

Global Social Policy Digest 12.2

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Global Social Policies: Redistribution, Regulation and Rights

REDISTRIBUTION

After the significant global attention given at the Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (G20) in Cannes to the possibilities of innovative financing and for developments including international financial transaction taxes (see GSP Digest 12.1), it was a return to business as usual. The Leading Group of Countries met for their 10th session in February 2012 and invited

those countries having implemented a tax on financial transactions to allocate part of the product to international solidarity and seriously consider facilitating a Conference to promote this.

Also in March 2012, the European Parliament discussed the Commission's plans to levy such a tax. The case for such a tax does appear to be gaining strength: the issue now is whether it will be spent on development assistance and global public goods. However, the prospect of the eurozone introducing a tax on financial transactions was reported to be fading as finance ministers and officials raised doubts about how the proposal can be made to work. Nonetheless, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has announced plans to introduce a 0.1% tax on financial transactions in August, regardless of whether it is implemented in other European countries. On a different type of tax discussion is a more theoretical World Bank working paper which discusses aviation and shipping taxes.

A special High-Level Meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was held with the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), on 12 and 13 March 2012. The meeting was dedicated to theme of 'Financing for Sustainable Development'. In concluding remarks the President of ECOSOC, Miloš Koterec suggested the setting up of a Working Group in order to facilitate better cooperation between ECOSOC and relevant stakeholders in the Financing for Development process. This suggestion had arisen out of the consultation by high-level officials including UN Ambassadors, and top level World Bank and IMF officials as a follow up to the Monterrey process.

Meanwhile, work continues on the mapping of current traditional development assistance by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. An OECD publication provides comprehensive data on the volume, origin and types of aid and other resource flows to around 150 developing countries. The data shows each country's intake of Official Development Assistance (ODA) as well as other official and private funds from members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, multilateral agencies and other key donors. Oxfam commented that the "cut in aid is a global scandal. Rich countries are using the economic crisis as an excuse to turn their backs on the world's poorest at a time when they need help the most" (see a related blog).

In terms of humanitarian assistance, DARA (a non-profit organisation) published its 5th annual Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) and concluded

after five years of HRI research, it is more than evident that the gaps are essentially the same as when the reform process began, and the pace of reforms may not be quick enough to match increasing needs and a rapidly changing aid context, much less respond adequately to future challenges.

Meanwhile the World Bank updated its poverty data, and concludes that there is a decline in the poverty rate as well as the number of poor in the six regions of the developing world. While this is a step in the right direction, the reality remains that many people remain poor and vulnerable across the world. Though some doubts about the validity of the World Bank estimates were raised by the Brookings Institution. Nevertheless, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon was able to report selected progress in meeting some of the MDG goals, and particularly that the number of people living in extreme poverty had declined in all regions of the world, including in Africa where challenges are greatest. Secretary-General's statement was supported by a joint report from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) showing the MDG target of halving the number of people without access to safe drinking water has been met (see also Habitat, Land, Housing section).

Internal UN discussions concerning the Post 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) process have begun with the establishment of an internal UN Task Team (UNTT). The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) zero draft includes some substantial challenges to the MDG mechanistic goals and processes and notes that "strategies for inclusive, equitable and sustainable economic growth and employment creation, which are central to reducing poverty and vulnerability, have been neglected". An expert group meeting was also convened

in February 2012 to advise it. A Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) report can be found at their [website](#). This story will unfold as the UN Task Team reports to Ban Ki-Moon in May 2012 followed by the establishment by him of a High-Level review panel which will be open to public consultation. The civil society coalition '[Beyond 2015](#)' have proposed civil society membership of the High Level Task Force.

In terms of aid effectiveness the final [report](#) of the four year OECD-DAC work on aid in the health sector [concluded](#):

It is difficult to strike the right balance and find better complementarities between programs that score well on delivering shorter term measurable results, though often at the expense of aid effectiveness and longer term transformational change and whole-of-sector approaches that are more sustainable, focus on greater alignment with country needs, institutions and priorities, but are more challenging to measure and report.

Also on the question of aid effectiveness and health are new working papers by the Centre for Global Development (CGD), more concretely on the [Gates Foundation](#), and on the quality of ODA [assessment](#). One facet of it is also the continuing concern of the donor community with corruption in recipient countries as [initiatives and reports](#) of the EU and World Bank testify.

A more nuanced analysis of how to overcome the problem centred on the need for effective democratic social contracts within developing countries seems to be provided by Anis Dani of the World Bank's former New Frontiers of Social Policy Programme. His [book](#) argues:

The links between state effectiveness, accountability and legitimacy of public institutions are undeniable. Good governance requires the transformation of subjects and beneficiaries into citizens capable of claiming their rights to foster social integration within society and an acceptable social contract with the state.

