

## **Presentation of the main lessons learned for the development of national floors of protection in other ASEAN countries and of an ASEAN Declaration on the SPF**

**Antonio Asper, Federation of Free Workers, Philippines**

1. Support the development of an ASEAN Social Protection Framework: some countries within ASEAN have already taken initiatives to establish a social protection framework. It is an arrangement because we realized that many countries were well ahead in achieving those goals. So we, the ASEAN countries, want to support those countries, to support what already exists.
2. The framework is aimed at supporting Member States to meet the national minimum standards (floors) or to exceed them and meet higher targets (ceilings). Regarding the framework:
  - a. Objectives need to be flexible and accommodate different contexts in countries.
  - b. The main responsibility to implement social protection programmes remains at the national level. ASEAN as a body can give complementary support.
3. Recommendation to set up an inter-sectoral network of social protection within ASEAN:
  - a. Each country needs to appoint a focal point.
  - b. Each country needs to develop an inter-sectoral social protection coordination mechanism.
  - c. A regional network will facilitate sharing of information, exchange of experiences and a common advocacy strategy.
  - d. There is a need to establish a monitoring mechanism whereby:
    - i. Each country has its own floor following the needs of that country.
    - ii. There will be a regular self-assessment based on a common monitoring format.
    - iii. The result has to be reported regularly to the ASEAN social protection network.
    - iv. The purpose is to assess progress made by the countries.

## Report on the discussion between different ASEAN participants at the workshop,

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There are two main issues to discuss:

### 1. **Lessons learned for the development of national SPFs**

The presentations at the workshop so far demonstrate that nation states have existing social protection systems, which are often run by different agencies, ministries or departments. With ILO's Recommendation concerning national floors of social protection, 2012 (No. 202), a strong intention has emerged in ASEAN countries to synergise their social protection efforts so as to have a coordinated approach.

A key question that arises is on how to implement effective inter-agency cooperation in a real sense. Each country has its own contributions and notions on this point, and these are all contextual. ASEAN countries can identify and share common lessons learned, which can fuel the issue of how an ASEAN SPF framework could address these common concerns.

### 2. **Feedback on the intention of ASEAN to develop an SPF framework**

In 2012, Cambodia came up with an initiative to develop an ASEAN SPF framework. The intention was to have a stronger ASEAN response because ASEAN works through different sectoral bodies, e.g. the labour sector deals with the social security aspects of SP; the rural development sector deals with conditional cash transfers to the poor; the health sector is establishing a working group on universal access to health care; and so on. Cambodia suggested that there is a need for a more concerted effort to have an inclusive process involving relevant as well as tripartite stakeholders.

The question is what kind of framework would work best. Initially, an ASEAN declaration was suggested to propose parameters for SPFs. However a declaration is more a suggestion; a framework sets the stage for action. There was a need to discuss what kind of framework would suit ASEAN, meet the concerns of member states and define what social protection is in the context of ASEAN.

In June the ASEAN secretariat would hold a regional workshop to look into this in greater detail. However the present workshop was a good opportunity to brainstorm informally so that they could provide some inputs to the ASEAN secretariat when the concept was developed further.

At present, different sectoral bodies in ASEAN were acting independently, mirroring the fragmentation of social service delivery at the national level. The point of proposing an ASEAN framework was to have an integrated approach to SPFs. Ms Irena proposed some questions for discussion.

- ***Should we have an SPF network or a working group in ASEAN?***
- ***Do we need another new mechanism at the regional level? What is the purpose?***  
Responses from the participants included:
  - to share information, best practices, experiences
  - to develop an advocacy tool for line ministries to continuously improve social protection schemes in member states
  - to encourage support and cooperation between ASEAN countries, sharing of technical expertise and experience between more advanced countries to less experienced member states
  - to develop standard SPF assessment mechanisms, including defining targets and standards, for reviewing and reporting at the regional level.
- ***Is the ASEAN SPF framework really needed and how will it add value to the efforts of different countries?***  
Responses from the participants included:
  - Some standardisation at the ASEAN level is necessary to improve coordination, such as standardization of social security number format, data structure, processes, registrations,

contribution payments and so on. However, it was observed that despite there being significant coordination issues, a high level of standardization was unlikely as the responsibility for social programmes and initiatives would still rest with national governments and regional cooperation can only add value to it.

