the realization of human rights and to the enhancement of social development<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are invoked to situate the discourse on entitlements and right over social protection

In 2003, in recognition of the increasing need to improve policy formulation and relevance, MOST has been reoriented<sup>2</sup>, both thematically and in its modalities of operation, and a stronger focus was given to building efficient bridges between research, policy and practice, and on promoting a culture of policy-making based on analysis of evidence and on dialogue.

### **III The Regional and Sub-regional Fora of Ministers of Social Development**

One of the ways MOST assists Member States to respond to global challenges is through the Regional and Sub-regional Fora of Ministers<sup>3</sup> in charge of Social Development. These opportunities enable Ministers to meet and exchange their experiences and to dialogue with researchers and other important stakeholders in social development, particularly the civil society and the UN System. The result of this process is to enable the development of high quality policy responses to social transformations.

The Fora of Ministers of Social Development provide:

- A space for regional dialogue at Ministerial level on regional strategies on social policy;
- A platform for the exchange of experiences and best practices on national policies;
- An environment that encourages the development of joint projects;
- Opportunities to influence international reflection and policy-making.

### **IV Mitigating the social consequences of the economic and financial crisis**

Member States have identified an immediate need to mitigate the serious social impact of the financial and economic crisis:

The UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, and the Chief Executives of the United Nations system, stressed at a meeting in UNESCO (4 and 5 April 2009) that *“If action is not taken urgently, it can be devastating for the most vulnerable, with growing social insecurity and displacement of people. The achievement of the MDGs is at stake. The middle class in many countries is being weakened. The vulnerable groups,*

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<sup>3</sup> Fora of Ministers have been organized in Latin America (seven times); South Asia (twice); for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (twice), The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (twice); the East African Community (twice), and the Arab region (twice). In 2010 a Forum of Ministers for the Caribbean will also be launched in Jamaica from 24 to 26 January 2010, and subsequently a Forum of Ministers for South East Asia and Central Europe respectively.

children, women, youth, elderly, migrants and people with disabilities are hit the strongest". The Chief Executives Board (CEB) underlined that the capacity of governments to design, afford and implement the right policies, while coordinating them with international partners, must be strengthened: *"The multilateral system plays a central role in articulating and delivering a global and coherent response to the crisis, and in translating it into action at the country level"*. The CEB agreed on the need for policy coherence and coordination and on nine joint crisis initiatives<sup>4</sup>, - each of which has one or more multilateral lead agencies.

In response to the crisis, MOST programme is currently focusing on the social implications of the financial and economic crisis and appropriate policy responses<sup>5</sup>, through its flagship activity, the Regional and Sub-regional Fora of Ministers in charge of Social Development. Social protection is one of the key policy responses to combat the social impacts of the crisis, especially for the most vulnerable such as youth, women and disabled.

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<sup>4</sup> THE NINE JOINT CRISIS INITIATIVES OF THE CEB:

1. **Additional financing for the most vulnerable:** advocating and devising joint World Bank- UN system mechanisms for the common articulation and implementation of additional financing, including through the World Bank proposed Vulnerability Fund.
2. **Food Security:** strengthening programmes to feed the hungry and expanding support to farmers in developing countries.
3. **Trade:** fighting protectionism, including through the conclusion of the Doha round and strengthening aid for trade initiatives and finance for trade.
4. **A Green Economy Initiative:** promoting investment in long-term environmental sustainability and putting the world on a climate-friendly path.
5. **A Global Jobs Pact:** boosting employment, production, investment and aggregate demand, and promoting a decent world for all.
6. **A Social Protection Floor:** ensuring access to basic social services, shelter, empowerment and protection of the poor and vulnerable.
7. **Humanitarian, Security and Social Stability:** emergency action to protect lives and livelihoods, meeting hunger and humanitarian needs, protecting displaced people and shoring up security and social stability.
8. **Technology and Innovation:** developing technological infrastructure to facilitate the promotion and access to innovation.
9. **Monitoring and Analysis:**
  - Strengthening macroeconomic and financial surveillance and implementing an effective economic early warning system;
  - Urgently establish a UN system-wide vulnerability monitoring and alert mechanism to track developments, and report on the political, economic, social and environmental dimensions of the crisis.

<sup>5</sup> The thematic session of the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Council (IGC) of the MOST Programme (28-30 September 2009) was *"National and International Responses to the Crisis"*.

## **V Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development in South Asia**

The South Asian Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development was launched in 2006 in Bhurban, Pakistan, with a Forum on *Governance and Decentralization*, followed in 2008, in Delhi, by a Second Ministerial Forum on *Transparency, Right to Information and Social Development*. In the New Delhi Declaration adopted in 2008, the Ministers stressed the importance of research for evidence-based policy-making: “Reiterate our common resolve to strengthen the Forum of Ministers of Social Development in South Asia, with the aim of facilitating consultations and dialogue that will help to develop social policies on the basis on scientific evidence”.

The Third Ministerial Forum is expected to take place in 2010 in Bangladesh with a focus on *Social Protection and Safety Nets in South Asia*.

## **VI Research Meeting on Social Protection Policies in South Asia, 18-19 March 2010, New Delhi, India**

**Objectives:** In order to strengthen the policy-research content of the Third Ministerial Forum from South Asia with research papers and policy proposals and recommendations– at regional and national level – a research meeting of primarily researchers from across South Asia already involved in policy-making in the social protection field is therefore organized.

The meeting will closely examine the topic proposed, *Social Protection and Safety Nets in South Asia*, and help address the following questions:

- What are the social policies that work under what conditions and what lessons can such experiences offer to other countries?
- How can such policies be further strengthened to enhance the transformative potential?
- And how can a regional perspective be built on issues of social protection?

It is also hoped to better understand: the country perspectives on linkages between social protection and human development at the conceptual level; how current social protection programmes work in order to identify gaps in terms of design, implementation, coverage and quality, institutional capacities, governance, fiscal possibilities? And what coherent social policy alternatives could be subsequently recommended nationally or regionally?

Therefore, expected outcomes are:

- Overview of social protection policies in the countries of South Asia (SAARC member countries)

- Country-papers on social protection policies and initiatives
- Opportunities for concrete horizontal projects and bilateral cooperation
- Identification of best practices on social protection policies
- Recommendations to policy makers

**Papers:** It is proposed that at least one or two papers would be invited from each country from reputed scholars and experts in the field of social protection. In all, it is expected that about 10-12 country-papers would be presented at the Meeting. In addition, one or two papers focusing on the South Asian region as a whole will be presented. Each paper would be discussed by a few knowledgeable pre-selected discussants before the sessions are opened up for general discussion.

The country-papers should focus on the implementation experiences, innovations and extension of social protection in the respective countries. The focus of such papers would be on exchange of knowledge and experiences (best practices) in the field of social protection (and not on identification of problems and issues) so that policy alternatives can be discussed in more concrete terms.

The broad themes that the papers are expected to focus upon are given below. However, the coverage of these themes is left to the paper writers and it is not expected that each paper would cover all the themes mentioned below comprehensively.

**Themes:**

- Nature of deprivation and vulnerability and marginal groups requiring focused attention
- Approaches to social protection in countries of the region.
- Current social protection policies and programmes – issues and challenges and recommendations for enhancing effectiveness
- Identification of implementation/delivery challenges in the universalisation of social protection – making delivery effective including governance and institutions (social protection floor)
- Issues relating to financing of social protection (fiscal and financial possibilities)
- Social protection policies from the point of transformative character (rights and entitlements)

**Participants:** It is proposed that about 30 scholars would be invited from universities, research organizations, and think-tanks. Experts from international agencies (multilateral and bilateral), UN organizations, and development practitioners from the grassroots would also be invited to participate in the research meeting and share their experiences through discussions.

**Organization of the Meeting:** The conference is jointly organized by the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Social and Human Sciences Sector of UNESCO New Delhi Office, within UNESCO's MOST (Management of Social Transformation) Programme.

The administrative coordinator for the research meeting is Dr. K.N. Jehangir, Consultant, ICSSR, and Mr. M. A. Jawaid, Deputy Director, ICSSR, Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, JNU Institutional Area, New Delhi 110067: email [knjehangir@gmail.com](mailto:knjehangir@gmail.com) & [knjehangir@icssr.org](mailto:knjehangir@icssr.org); fax: +91-11-26742351; phone: +91-11-26742351.

The academic coordinators of the conference are Prof. Ravi Srivastava, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110067 ([ravisriv@gmail.com](mailto:ravisriv@gmail.com)); Mr. C. Upendranadh ([c.upendranadh@gmail.com](mailto:c.upendranadh@gmail.com)), Programme and Network Manager, Social Protection in Asia Programme, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi; and Ms. Rukmini Tankha ([rukminitankha@gmail.com](mailto:rukminitankha@gmail.com)), Research Associate, Institute for Human Development, IIPA Compound, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, New Delhi 110002.

The regional coordinator for UNESCO Forum of Ministers in charge of Social Development from South Asia is Ms Marina Faetanini, Programme Specialist, Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO New Delhi. Email: [m.faetanini@unesco.org](mailto:m.faetanini@unesco.org).

## **VII. A Note on Social Protection in South Asia**

Social Protection pertains to the set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress caused by the **absence or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies** (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age or death of the breadwinner), the provision of health care and the provision of benefits for families with children. The ILO suggests that social protection should be approached in its various dimensions and through various phases. The dimensions include: access to essential goods and services, prevention of and protection against various risks, and promotion of potentials and opportunities in order to break vicious cycles and pervasive tendencies. The phases are: before, during, and after working years.

At the international level, working class struggles, the consequent evolution of state policy in a number of diverse systems led to the post war consensus on social security and social protection as human rights. This is clearly set out in the Universal declaration of Human Rights. Articles 22 to 26 state the universal rights of each individual to a basic standard of life, to proper working conditions and to social security and social protection. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966, again recognizes “the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance” (Article 9) and Articles 10 to 13 of the Convention

elaborate on the right of mothers and infants, the right to a decent standard of living, the right to food, health and education. While the developed countries have a legacy of social protection that emanated from welfare state regimes, the same is not the case with developing countries.

The reason for such a situation is that most developing countries are still grappling to meet the needs of vast majority of population in terms of their basic human capabilities. Moreover the economic structure of these countries, dominated by the informal sector, also militates against the expansion and universalisation of social protection measures. Moreover, structural adjustment and liberalisation have also provided an ideological basis for a minimalist state which also does not seek a high priority for social protection measures. Thus social protection as understood in the developed countries remains rudimentary in nature (both in terms of conceptualisation as well as delivery) in the developing countries. Frameworks like social risk management (*a la* the Worldbank) and social security for workers (ILO inspired) have led to formulation of some policies and programmes, but they have not been able to reach large sections of needy population in developing countries<sup>6</sup>.

However, in the recent period some broader notions and ideas of social protection have emerged, not only to cushion economic shocks and vulnerabilities faced by millions of informal workers but also to enhance basic capabilities that would accelerate poverty reduction<sup>7</sup> and social inclusion. It is in the same vein that the notion of universalisation of socio economic security is also advocated, encompassing elements of capability enhancement measures as well as protection measures for all. All this would mean not only re-classification of social policies (and programmes) in terms of their nomenclature, but also more importantly, it reflects a shift in the approach, design, content and delivery of social policies that would create a lasting impact.

Viewed from this perspective, basic services (like education, health, nutrition, housing, sanitation and water supply) form a set of important capacity enhancement measures. Protective and preventive measures include social assistance to different segments of population, social insurance to face contingencies and social security measures (those applicable for formal sector workers). Meeting bouts of unemployment, food scarcity/access, ill-health and work place induced disabilities, retirement benefits and support, old age support, disability support and etc., form important social assistance and social security measures.

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<sup>6</sup> One finds a plethora of targeted programmes and schemes in all the countries of the South Asia region but most of them suffer from limitations in terms of design, outreach, quality and impact. See “Social Security in South Asia: Issues and Perspectives” by Naila Kabeer, Alakh N Sharma and C. Upendranadh at [www.socialprotectionasia.org](http://www.socialprotectionasia.org)

<sup>7</sup> In South Asian countries, over 90 per cent of the work force is informal workers and over 75% of population in six large countries of the region live under \$2 (PPP) a day.

In policy terms, this would mean recognition of the vital role of governments in creating mechanisms to provide basic social security (capability enhancing measures) as well as mechanisms in mitigating the vulnerabilities that poor and marginalised sections face due to various reasons including their inability to mediate the dynamics of the labour market. It would also mean acknowledging the critical role of poverty reduction strategies that need to work in tandem with social protection policies. With increasing acknowledgement of the multi dimensionality of poverty and the potential of social protection, it is advocated that there is a need to view social protection policies as 'developmental' as against their current treatment as 'residual' social policies. Such a mainstreaming is also in conformity with the thinking that social protection policies ought to be 'transformative' in content and practice as they mediate through notions of rights and entitlements, inclusion, citizenship, collectivity of the poor and good governance<sup>8</sup>.

While such conceptual developments of social protection are available in the existing policy literature, the need is to translate them into programmes, to identify barriers for extension of social protection to the poor and marginalised. What is glaringly missing in the region is a cohesive and inclusive national social protection policy that would articulate aspirations and programmes for social development. There is also need to identify and adapt innovative forms of social protection that are available across the countries of South Asia, which share several similarities in terms of nature and quantum of poverty, social exclusion, conditions of vulnerability and deprivation amongst their populations.

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<sup>8</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are invoked to situate the discourse on entitlements and right over social protection