

CONCEPT NOTE

Asia and the Pacific Regional Consultation on Social Protection, Rural Employment and Food Security *Bangkok, Thailand (8-9 October 2014)*

Background

Despite strong economic growth in recent decades, Asia and the Pacific region remains a home to over half a billion undernourished people with inadequate access to nutritious and safe food and around 162 million stunted children, representing two third of the world's undernourished children.

In Asia and the Pacific Region, around 80 percent of farmers are smallholder farmers who provide the majority of foods for this region. Around 70 percent of the poor live in rural areas who are dependent on agriculture directly or indirectly for their livelihoods. Poor rural households in developing countries are specially exposed to frequent economic, man-made and natural risks and shocks that threaten their livelihoods.

According to the latest revised estimates released by FAO, WFP and IFAD, the proportion of the chronic hunger in this region declined from 24.1 percent in 1990-92 to 13.5 percent in 2011-13, making it possible to achieve the MDG1 target of 12 percent by 2015 by doubling the efforts. However, it should be noted that our goal is not just to reduce the proportion to 12 percent, but our ultimate goal remains to achieve “0” for eradicating poverty and hunger. The people in the bottom of 12 percent are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Without supporting them through combined targeted approach and social protection measures, the world would not be able to achieve social stability, equitable growth and sustainable development. Hence our efforts for achieving food security, nutrition and eradicating hunger should be closely associated with and combined by various social protection interventions. Different social protection measures such as social safety nets including conditional cash transfer, various social and agriculture insurance schemes, rural employment generating schemes, etc. can ensure that the most marginalized are reached and supported.

Social protection policies aim at reducing social and economic risk and vulnerability and alleviating extreme poverty and deprivation, taking into account different risks and vulnerabilities throughout the lifecycle. By ensuring predictability and regularity, social protection instruments enable households to better manage risks and engage in more profitable livelihood and agricultural activities. When directed towards women, they are not only empowered, but households' welfare is also improved because of women's priorities for food and nutrition and their children's education and wellbeing.

Social protection and rural employment mechanisms can provide means to poor and low-income households to better cope with, and overcome financial constraints and better managing risks, with positive impacts on food production, value chain development and on-farm, off-farm and non-farm level investment in agriculture and related fields. It can stimulate the local economy, with positive effects on agricultural production, rural employment and poverty reduction. Most importantly, social protection enhances the development of human capital with long-term beneficial impacts on livelihoods.

There is a clear need to forge links and promote greater policy coherence and synergies between social protection, rural employment, food security, agricultural development and rural poverty reduction. To achieve their desired developmental impact, social policies will need to go hand-in-hand with agricultural and rural development policies. It is also crucial that different sectors of the government work together to deliver social protection successfully.

Objectives

The overall objectives of this consultation are to share country experiences and enhance their understanding and knowledge of the role of social protection and rural employment, and its linkages with agriculture, food security in improving nutrition and rural livelihoods, and to identify and agree on policy options and priority actions to be implemented at country levels and region towards eradicating poverty and hunger.

Outputs

- Country experiences, including issues, policy interventions, and lessons learnt shared among participants.
- Key issues and challenges related to social protection, rural employment, agriculture and food security identified.
- Selected case studies on linking social protection with rural employment and food security presented.
- Policy options and priority actions at country and regional levels for promoting social protection with its linkages to rural employment, agriculture and food security, and their effective linkages and synergies discussed and agreed.

Participants

The meeting is expected to be attended by Ministerial level participants including senior officials from the ministries of agriculture and social welfare of Asia and the Pacific countries. In addition, it will bring technical experts and partners of Social Protection Floor, and other development partners. The total expected number of participants is around one hundred.

Date and Venue

The Consultation will take place on 8-9 October 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand.