

## The Theme of the Workshop

THIS WORKSHOP is designed to discuss and create a broad perspective of the concept of social protection floor and to find out the opportunities of establishing a social order eradicating, poverty, illiteracy, deprivation, and an assured life in old age with a sustainable health care system. It is also designed to identify measures for progressively extending social protection to all workers in the informal economy, particularly those who are most disadvantaged.

2. The term “social floor” or “social protection floor” has been used to mean a set of basic social rights, services and facilities that a global citizen should enjoy. ILO’s Recommendation 202 (Para. 2), adopted unanimously in June 2012 at International Labour Conference (ILC) describes social protection floors as “nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion.” It has recommended that the social protection floors should comprise at least the following benefits:-

- a) access to nationally defined services, like, essential health care, including maternity care;
- b) basic income security for children, , education, care, nutrition, skill development etc.;
- c) basic income security, minimum level to be defined, for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and
- d) basic income security, at minimum level, for older persons.

At the heart of these recommendations the central point is that these social guarantees should be established by law, prescribing qualifying conditions and the level of the benefits in the most transparent and in an accountable manner.

3. The acceleration in the growth rate in India has surely led to a decline in poverty and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), and improvements in indicators, such as, life expectancy and educational attainments. However, these promising achievements still continue to co-exist with high levels of poverty; low levels of education, skills and productivity for a vast majority of workers; low nutritional status, particularly of children and women, inter-group and inter-class inequalities; and vulnerabilities. On the work front, the Indian workforce comprises a small formal/organized sector of the economy and a huge informal/unorganized sector, both in agriculture and non-agriculture. At the same time, there has been a rise in informalization in labour market with a decline in the percentage of regular workers as a result of open market economy. This has increased high level of social vulnerability calling for intensification of social protection measures, positioning of appropriate institutional arrangements and policy. This calls for strategies both to improve the quality of employment and growth and to extend social protection to the unreached.

4. However, India also has a plethora of social protection schemes, both at the Central and State levels, which cater to different segments of the population. The ambit of these schemes is quite large, covering basic education and health, employment creation, workers' social security, food and nutrition security, and social pensions. Some of these programmes are now supported legally. The total expenditure by the government of India on six of the major social protection related sectors

(elementary education, health and family welfare, labour and labour welfare, social security and welfare and rural development) has increased from 1.06 per cent of GDP in 1995-96 to 1.35 per cent of GDP in 2005-06 and further to 1.75 per cent of GDP in 2010-11. The states spend almost twice as much as the central government on these sectors but their expenditure (as % of GDP) has not changed much in the last decade. According to the Study carried out by Prof Srivastava and reported in his book, "A Social Protection Floor for India", the central and state governments together spend on these sectors has increased by about 0.83 per cent of GDP between 1995-96 and 2011-12. The central government's expenditure on major social protection programmes (excluding those in health and education sectors including the scholarship schemes of the Ministry of Social Justice) has increased particularly significantly between 2005-06 and 2011-13 – from 1.29 per cent of GDP to 1.73 per cent of GDP.

5. It is relevant to point out here that The United Nations Chief Executive Board (ILO & WHO 2009) has also outlined the key elements and dimensions of a Social Protection Floor. Their recommendation consist of the dimensions of income security over the entire life cycle (childhood, working age, and old age) and adequate access to health and other essential services, including drinking water & sanitation, food and shelter. Member countries have, however, been given the flexibility of designing a SPF depending upon their level of development and their specific history and context. ILO Recommendation 202 lays down the guiding principles that should be observed in creating the SPF. Among other things, the SPF should create clear-cut entitlements and should be backed by legislation.

6. In the said context we may briefly examine the existing national scenario. These are briefly as follows:

- *Children's education, nutritional status and health.* The Right to Education Act (2009) provides specific entitlements to children to free schooling on the basis of essential norms and standards. The proposed Right to Food Act incorporates the mid-day meal and nutrition related elements of the ICDS.
- *Employment and Livelihood Security.* The MGNREGA provides for 100 days of unskilled manual labour to every rural household, on demand, within fifteen days, and ordinarily within a distance of five km.
- *Social Pensions.* The Task Force on Restructuring the National Social Assistance Programme has proposed a significant expansion of coverage of the programme to old-aged persons, widows and separated/divorced/single women. It has also proposed some increase in pensions.
- *Social Health Protection.* The Ministry of Health has proposed a National Health Bill (2009) which is under discussion. Meanwhile the High Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage has proposed a universal health entitlement to all citizens in the form of National Health Package (Planning Commission 2011a).
- *Food Security.* The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NSFA), converts into legal entitlements for existing food security programmes of the Government of India. It includes the [Midday Meal Scheme \(MDM\)](#), [Integrated Child Development Services \(ICDS\)](#) scheme and the [Public Distribution System \(PDS\)](#). Further, the NFSA 2013 recognizes maternity entitlements. The MDM Scheme and the ICDS Scheme are universal in nature whereas the PDS will reach about two-thirds of the population (75%

in rural areas and 50% in urban areas).. The entitlement, both in terms of quantity of cereals and prices will be higher for destitute families (AAY).

- *Housing*. It is a right based approach that recognizes the right to housing. While the Central government's urban housing policy is more limited in scope, it does project the goals of a slum-free India, and there has been a significant expansion in effort to provide affordable housing to the urban poor.

7. The exact scope of entitlements in each of these dimensions is, and possibly will remain, a highly contested domain, and some continue to question the validity of this approach altogether. Nonetheless, at the same time, there is an emerging consensus on the direction in which social protection needs to be advanced in each of these dimensions. Experts feel that these dimensions taken together can form the basis of a rights based approach to a social protection floor in India which also overlaps with the ingredients of a SPF as envisaged by the UN.

8. The workshop discussion is aimed at identifying the validity of the aforesaid approaches. It may also bring forth the conclusion whether these decisions taken together can form the basis of a right based social protection floor as envisaged in UN resolution but it can try to identify the challenges facing the above initiatives in reaching the benefits to the most vulnerable segment of the population It may also suggest a road map of developing an effective social protection floor in India.

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