



ICSW WINDHOEK DECLARATION ON SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN AFRICA

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From left to right: Dr. Sang-Mok Suh, Global President, ICSW and Hon. Dr. E. Muinjangu, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Social Services, Namibia

As part of the activities of the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) Seminar on Social Policy and Social Protection in Africa (28th and 29th September 2023, Windhoek, Namibia), ICSW Africa Region convened local and global social scientists and professionals from state and non-state agencies together in Windhoek to deliberate on social policy and social protection issues in the African Region and to draft a road map towards accelerated progress in achieving the SDGs in the Region.

The participants concluded that social policies and social protection programmes are a necessity for human, social, and economic development and ecological sustainability and issued the following declaration, endorsed by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, Namibia, and ICSW as global organization:

Social protection is a right - not an act of charity.

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom. The steps that are needed from the developed nations are clear.” (President Nelson Mandela, at the launch of Make Poverty History -campaign, 2005)

Social policy and good governance are key tools for realizing human rights for all.

Social protection is a high priority in reaching *the Africa we want*, need, strive for -and will get. The AU Strategy 2063 and the supporting Social Agenda aim at providing Member States a vision and guidance to use the transformative powers of social protection to achieve development for all.

Social protection including social assistance in cash or kind, social work services social insurance and labor market policies are effective tools for redistribution of wealth, reaching equality and equity, and for strengthening inclusion and social cohesion that is necessary for mobilizing the productive potentials of nations.

ICSW strongly supports the social protection strategies and human rights instruments of the African Union.

The coverage and adequacy of social protection in the African Region is still too low to ensure eradication of poverty and for achieving inclusive development. There is a need to find ways to address the predominance of informality and to expand decent work that provides adequate livelihoods and rights at work, including social insurance. ICSW strongly supports the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition (2021) and the advancement of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Universal Social Protection (USP) adapted to regional and local conditions.

Social policy is a necessary element in advancing sustainable development goals.

Social protection is decisive instrument for realizing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)of (1) Eradicating poverty (Goal 1), Ending hunger (Goal 2), Good health (Goal 3), Quality education (Goal

4), Gender equality (Goal 5), Decent work (Goal 8), Reduction of inequalities (Goal 10). It is also a necessary facilitator/enabler for achieving most of the other SDGs.

COVID-19 revealed structural weaknesses and demonstrated the importance of social protection systems and social work for recovering from the mental, social and economic shock. However, the shadow of COVID-19 will be long because it increased poverty and exclusion and especially many children and young people were left further behind.

Social policies and social protection will help in reaching the African Union vision of *silencing the guns by 2030* in the Region.

Peace and human security continue to be challenged by global, regional and national inequities, poverty, institutional failures and natural calamities. Equity -oriented social policies and social protection measures are necessary instruments for prevention and mitigation of such risks and for helping people to cope with the consequences and for promoting promote social cohesion and peaceful cooperation.

Action Points

1. Include social policy in general and social protection, in particular, in development policies

Social policy is a corner stone for nation building, human, social and economic development. It is an investment in the future of people and nations. It has a price tag, but should not be accounted as a cost, but as an investment in people and the future of society with a high rate of return.

Social protection should be understood as part of broader, developmental, comprehensive social policy that aims at including access to human rights to all and includes social values in all sector policies. Such developmental approach calls for a Whole-of-Government – approach to development policies, as for example Namibia has done.

Facing complex and interconnected social challenges such as multidimensional poverty, inequality, healthcare disparities, education gaps, and lack of decent jobs, a holistic *“Whole-of-Government” - approach* is particularly relevant in the African context characterized by a high degree of informal economy.

The superdiversity of our societies (ethnicity, gender, age, language, etc.) makes it necessary to develop participatory methodologies. Citizens’ participation is a prerequisite for the design and implementation of a sustainable and legitimate social policy and social protection system. ICSW networks in Africa advocate for a *Whole-of-Society approach* aimed at involving all people through civil society organizations and networks.

2. Advance “Smart welfare” making full use of cost-effective ICT.

In the context of ‘sustainable development’, we recommend a more innovative approach to social security and welfare issues in the spirit of ‘smart welfare’, which includes not only the full utilization of ICT but also more efficient and effective ways of devising welfare policies and programs. In this

respect the international community should make more efforts in exchanges and accumulation of the information on successful experiences of 'smart welfare.'