Meanwhile the current fashion to regard diaspora remittances and investment as an alternative source of development finance continues. That remittances affect financial inclusion is testified by the establishment of an [African Institute for Remittances](#).

SPECIAL SECTION: Looking towards Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Internationally, most attention was focused on the upcoming Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (15-18 June) (see also DESA News). A zero draft report was released on 10 January 2012 entitled 'The Future We Want'. This report was the result of the consultation by various stakeholders such as governments, businesses and civil society groups and set out their vision for the goals of the conference. David Mittler, from Greenpeace International, expressed concern about the lack of urgency in the draft report. Though he does acknowledge the positives such as the recognition that GDP is not the ideal tool for measuring well being, and the possibility of an emergence of a UN Environment Agency. Understandably, this appreciation for recognition of centrality of the environmental issues is not shared by all. Accordingly, some concern arose that the final Rio+20 document might shape the post MDG agenda with an environmental rather than a social development focus (for some connected links and topics see the special section on climate change and social policy in digest 12.1). The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), among others, has drawn attention to this concern with a research programme and a public seminar on 11 April 2012. The concern that the environmental agenda would overshadow the priorities on development emerged as a theme in the discussions by various organisations. Mostly to point out that the problems facing the international community are interlinked and cannot be addressed through any one means.

Under the banner for ensuring sustainable development is the argument for inclusion of environmental, economic and social concerns in the outcome of the conference. This view is best portrayed in the Report of the High Level Panel on Sustainable Development, 'Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing,' which the Secretary General established to advise the Rio+20 Conference, that defines sustainability in terms of a combination of Social, Environmental and Economic Sustainability. Additionally, the March 2012 issue of the 'Development' journal entitled 'Greening the Economy' provides a multiplicity of perspectives on the linkages between the social, economic and environmental dimensions.

In addition, Global Human Development Forum adopted an 'Istanbul Declaration' urging action at Rio+20. The meeting organised by the UNDP together with the Turkish government, and attended by about 200 development experts, civil society activists, government ministers, private sector representatives and UN officials from all world regions, claimed that

it is time to reset the global development agenda [...]. The world needs a renewed commitment to sustainable development and strong political leadership to implement it.

Another bridging attempt is portrayed by Oxfam that produced, in the run-up to Rio+20, a discussion paper which presents a visual framework – shaped like a doughnut – which brings planetary boundaries together with social boundaries, creating a safe and just space between the two, in which humanity can thrive. Moving into this space demands far greater equity – within and between countries – in the use of natural resources, and far greater efficiency in transforming those resources to meet human needs.

The relevance of the upcoming Rio+20 Conference was also evident in the renewed discussion about how business might be better regulated (either through law or self regulation) to contribute to social and environmental sustainability. The UN Global Compact reported that at the Corporate Sustainability Forum (part of the conference) “chief executives and government-corporate partnership teams will be clearing a text on the private sector role in helping to save the planet from unsustainable and ultimately self-destructive practices.” However elsewhere the same Global Compact stated:

But the fact remains that a large majority of the world’s businesses have not yet made any commitment to universal principles, acting as a drag on sustainability efforts. (Even) within the Global Compact, a significant number of participants continuously fail to produce evidence of progress. The number of companies expelled has recently passed 3,000 (since 2005) and today stands at 3,123.

The WTO Secretariat contributed their Rio+20 report to the discussion and are concerned to ensure

that measures with a trade impact taken for environmental purposes do not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade

Furthermore, in the report the WTO called on the international community to support the Doha Development agenda, to support an open international trading system, and to further the participation of developing countries in trade.

An aspect not sufficiently addressed seemed to be the protection of human rights. More than 20 UN experts addressed world governments with an open letter calling “to incorporate universally agreed human rights norms and standards with strong accountability mechanisms into the Rio+20 sustainable development conference’s goals”. UN Human Rights chief Navi Pillay has urged UN member states to ensure that human rights are integrated in

any outcome. Pillay felt that the draft report did not pay sufficient attention to the need for entrenching human rights in future visions for development. Therefore, the lead up to the Rio+20 conference has certainly been used to bring out issues of key concern by various stakeholders and it remains to be seen what type of ‘future we want’ will be agreed upon.

REGULATION

Tax evasion continues to preoccupy the OECD among others. A new report ‘Hybrid Mismatch Arrangements: Tax Policy and Compliance Issues’ describes aggressive tax planning including untaxed income, multiple deductions and other forms of international tax arbitrage. The OECD also published ‘Reducing opportunities for Tax Non- Compliance in the Underground economy’ and it plans to simplify its transfer pricing rules.

