



SOCIAL SECURITY

Essential for the rural population

Abstract

Every society should aim to ensure for all its members a dignified living standard. An important precondition for achieving this is the provision of a safety net to protect people from the greatest social and economic risks. Primary education and basic health care should be available to everyone free of charge. The ratification of economic, social and cultural human rights has given these political targets the status of an inalienable human right.

Health and education are important for full participation in economic, social and cultural life. Social security measures must therefore become an integral part of rural development. Private business and self-help systems play an important role in this regard, but above all, it is the responsibility of governments to take the initiative in their countries and create favourable framework conditions. In states where government structures are fragile or inadequately equipped, the international community should support the provision of social security – preferably involving local civil society – at least intermittently.

Social security entails protection from economic misery. Beyond securing pure survival, it aims at assurance of living standards compatible with human dignity for all members of a society. Fundamental risks must be insured against in order to avoid dependency and poverty. People who are unable to earn a living and contribute to the social security system also have the right to a life compatible with human dignity. This includes assured access to food, health services and education.

Traditional social security structures (family, clan) tend to function less satisfactorily in many developing countries. This makes state benefits (income transfers in the form of social welfare payments) increasingly important. Public, private and self-help-based institutions also play an important part in providing instruments for social security and income transfer. State monitoring and regulatory mechanisms are essential in order to guarantee that these institutions function effectively.

State social programmes (e.g. minimum wage, social welfare) have become increasingly important in developing and emerging countries since the turn of the millennium. To date, at least 45 states have such programmes, reaching a total of 110 million families – about half a billion people in all. Many studies prove that people involved in these programmes are healthier and better nourished, that their children go to school more regularly and that they work more productively than comparable groups who have no access to social services. Cash transfers do not only support survival; they also stimulate the economy and help people to help themselves.

In rural areas, the impacts of social security systems are becoming increasingly visible. Cash transfer based on preconditions – linked for example to work (cash for work), participation in training and education or to health care services – can support the development of rural infrastructure. They also have indirect positive effects such as contributing to higher wage levels and encouraging growth of the local economy (productive safety nets). Due to such programmes, the poorest people are no longer forced to accept work under any conditions. Income support can strengthen the position of women in the village community. New concepts to protect particularly vulnerable groups (children, orphans, the old, the sick and people with handicaps) are becoming increasingly important because even in rural areas, traditional family structures are eroding – partly due to migration.

In some cases it can make sense for the social security system to be supplemented by private providers. This is particularly the case in relation to limited, clearly defined risks, e.g. to cover funeral costs or redemption of a credit through a life insurance. Insurance for the farming population (e.g. against loss of harvests) could have great economic and social impact (cf. Section 5 on microfinance).

Social security in its wider sense could include all state measures and those of public institutions and organised (civil) society which have socio-political targets. This primarily covers health, educational and labour policy.

Health care in rural areas is generally less effective than in urban agglomerations. Large numbers of people work in the informal sector; this includes landless people and seasonal migrants in search of work. These groups usually have no access to formal social security systems at all (health and pensions insurance, social security). There is also a lack of rural social infrastructure. Health care institutions are usually far apart and difficult to reach, due to the lack of transport facilities. They are often poorly equipped and run by inadequately trained healthcare staff. Several studies have shown that poor people are more frequently ill and on average die younger than those with means. They are often unable to afford the cost of treatment, which means that they sink even deeper into poverty. Micro insurance can make a significant contribution if there is no access to comprehensive social security systems. Women have particular health-related rights and needs. The human right to sexual and reproductive health includes the right to family planning and safe pregnancy and birth (cf. Section 7 on women).

In addition, the rural population needs access to effective educational institutions. The infrastructure problems listed above in relation to the health care system also apply to education. Formalised structures for vocational training are practically nonexistent in rural areas; illiterate people are usually excluded from educational opportunities. There is little formal vocational training in agriculture. Local agricultural extension services are often understaffed and employees are badly paid. The demands made on schools and on non-school education have changed greatly in recent years. Rural households must be strengthened so that they can meet economic and social challenges (cf. Section 8 on civil society).

Welthungerhilfe's involvement in relation to social security for the rural population in developing countries:

Supporting people in disaster-related emergency situations by the immediate, unconditional provision of food and materials and promoting reconstruction by cash-for-work or food-for-work measures.

Promoting self-help-based insurance for the rural poor. Measures of this kind not only improve social security in the villages but also give communities more negotiating power vis-à-vis health care providers.

Supporting people in claiming the social security payments to which they are entitled (e.g. National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India).

Supporting partners in the fight against corruption, particularly in the health care system, in order to improve the effectiveness of social systems.

Education and health care are supported as an integral aspect of rural development projects.

Welthungerhilfe's demands relating to social security for the rural population:

Donor countries should make funding available for the development and maintenance of social security systems from the funds for development cooperation.

Governments should take steps to allow free access to primary education and basic health-care for the whole population.

Developing countries must fulfil their human rights obligations to ensure basic social security for their citizens. This includes state financed, preferably free primary education and basic health care.

Developing countries must introduce laws and monitoring systems so that public institutions and private businesses can provide effective and efficient social security.

Particularly vulnerable groups (e.g. people with handicaps, the old, orphans) not possessing property or working capability should be provided with special support.

One effective measure to reduce the rural exodus is to make rural areas more attractive by introducing education and training opportunities (school systems and vocational training).

This section is an excerpt of the WHH Position Paper Rural Development. Please also consult all other sections at www.welthungerhilfe.org/position-paper-rural-development

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