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Universal Social Protection towards ending Inequality Intervention Points – Roshni K. Nuggehalli, India, YUVA/WNTA/GCAP

Principles

- Social protection is a human right and it is Redistributive
- Includes public systems for wide range of measures across the life cycle. Most countries adopt a life cycle approach.
 - *Child and family benefits*
 - *Maternity benefits*
 - *Support to those with no jobs, poor*
 - *Healthcare*
 - *Occupational hazards and safety support*
 - *Disability benefits*
 - *Old age pensions and other support*
- In the Global South there is much to be achieved, despite improvements over the last century
- According to the ILO, less than half (45%) of the world is covered by 1 SP measure
- And only 29% have comprehensive SP (5.2 billion people! Are only partially covered)
- If these figures weren't staggering enough,

Just as we stepped into the Decade of Action in 2020, 2020-21 COVID dominated

- Exposed existing faultlines and inequalities in our countries – Arundhati Roy called it an X-ray in the context of India revealing all that is wrong.
- This crisis has exposed wide gaps in unemployment protection, in particular for those in the informal economy, which is why inequality has risen so much in last 18 months
- About 120 million additional people are living in poverty as a result of the pandemic, with the total expected to rise to about 150 million by the end of 2021 (World Bank, 2020). Oxfam Inequality report shows how inequalities have risen across the world, particularly in the Global South.
- Now our worry is not only lower income countries, **but even middle income like India and Nigeria and the 'new poor'** caused due to the pandemic. In percentages and absolute numbers this is high.

And in response to these shocks, what did governments do?

- They invested in social protection measures
- Across the world, average 90% countries announced
- Most non-contributory, most short-term (3-6 months), now have been extending due to repeated waves
- Indian example 2020 announced USD 260 billion package – decentralised way too
- **Food, direct cash transfers to mitigate wage loss, deferring payments**
- Also improving delivery systems and mechanisms (will come back to this later)

The discourse for USP had already gained traction before 2020, but in the context of pandemic, there can be no doubt that now is the time for Universal Social Protection

- An essential part of any pandemic response, has to **centre Universal SP**
- It has to urgently occupy our conversations for the Decade of Action, which is slipping away

- Why Universal – because not just for the poor, but even the lower income groups, who are esp affected post COVID
- Indispensable not just for economic growth, human development but also mitigating inequality. Shock resilience and political stability. An extreme example – see the protests in Cuba.
- It makes **economic, social, political and moral sense to push for USP**.
- And it IS possible in all countries, with support from the global ecosystem

HOW?

- For universal social protection
- We need a **universal social protection floor**, basic income security, financed from public funding
- Along with **robust social insurance system** – funded by contributions from employers, workers, state
- These **two are basic, in addition** to that can have private voluntary contribution
- The principle of redistribution clearly emerges

RISKS

- **Reducing employer contributions (through taxes)**
- **Privatisation of social insurance**
- Examples esp in S America this has been done and some places reversed too
- Biggest risk for **us post pandemic is the austerity wave**. Not 2nd, 3rd, 4th, but austerity wave.
- Isabel Ortiz has studied this in detail – and predicts that over 159 countries will see public expenditure cuts from now till 2025, this will effect 85% of worlds population by 2022
- We need more SP, not austerity!

OPTIONS

- Improve tax revenues
- Use reserves
- Reallocate public expenditure
- Aid and transfer – like the Global SP Fund

Several options to make USP a reality – as long we are aware of the risks and emphasis on reaching the most marginalised.

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**Draw your attention to a few areas of specific focus in the context of USP and removing inequalities: Invisible groups in the policy making space, Data, Technology:**

### 1) ‘Invisible groups’

Three main ones (of course with overlaps): Migrants who primarily work in the informal sector, Gender, Youth

### Migrant and Informal Workers

- We need specific, contextual and **long-term**, not restricted to immediate measures
- Income support
- Healthcare support

- Food and housing support
- As the gig economy, part-time jobs, and fluid forms of employment grow, what happens to the protections the traditional job market offered to people and workers?
- Reaching the most marginalised – improved administrative procedures, but also working closely with unions, and other civil society stakeholders

## Gender

- We see women and others along the gender continuum being left out of traditional measures – home based workers, miss all safety nets, and more so after COVID
- Prioritise gender alongside traditional disability, workers benefits, etc.
- Look at cash transfers not as temporary fixes, but as gender transformational
- Look at SP that responds to sexual, reproductive needs and also to gender-based violence
- Universal healthcare – ease entry requirements for women and support them in negotiating systems

## Youth

- Most countries in Global South have young populations
- In order to derive benefit from the demographic dividend, there is an urgent need to make social protection respond to the situation of young people
- 10 million girls just in India at risk of dropping out of school
- Malnutrition and immunisations have had a huge setback
- So for young people, along with employment programmes, we need Integrate SP
- Housing, Sexual and reproductive health and so on

## Data role

- **For any USP system, data is central. But bottom up data processes are what is critical** – this responds to the 2030 Agenda and whole issue of community data.
- Using data not just as a targeting mechanism, **but using data to push for accountability by CS. That is what we are aiming for.**
- **Risks of data for the sake of profiling** – very high in current Indian context. CS has to play a role in mitigating these risks while ensuring adequate data for SP.
- **Data to support organising by CS:** not just unions but diverse forms of collectives, since urban poor and homeless are also heterogenous. Data from Collectives *not* dashboards and platforms.

## Technology role

- **Any conversation on USP will include technology**, so I want to speak about it today.
- **When to use technology:** Technology is an enabler, cannot drive the process. Has to come downstream. Where it exists as a substitute for political will, the process caves in. Our experience shows this. **Which moment in time the tech comes** is paramount.
- **Where to use technology:** our experience says at the last mile to improve access and outreach. But typically we see governments use technology as a centralising mechanism - which is ironical - but true.
  - We do need visibilisation, but to ensure social protection, not for surveillance. And currently technology claims to do the former, but ends up doing the latter.

## Conclusion

- Huge urgency for the decade of action to focus on USP

- To advance towards Agenda 2030 and to end poverty everywhere
- To reduce the unbearable inequality within and between countries.
- We want governments to build sustainable and adaptive social protection systems to manage this and future crises. Needs to be evolving
- Governments should have robust SP mechanism for different kinds of workers, different kinds of vulnerable groups, heterogenous and longitudinal, both.
- CS role as an active and responsive partner in ensuring USP for LNOB
- **As CS we must adopt a Systemic approach and systematic method**
  - At national and local levels
  - Identify gaps in existing systems
  - Data for mapping SP needs and monitoring has to have a people-owned nature.
  - Recommend ideal systems with technology as an enabler
  - Suggest financing mechanisms for these
  - Link with global partnerships and the Global Fund

**Truly make the audacious/transformational dream of USP a reality.**