# 'Inclusive Social Protection' and the Post-2015 Agenda

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**Social protection has** proven its ability to provide an effective toolkit for addressing vulnerability and poverty, and has made significant contributions to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in many countries. But much work remains to be done, particularly in terms of social protection's role in the post-2015 development framework. Operationally, the coverage and quality of social protection programmes need to be substantially improved. Conceptually, the shift from discretionary 'charity' to rights-based claims is far from complete, and, we would argue, social protection needs to refocus on its core functions.

In a recent *IDS Policy Briefing* (Roelen and Devereux, 2013) the Centre for Social Protection argues that post-2015 development thinking offers an opportunity to promote a more inclusive approach to social protection that could help to address these challenges. We identify six principles for 'Inclusive Social Protection'.

1. Include **everyone** in social protection systems. Social protection in developing countries was initially conceptualised as handouts targeting poor people who are unable to support themselves. However, everyone needs social protection, either social assistance (child grants so that all children can exercise their right to go to school) or social insurance (universal pensions so that all retired workers can enjoy their right to income security in old age). Reinforcing this inclusive message is one way of overcoming complaints about 'fiscal unaffordability' and 'dependency creation', which are largely unfounded but widely held prejudices against social transfers. Growing disparities between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' exemplify the need for greater inclusivity.

2. Include **rights** in social protection systems. All governments and development agencies should explicitly acknowledge that all people have a human right to social protection, and should take more active steps towards the progressive realisation of this right. A rights-based approach to public works projects, for instance, translates this supply-driven instrument into demand-driven employment guarantee schemes. This thinking increasingly extends to how social protection is delivered, which should be underpinned and guaranteed by enforceable 'customer service' charters and grievance mechanisms. Current thinking about the post-2015 agenda makes this an ideal time to make these rights real.

3. Include **managing vulnerability and strengthening resilience** as primary objectives for social protection systems. Social protection should prioritise managing or reducing vulnerability and building resilience against risks and shocks, rather than reducing the poverty headcount, which is not its *raison d'être*.

   The current push to 'graduate' participants out of social protection programmes confuses these two functions. The defining task of social protection, especially in a global context of ongoing financial crises and commodity price shocks, is    to establish mechanisms that will stabilise consumption and protect assets against all threats to lives and livelihoods—and let 'development' policies do the rest.

4. Include **addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability and poverty** as secondary objectives for social protection systems. The social protection agenda has become dominated by social transfers targeted at individuals and households. Alleviating chronic poverty with cash transfers, or providing public works in response to food price spikes, is necessary to address the immediate consequences of vulnerability and poverty but is not sufficient to address their fundamental causes. Innovative interventions are needed at the sectoral and macroeconomic levels to address the structural weaknesses and constraints that generate vulnerability and poverty. Does it make more sense to hand out food aid when prices escalate, or to stabilise prices?

5. Include all social protection projects and programmes in **'scaled-up and joined-up'** national social protection systems. Despite the proliferation of social protection interventions in even the poorest countries, coverage remains limited and is characterised by projects and programmes that are time-bound and exclude large segments of the population. These scattered and unconnected interventions need to scale up, by expanding or replicating existing projects until national coverage is achieved, and to join up, by ensuring that all social protection needs are covered with a comprehensive suite of interventions that are institutionalised within government structures.

6. Include **linkages with other social and economic sectors** in comprehensive social protection systems. Experience has shown that social protection generates powerful synergies with social and economic development when it is directly linked to social sectors (such as education and health) and complemented with economic support (such as livelihood packages and financial inclusion). On the other hand, the accessibility and quality of social services and economic programmes need to be adequate to match the demand-side push that social protection generates. Such an integrated approach will allow both 'livelihood protection' and 'livelihood promotion' objectives to be achieved.

Social protection needs to be at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda. The concept of 'Inclusive Social Protection' is fully aligned with the principles of inclusive social and economic development, and resonates with several themes that have informed the post-2015 discourse—notably rights, equity, sustainability and national ownership. Inclusive approaches to social protection are more effective at tackling the multiple dimensions of poverty and inequality, and have greater potential to focus on underlying drivers of vulnerability and poverty, rather than merely alleviating their symptoms.

Reference:

Roelen, K. and S. Devereux (2013). 'Promoting Inclusive Social Protection in the Post-2015 Framework', *IDS Policy Briefing*, No. 39. Brighton, Institute of Development Studies, <www.ids.ac.uk/publication/promoting-inclusive-social-protection-in-the-post-2015-framework> (accessed 13 February 2014).

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