Public administrations, companies and citizens must respect the digital rights of citizens. ICSW recommends promoting participatory and inclusive digitization processes, reducing the digital divide. A high priority should be accorded to making available digital skills training for all citizens, including the elderly, and for social welfare professionals, in particular.

3. Strengthen the resilience and elasticity of social protection systems.

Since the pandemic started, countries made massive innovations in providing emergency cash transfers to hundreds of thousands of people using mobile money and other technologies.

One of the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic is that our societies must be prepared to address present and future humanitarian catastrophes. To this end, ICSW highlights the need for specific training of social welfare professionals, greater coordination between public administrations and the private sector, and increased investment in social protection systems.

4. Be also aware of slow emergencies, such as climate change.

Climate change is a slow emergency with potentially disastrous impacts. It has already affected drastically the African region – that has been least responsible for the emergence of climate change. ICSW supports the initiative to establish Damage and Loss Compensation Funds and implement them through existing social protection systems.

5. Gender responsive system includes men, as well as women.

Expanding and investing in universal gender-responsive social protection, including income support, as well as contributory and non-contributory social protections systems to not only increase women's and children's resilience but also to be inclusive of men as critical stakeholders. Furthermore, the pandemic has exacerbated the mental health challenges of men. The emerging mental health epidemic calls for a broad bio-psycho-social-cultural-spiritual framework to understand holistic conceptions of human beings and for meeting adequately the mental health challenges of women, men, boys and girls.

6. Promote a 'Well-being Economy,' -approach that puts people's wellbeing at the centre

The aim of sustainable development is to improve the well-being for all people and the planet. Economic indicators of development and well-being should be replaced with more multi-dimensional, and human centered indicators in the context of limited physical/natural resources. The interdependent and mutually reinforcing connections between the economic and the social dimensions of development require more attention to the interactive dynamics of development instead of treating social and economic development and ecological sustainability as separate sectors.

7. Put children at the center of sustainable development policies.

Sustainable development means taking care of the needs of today's people without compromising the possibilities of future generations to cater for their needs. The first future generation is already here: today's children. Thus, children belong to the focus of sustainable development discourse and action. All policies should thus be evaluated by 'child impact assessment'. ICSW supports the

Universal Child Grant for equalizing the opportunities of children for a better life and future for all children.

8. Encourage Corporate Social Responsibility commitments.

In the spirit of 'Who Cares Wins,' the international business community should develop new ways of cooperating with NGOs and the local community in the field of social welfare and social development. In this respect, we recommend that each country should develop its own way of encouraging CSR activities by business firms including appropriate regulation, once needed.

9. Fight tax avoidance and evasion

The adverse impact of tax avoidance and evasion on African government revenues means less funds for social protection, including essential social services, COVID-19 recovery, and urgent climate action.

We call for the enactment of progressive wealth taxes at global and national levels through a legally binding UN Tax Convention to curb the outflow of resources from Africa and the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of an increasingly powerful few. This is necessary in order to increase public spending to end poverty and to achieve the goals of Agenda 2030.

10. Promote the Social Summit 2025

ICSW supports strongly the convening of the 2025 Social Summit, as proposed by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, in view of deteriorating global political, social and economic conditions.

Reaching a consensus on social development principles and action will be very difficult in current conditions of increasing discrepancies and antagonisms. This is exactly why a new global Social Summit is necessary.

ICSW proposes that higher priority should be accorded to the views of the 'Global South' that is the lower- and middle-income countries. Convening the Summit in one of those countries would facilitate the voice of them to be heard better. Co-financing by higher income countries would enable the hosting of the Summit by any of the country that will best be able to facilitate the voices of the less resourceful countries to be heard.

Promotion of wellbeing for all and the extension of social protection in Africa requires the mobilization of all resources: those of families and communities, those of the public sector as well as the private sector. Furthermore, it is in the interest of the international community to promote and help finance the development of appropriate social protection systems in the African Region. Most importantly the African Region must take the role and position that it is entitled to. Equal participation and fair Global, regional and national cooperation are keys to sustainable development.

"Let me repeat, this is an era of partnerships, Government's cannot do it alone.

The UN cannot do it alone and, I am afraid, NGOs cannot do it alone, and business can't."

– UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002."



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