

REU Consultative Meeting on Social Protection

Budapest, 29th November 2016

Meeting report

Background

The REU Consultative Meeting on Social Protection was held in Budapest, on 29th November 2016, as the result of a REU-ESP collaboration under the SP3 framework on reducing rural poverty through promoting social protection systems.

The event aimed at sensitizing FAORs and staff in the region on FAO's approach to Social Protection (SP). It has equally addressed the role of SP in improving food security and nutrition and combat rural poverty, and provided a venue for discussing the relevance of a REU Social Protection Meeting, in the spring of 2017.

Hosted by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, the consultative meeting brought together 20 participants from FAO Headquarters, REU, Sub-regional Office and representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Turkey (List of Participants - Annex 1).

Expected outcomes

The main expected outcomes of the meeting were:

- i. FAORs have a better understanding of FAO's Social Protection approach;
- ii. FAORs are better prepared for a strategic meeting in the spring of 2017;
- iii. FAORs agreed on supporting a mapping exercise of country opportunities regarding SP for Food Security and Nutrition and rural populations, in preparation for 2017 meeting;
- iv. Participants agreed on Terms of Reference and Agenda proposal for 2017 meeting.

While discussions were fruitful to clarify what SP is, how FAO is promoting it as well as to build a consensus on the importance of next year's meeting, further consideration is necessary for points iii and iv, as suggested in the follow-up points.

Overview of discussions

Presentations

Discussions were organized around thematic blocks related to: FAO's role in reducing rural poverty as part of its Strategic Programme (SP3) and Regional Initiative 1 (RI1); the linkages between social protection, agriculture and FSN, including the status of SP in the region; and reflections on the relevance of organizing a strategic meeting on SP in REU in 2017.

A broader view of the **Organization's rural poverty agenda and the SP3 framework**¹ facilitated understanding of SP as an important contributor to the multiple pathways out of poverty. The presenter stressed that reducing rural poverty encompasses a comprehensive set of policies and programmes, with SP being an important dimension of it. As such, Social Protection configures a risk management strategy, among other roles, complementing economic productive support and reducing households' negative coping strategies. The main messages conveyed by the presenter also pointed out the need for increased cross-sectoral/cross-unit work inside the Organization to leverage impact at country level. At the same time, the adoption of a broader approach to poverty reduction should be accompanied by more focused interventions at country level, which would also imply new partnerships going beyond the traditional work with Ministries of Agriculture.

Complementary, the **profile of family farming in REU**² revealed the vulnerability of smallholders and family farmers in the region. The Regional Initiative 1 on "*Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction*" operates in this complex environment through policy and community level work, including by producing country studies and promoting awareness raising. Under the umbrella of SP3, there is indication of potential synergies between RI 1 and SP, to be further developed. Some entry points suggested by the presenter could involve integrating SP components in the ongoing regional activities related to rural development, both at community (e.g. public works, school feeding) and at agricultural policy levels.

Following the policy and institutional context linking rural poverty and SP initiatives, a presentation was done on the major elements of **Social Protection agenda in FAO**³, which is housed in SP3, in collaboration with SP1 and SP5. In line with the SDGs and the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection, the FAO approach promotes a systemic concept of SP as a set of policies and programmes that addresses needs and risks aiming at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. Participants were then guided through evidence on SP contributions to FAO strategic areas of work, including agriculture, FSN pillars and nutrition, with an overview of the evidence on the impacts of SP programmes and examples from India and Brazil.

The discussion on SP appeared as particularly relevant for the REU region given the common past soviet history. The REU study "*Social protection and rural population: the case of the post-soviet countries*"⁴ was presented, highlighting the main features of current SP systems in the region, as well as their main challenges. A glimpse of FAO's SP work in REU was provided

¹ Presentation by David Conte, Senior Advisor, Strategic Programme on Rural Poverty Reduction (SO3).

² Presentation by Morten Hartvigsen, Regional Initiative Delivery Manager, REU Land Tenure Officer.

³ Presentation by Darana Souza, ESP Social Protection Officer.

⁴ Presented by Dono Abdurazakova, REU Gender and Social Protection Specialist.

through the **case of Kyrgyzstan**⁵, where SP features as part of the CPF priority areas; FAO is collaborating with ILO in the Assessment Based National Dialogue on Social Protection Floor; and, through a Russian funded project, pilots will be implemented on Home Grown School Feeding and CASH+ interventions (transfers aligned to small scale agricultural innovations, training and extension services, and nutrition education).