- A question was raised on what would happen if ASEAN economic integration occurred in 2015 as planned without an ASEAN social protection mechanism in place. To avoid this, it was necessary to discuss what kind of instrument should be developed, such as a resolution, a declaration? The instrument must take into consideration the rights-based approach and a caveat that there is no one-size-fits-all model for SPFs.
  - It was suggested that ASEAN could be a part of benchmarking, targeting and advocacy. ASEAN could set benchmarks for countries to gradually move towards, for example, a standardised registration system. A self-assessment mechanism could effectively help countries to keep pace with member states.
  - An ASEAN framework is needed because it is central to the development of nations and countries need to learn from one another. Some kind of data collection from on issues such as poverty levels etc. could be a starting point.
  - Ms Irena raised a few questions at this point. Are we talking about minimum standards set by member governments and reporting to ASEAN or regional minimum standards? Are we talking about ceilings (targets) or floors (minimum standards)? So they could discuss on a regionally accepted floor or nationally-defined floors reporting to ASEAN. It was observed that setting regional standards would be difficult and national standards would be a more practical approach.
  - The initial impetus behind Recommendation No. 202 was not to set minimum standards but to focus on collaboration regarding emerging issues of vulnerability. As a region such issues could include migration, youth employment, and so on. Big issues could be given more attention such as portability of social benefits.
- ***Each ASEAN sector already has its own collaborations. As ASEAN should mirror what happens at the national level, should we be encouraging each country to have an inter-agency coordination mechanism on social protection?***

Responses from the participants included:

- ASEAN should monitor progression made by member states on harmonization of efforts between ministries. ASEAN could develop mechanisms to enable members to do this according to their respective capacities.
- Regarding compensation for losses under ASEAN, for examples in trade agreements if you do not follow regional decisions and a member state is going to be negatively impacted, you must compensate that member for their losses. Similarly ASEAN could provide some form of grant or subsidy to enable states to meet minimum social protection requirements.
- Regarding ASEAN integration, Ms Irena noted that all 10 member states share one common goal, that of improving the welfare of people in the region, a shared agenda of narrowing the development gap. This requires inclusive and quality social services, especially for vulnerable groups. However this is largely nationally driven. Secondly, regarding mobility of labour, they need to come up with a common agenda for portability of benefits. Also there is an ASEAN instrument on promotion and protection of migrant workers that is looking at portability of social benefits.
- A key challenge was the lack of a good assessment of what constituted 'winners' and 'losers' due to the existence of an uneven playing field. They needed to better their understanding on this aspect through some analysis, such as that before the EU integration. It was highlighted that there is an ongoing ILO study on the economic impact of ASEAN integration. Also any ASEAN framework would have to be developed in line with the post-MDG agenda.
- The ASEAN social security association could be used. A standardised reporting format would need to be developed. Member states should establish a focal point on social protection to report to ASEAN. Each country would require a coordination mechanism to decide which ministry would report to ASEAN. National social protection representatives could be made responsible for reporting and coordination at the policy level. While standards may be different across countries, reporting mechanisms must be common. The adoption of this notion on national representatives would need to be at the highest level; the SP representative would need a mandate to coordinate across all ministries.

- AusAID is setting up a social protection hub in Jakarta. This potentially comprises people waiting to work with an ASEAN taskforce on SPF.
- Technical coordination is important and the right officials with appropriate expertise need to be appointed. Training programmes, master class programmes on relevant thematic areas should be provided to ASEAN member state representatives.

Ms Irena noted that the ASEAN had moved beyond the idea of a Declaration on SPF, which was more as an expression of **intent and goodwill, and towards the idea of a Framework, which could be made operational**. Regarding the issue of migration, clear linkages would need to be established between the Ministries of Labour, Foreign Affairs because at times, migration laws constrain access to social security for migrant workers. It also needed to be seen if there was a strong political commitment among member states regarding portability of social security benefits.

**Summary of the ASEAN group discussion:**

- Group participants seemed to be agreeing on the point that an ASEAN framework was needed as ASEAN moved towards economic integration.
- The need for stronger cooperation at the ASEAN level on social protection was accepted.
- There was great interest in developing an ASEAN SPF framework. The aim of an ASEAN SPF framework would be to support states to meet minimum targets and build SPFs, and further support countries in a relatively advanced state to go further than the SPF.
- The framework could facilitate sharing of information and best practices, and provide assistance.
- A reporting mechanism at regional level could be developed to establish comparisons between member states.
- Establishment of an information sharing mechanism and a monitoring and reporting mechanism were suggested.
- Any proposal would have to be cross-sectoral. In each country there would need to be a similar mechanism for policy coordination. This could be tied in with cooperation with ILO and other organisations to ensure integrated coordination. The UN Sub-working group on SPF could be the UN focal point.