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United Nations Development Programme

# LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: A SOCIAL PROTECTION PRIMER FOR PRACTITIONERS





# CONTENTS



## INTRODUCTION

Why a Social Protection Primer for Leaving No One Behind?	6
Who is this Primer for? Where would it be useful?	8
	11



## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: APPROACH AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

What is social protection?	12
Why do we need social protection to achieve sustainable development?	14
Guiding principles of social protection for sustainable development	16
	21



## UNDP'S WORK ON SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The added value of UNDP in social protection	24
What can UNDP do to support social protection in my country?	26
	28



## POLICY COHERENCE: TOWARDS A SYSTEM OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

Overview of programmes and policies	32
Assessment Based National Dialogues: Building coherent national social protection strategies	34
Linking programmes: A systemic view	37
Universal vs. targeted social protection programmes	38
Unified social registries	41
	42





## REACHING THOSE LEFT BEHIND: MAKING SOCIAL PROTECTION INCLUSIVE

44

Reaching all that need to be reached: Expanding coverage

46

Sensitization of social protection: Addressing needs and overcoming barriers

46



## MAKING THE LINK BETWEEN SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

54

Social protection and the sustainable use of natural resources

56

Social protection and climate risk

62



## FUNDING AND RAISING RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION

70

Is social protection affordable?

72

Financing mechanisms

72

## ANNEXES

Annex 1. Letter from UNDG Chair and ILO Director General to all UN Resident Co-ordinators and UN Country Teams

75

Annex 2. Glossary

73

Annex 3. Targeting approaches and Mechanisms

78

Annex 4. References

82

## FOREWORD

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is about balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. Underlying the Agenda is the powerful commitment to leave no one behind and to reach those farthest behind first.

The level of ambition of Agenda 2030 points to a paradigmatic shift—an aspiration to improve the lives of every single person in the world. The eradication of poverty entails going beyond a narrow focus on providing individuals with the specific needs they lack, towards a systemic view that aims to remove the structural drivers that prevent individuals from living the lives they value. This shift requires looking at development policy in a different light and focusing on tools that advance people's well-being by tackling the interconnected issues that result in poverty and deprivations.

Social protection systems that are inclusive and risk-sensitive can be a powerful tool to fulfil this commitment. By advancing human rights and tackling inequalities, exclusion, vulnerability and deprivations, social protection is a means to reach those left furthest behind. The experience with the MDGs has shown that growth alone cannot guarantee the eradication of poverty and reduction in inequalities. Even when growth lifts the incomes of millions of people, it does not necessarily lift all incomes, particularly those of the poorest, unless explicit policies are implemented with this aim. It is now evident that poverty reduction efforts are not likely to be sustainable unless the underlying drivers of poverty such as exclusion and vulnerability are tackled.

The momentum for expanding social protection has been building in recent years. In 2009, the UN System's Chief Executive Board for Co-ordination (CEB) launched the Social Protection Floor initiative, which was endorsed by member states in the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development. The commitment to social protection is also embedded in the SDGs, not only as a specific target (Target 1.3) which calls for the "implementation of nationally-appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including social protection floors", but also as a feature in Goals 3, 5 and 10. In addition social protection is one of the pillars of decent work and is therefore featured in Goal 8, and more specifically Target 8.5.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda also includes a commitment to delivering social protection and essential public services for all. The "new social compact" calls for the provision of "fiscally sustainable and nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, with a focus on those furthest below the poverty line and the vulnerable, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons, children, youth and older persons."<sup>1</sup> The 2015 Human Development Report recognizes extending social protection as key policy strategy for enhancing human development through work.

UNDP has been an important partner to national and local governments in efforts to articulate and implement social protection for sustainable development. The cross-sectoral scope of UNDP's work has positioned it as a key player in advancing policy dialogues concerning social protection, generating evidence and bringing together relevant partners. UNDP has also played an important part in extending social protection programmes, reforming them, fostering innovation, transferring know-how across countries, and working closely with traditionally excluded communities to ensure that their voices are represented and their needs addressed. As the UN's lead agency for sustainable development, UNDP is also well placed to support countries in integrating environmental sustainability policies into social protection.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 2015. Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda). Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2015. Paragraph 12.



This Primer is intended to provide UNDP Country Offices, programme staff and relevant partners with a practical resource on ways to strengthen social protection to address the systemic and interlinked objectives of the Sustainable Development Agenda. It articulates and highlights some lessons learned from the countries that are leading the way in thinking about social protection in the context of sustainable development. Ensuring that no one is left behind is not just about transferring resources that push people above the poverty line, it is also about ensuring that people have the freedom, opportunities and access to live the lives they value. Social protection, when designed and implemented from a social inclusion perspective, is an important means to fulfil this commitment.



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# INTRODUCTION

“Agenda 2030 is ambitious and achievable. It is integrated and universal. It recognizes that poverty and hunger have complex and interconnected root causes. We made our promise. Now it is time for action.”

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon  
Opening Ceremony for World Food  
Day at Milan Expo



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