Towards the end of the day, discussions focused on the **Strategic Meeting in 2017**⁶. The proposal presented envisaged an event to deepen understanding of FAO's role in SP in the region; identify entry points for FAO's work and specify country and regional follow-up actions. Participants were then invited to share their views on the pertinence, nature and scope of the meeting, which enlightened the main follow-up points described in the final section of this report.

Arising issues

A summary of the main points raised by participants is presented below. Those elements may reveal some of the priority issues prevailing in the region. Others may indicate thematic areas to be further discussed during the 2017 Strategic meeting.

❖ **What are FAO's comparative advantages vis-à-vis other agencies working on SP?**

A point was made to clarify that FAO seeks to position itself not as a Social Protection Agency per se, but rather recognizes its contributions to SP as linked to its main areas of work. The FAO approach to social protection embraces initiatives at both policy and programme levels, especially through policy and programme support, capacity building, advocacy and evidence generation. The main areas of work are aligned with FAO's comparative advantages in agriculture and food security and nutrition: (i) expansion of coverage to reach the poor in rural areas; (ii) greater coherence with agriculture (including fisheries, forestry and NRM) (iii) strengthening the nutrition sensitive aspect of social protection; and (iv) addressing SP in humanitarian and fragile contexts to strengthen resilience to threats and crisis. As FAO advocates for the inclusion of rural populations in Social Protection systems, the Organization marks its position in the SP community of partners, where close collaboration with major SP actors (e.g. UNICEF, World Bank and ILO) is paramount. These strategic partnerships contribute for the promotion of SP systems for all, but also for supporting the necessary multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination to achieve the SDGs (FAO has strategic role in linking **SDG1** and **SDG2**) at country level.

❖ **How is FAO collaborating with other agencies at country level?** As exposed by the case of Kyrgyzstan, FAO is part of the ILO led-process to discuss Social Protection Floors in the country, through ensuring that food security and nutrition considerations are addressed in a coherent and coordinated way across sectors, and is also a member of the Technical Working Group to redesign the Kyrgyz child grant programme. FAO has also been working with ILO on expansion of SP coverage to rural populations in Mali and Zambia. UNICEF and WFP are also partners for Home Grown School Feeding Initiatives, in Zambia. And a Farmers' registry is being piloted in Lebanon, in collaboration with ILO.

⁵ Presented by Dorjee Kinlay, FAOR Kyrgyzstan.

⁶ Presented by Darana Souza, ESP Social Protection Officer.

❖ What is FAO's rationale for addressing SP in the Region today?

- Post-soviet countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia share a common historical background related to social protection systems. Defined by the soviet welfare model, SP interventions were based on principles of universality, accessibility and comprehensiveness. Subsequently, the transition reforms to the market economy introduced similar patterns of change in social policies across the region. Therefore, this deep-rooted experience of post-soviet countries with social protection policies reinforces the singularity of the SP agenda in REU if compared to other regions, highlighting the institutional opportunities to be further explored;
- The SDGs framework places Social Protection coverage for the poor and vulnerable as one of its priority areas (target 1.3) for eradicating poverty. Within this context, and considering the significant gaps in social protection coverage of rural areas from a policy and programmatic perspective, there is a clear window of opportunity for reinforcing FAO's work as part of this international policy agenda;
- As countries move towards the implementation of the Agenda 2030 at national level, the role of FAO country offices becomes central in supporting national governments' multi-sectoral strategies to end poverty and promote social inclusion;
- When possible, SP approaches could be integrated during implementation of planned strategies and programmes. REU suggested further dialogue on how to build bridges between SP and the ongoing RI1 work on family farming in the region. Similar exercises could be undertaken for the current CPFs (finalized or under finalization). The priority SP thematic areas defined by FAO could guide this exercise at policy, programme and project levels: (i) expansion of SP coverage (social insurance and social assistance) for adequate protection of the rural poor, including by advocating for domestic SP financing; (ii) combining SP with agricultural interventions (including fisheries, forestry, etc) for adequately addressing rural poverty reduction⁷; (iii) building linkages between social protection and nutrition through *nutrition sensitive agriculture*⁸; and (iv) addressing social protection for strengthening resilience in times of protracted crises and in humanitarian and fragile contexts⁹;
- The rural development agenda is being introduced in the region and REU is engaged in discussions on family farming agriculture, including the agenda on

⁷ Some examples of what could be done in this regard: combine SP with agricultural interventions (training, inputs, programmes) to enhance productive and economic impacts - at household and local economy levels; focus on all subsectors of agriculture (Fisheries, Forestry, crops, etc), as well as linkages with decent employment, access to financial services, linkages with rural institutions and women's economic empowerment; and provide expertise in evidence generation, and policy and programmatic support at country level. Practical examples of SP and agriculture complementary interventions are Home Grown School Feeding and CASH +. For more on SP and Agriculture: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5386e.pdf>

⁸ Some principles for implementation of nutrition-sensitive social protection interventions are: target the nutritionally vulnerable; incorporate nutrition objectives in national policies on FSN; empower women as recipients of SP benefits; promote strategies for household diet diversification. For more on SP and nutrition: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4819e.pdf>

⁹ Examples of interventions are Cash and CASH+, and risk-informed social protection systems (bringing the environmental, rural and livelihoods dimensions).

the rural youth. This may constitute a good momentum for also addressing the relevance of SP with country counterparts.

- ❖ **Need for country-specific SP approaches** were underlined by country representatives given the great disparities among countries and particular local partner dynamics. In this context, SP interventions is to be further defined at both policy or community levels, as provisioned in SP3 related outputs. The choice of instruments and approach should be country based.
- ❖ **Sensitization of Ministries:** Broadening the range of local partnerships was mentioned as essential when discussing SP. Notwithstanding, participants addressed the challenges in sensitizing Ministries of Agriculture as in general SP is managed by a single Ministry. Armenia mentioned how challenging addressing SP is at higher levels, recommending focus on awareness raising at country level. The multiplier effect of SP in the economy could be embedded in the FAORs discourse (e.g. Azerbaijan suggested introducing the SP discussion in the UNCT). Awareness raising would also entail FAO dialogue with other actors, as reinforced by FAO-SEC, for which it would be important to identify what are the cross-sectoral bodies that could serve as entry points. Sharing SP background materials with country teams may also be relevant for facilitating their interventions with local partners.
- ❖ **Limitations and lack of data** should be addressed.
 - **Measurement of impact** was commonly mentioned as a need. In particular, Azerbaijan suggested undertaking studies on impact of country's SP system, and Georgia on designing a TCPf to produce country specific studies/evaluation. Lack of resources (technical and financial) appears, nevertheless, to be a common challenge;
 - **Identification of vulnerable groups.** Identification of the most vulnerable groups, more information on typology of farmers and livelihood strategies would indicate ways on how FAO could intervene in the region through concrete initiatives.
- ❖ **The issue of SP in times of conflict** was raised by Azerbaijan and Turkey, in particular related to vulnerable groups such as refugees and IDPs. SP3 has been collaborating with SP5 on promoting shock responsive SP systems, with focus on strengthening resilience of vulnerable households. This could be a niche for deeper discussions in the region, for instance on identifying and reaching affected populations and on adaptation of existing SP programmes to deal with crisis response.
- ❖ **The theme of migration** has been particularly underlined by Turkey given the current human mobility crisis experienced in the country. Work on linkages between migration and SP are at initial stages in FAO, but future discussions could consider looking into the situation in REU.
- ❖ **Decent work.** The theme of decent rural employment appeared as an important agenda for rural development in the region. Participants suggested further addressing DRE, particularly as a tailored meeting next year or as part of the SP Strategic meeting agenda.

Moving towards the 2017 meeting

Discussions revealed a twofold approach towards 2017 Strategic Meeting. First of all, there is a clear need for clarifying what FAO can do in the region and for strengthening a common understanding on relevant SP linkages in the region. Likewise, national actors should be further exposed to the value (and impact) of social protection linked to agriculture and food security and nutrition as a way to reduce poverty.

The main outcome of the consultation was the indication that an upcoming meeting would be focused on **awareness raising**, especially through presenting selected international best practices, as well as the cases from the region itself. Engagement of external partners, such as Governments and UN Agencies, was also agreed as relevant, although levels of participation and identification of key actors would need to be discussed in details.

Elements drawn from the meeting would contribute to collecting additional information on potential SP areas where FAO could invest. Furthermore, the meeting can be further connected to the upcoming RII TCP country studies and the Russian funded projects in Armenia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which would all contribute to clarify entry points for SP in the region.

This capacity-building path would have the potential to place FAO in a better position to develop SP work at country level. What remains as an open question, subject to further consideration, is how one could look beyond a single meeting. Possibilities include engaging countries in a continuous process to strengthen SP in the region – for instance, through more tailored initiatives and/or through designing a specific regional TCP on social protection.

Final remarks and Follow-up points:

The overall REU-ESP appraisal indicated the value added of the consultative meeting in clarifying major elements around the SP discussion in FAO. As highlighted by REU, Social Protection is a new area of work for FAO, which requires increase understanding of what SP means within FAO results framework. This agenda is of relevance for the region, especially given the role of SP systems in the past soviet history. At the same time, the particularities and diversity of Europe and Central Asia require deeper discussions on how the FAO approach to SP can adequately be developed within the regional/country priorities and programme of work.

Equally important, coordination and multisectoral approaches are core elements attached to the current discussions on linking SP to FSN and rural development, for instance through nutrition sensitive social protection. In that sense, participants shared a common gap towards engaging in dialogue with other partners. Gathering further evidence and having a clearer idea of SP best practices seem, thus, essential for building internal capacity to develop the FAO SP discourse and action in the region.

Based on the findings and recommendations from participants, the immediate follow-up actions to prepare for the 2017 Meeting would entail:

- (i) REU and ESP to further adjust the 2017 Meeting purpose and design;

- (ii) REU and ESP to agree on and carry out adequate preparatory work (e.g. mapping experiences, identification of participants, budget, etc);
- (iii) Review and sharing of Meeting ToR with FAORs;

Annex 1: List of participants

List of participants			
REU SP meeting - Budapest, 29th November 2016			
#	Name	Title	E-mail
1	Anetta Szilagyi	Rural Development LTO, REU	anetta.szilagyi@fao.org
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Annex 2: Concept Note and Agenda

Preparatory consultation for the REU Strategic Meeting on Positioning FAO in Social Protection for Food Security, Nutrition and Rural Poverty Reduction in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Budapest, 29th November 2016

REU Conference room

Background

In the first quarter of 2017 FAO will organize a strategic meeting of 2 days involving FAO Representatives, representatives of ministries of agriculture and other relevant national institutions, development partners and regional experts to identify how to strategically position FAO's work on social protection in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia. More specifically, the objectives of the strategic meeting are to:

- Deepen understanding on FAO's particular role and respective entry points in social protection agendas at national and regional level;
- Identify relevant and realistic windows of opportunity to bring about policy, regulatory, programmatic and/or institutional change at national and regional level;
- Specify concrete country and regional follow-up actions that require SP1/SP3, ESN/ESP support for concrete results in MTP period.

In November 2016, the REU office will hold a Regional Management Meeting involving FAO Representatives from the region. To make the best of this gathering of FAO Representatives and to support the preparation of the 2017 strategic meeting, the Social Protection Team proposes to organise a **preparatory consultation on 29 November 2016**.

Objective of the preparatory consultation

The objective of the preparatory consultation is to facilitate preparations for the 2017 Strategic Meeting by sensitising FAORs and key staff in the region, including policy officers and the Sub-regional Coordinator for Central Asia, on the potential role of social protection in improving food security and nutrition and combating poverty in the region. This is expected to better enable the participants to take part in activities (e.g. reviewing agenda; mobilizing government participation; preparing presentations etc.) and consultations in preparation for the Strategic Meeting of 2017.

Expected outcomes of the preparatory consultation

- FAORs have a better understanding of FAO's Social Protection approach.
- FAORs are better prepared for strategic meeting in spring 2017.

- FAORs agreed on supporting a mapping exercise of country opportunities regarding SP for Food Security and Nutrition and rural populations, in preparation for 2017 meeting.
- Participants agreed on Terms of Reference and Agenda proposal for 2017 meeting.

Agenda of the preparatory consultation (November 29th 2016)

9.00 – 09.05	Opening and background	Raimund Jehle , Regional Strategic Programmes Coordinator
9:05 to 9:30	FAO's role in reducing rural poverty	David Conte , Senior Advisor, Strategic Programme on Rural Poverty Reduction (SO3)
9:30 to 9:40	Discussions	Plenary
9:40 to 10:10	The status of small family farmers in the region and FAO's approach to reducing rural poverty in the region	Morten Hartvigsen , REU Land Tenure Officer
10:10 to 10:20	Discussions	Plenary
10:20 to 10:50	Linkages between agriculture, social protection and food security and nutrition	Darana Souza , ESP Social Protection Officer
10:50 to 11:05	Discussions and Final comments	Plenary
11:05 to 11:15	Coffee	
11:15 to 11:45	Social protection in the region	Dono Abdurazakova , REU Senior Gender and Social Protection Advisor
11:45 to 12:15	FAO's work on social protection in Kyrgyzstan	Kinlay Dorjee , FAOR Kyrgyzstan
12:15 to 12:45	Questions and answers	Plenary
12:45 to 13:45	Lunch	
13:45 to 15:00	Presentation of concept note for the Strategic Meeting in Spring 2017. Discussions on next steps. Conclusions.	Plenary discussions