On 1 April 2012 a new dimension to this problem was noted:

Banks are taking offshore to the next level and plan to launch a new trading platform in space to avoid what they consider to be onerous taxes and legislation. A consortium of the world’s largest banks including Barclays, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan believe the billions of dollars of investment needed would be recouped within years since the ‘space haven’ would allow them to avoid terrestrial tax bills, capital controls and other legislative requirements designed to curb their speculative activity.

Meanwhile, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) charged with the task of overseeing the global regulation of labour and related standards will in June consider the General Survey: ‘Giving globalization a human face’, which deals with all eight fundamental conventions and seeks to give a global picture of the law and practice in member States. The ILO has also launched a comprehensive new database providing open access to the latest information on ILO international labour standards as well as national labour and social security laws.

The Population Division of UNDESA convened its 10th Coordination Meeting on International Migration in February in order to prepare the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The High-level Dialogue will be organised by the General Assembly during its sixty-eighth session in 2013. The goal will be to examine the cooperation between international organisations and the 2011 and 2012 editions of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. As well as to allow international organisations to exchange information on current activities and to present major new initiatives in the area of international migration. The impossibility of the task was underlined by the list of over 30

contributed papers from allied organisations. Meanwhile the Global Migration Group appears to be without an active chair since the UNESCO ended its stint in December 2011.

RIGHTS

The Fiftieth Session of the Commission for Social Development took place 1-10 February 2012 in New York under the topic of 'Poverty Eradication'. The Session's report also addresses rights questions, particularly with regard to social groups. Amongst other things, the Special Rapporteur on disability presented his report to the Commission, leading to a draft resolution. A particular focus was placed on youth poverty and unemployment. With regard to children's rights the report reiterates:

the commitment to invest in children and our vow to break the cycle of poverty within a single generation, united in the conviction that investments in children and the realization of their rights are among the most effective ways to eradicate poverty (p. 9).

As well as it reaffirms the rights of women (p. 11). The meeting also reflected preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, including issues such as equal rights for men and women.

This almost exclusive focus on youth poverty and unemployment generated a blog comment at 'HelpAge international' re-calling the social needs of older people. The Group of 77 had addressed the session by stressing the issue of population ageing (section 9). The Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (established in December 2010) meanwhile is preparing its third working session (to take place 21-24 August 2012). The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People is calling for a convention for older people, which ensures appropriate respect for the group of older people, within more general international human rights laws. Also the 'State of the World's Older Persons Report' is in preparation, to be launched in October 2012 (there is more information on the HelpAge International website). Linking the rights of elderly people and rights to health was the topic of this year's World Health Day on 7 April (see also Health section).

Women's right were focused on in the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which took place in New York, 27 February to 15 March 2012. It considered the empowerment of rural women, and reviewed the theme of gender equality and women empowerment (referring to the fifty-second session). Similar to the Commission on

Social Development, the emerging theme was young women and men and gender equality. After the meeting, Executive Director Michelle Bachelet posted a statement saying:

Unfortunately we have [...] witnessed an inability to reach consensus on the agreed conclusions on our priority theme, empowering rural women. We have come to an impasse, which is deeply regrettable.

The empowering of rural women was also the theme of the International Women's Day (8 March). The ILO issued statements and launched some events. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said "There is a long way to go before women and girls can be said to enjoy the fundamental rights, freedom and dignity that are their birthright and that will guarantee their well-being". UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay also issued a message to mark the day (for further statements see here). Others expressed similar concerns of a job not yet completed as ISSA stressed the gender gap in social security.

On the children's rights, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child is now open for signature. It will allow children to bring complaints to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (see also this story). The 'State of the World's Children 2012 report' includes a chapter on children's rights in urban settings. UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children 2012 also includes the statement that: "Full funding for 2012 is needed in order to meet the needs of vulnerable children and women to fulfil their right to health, survival and development" (p8). The Human Rights Watch has published an article by David Mepham asking if 'Business can Uphold Children's Rights'. It hints at the fact that "despite a plethora of international initiatives on corporate social responsibility (CSR), none has focused exclusively on the impact of business on children's rights." In response to this fact, 'Children's Rights and Business Principles' were launched in March 2012, involving UNICEF, Save the Children and the UN Global Compact.

Recently published was also the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street. The Report highlighted the necessity for investing in children in street situations as a way for building societies that respect human dignity. It points to the reality that children that find themselves in street situations have experienced multiple violations of their rights prior to reaching the street situation.

Global Social Governance

Shuffling the pack at the highest level of global governance was the order of the day this spring. The World Bank and the ILO were both about to appoint new leaders. The Nominees for the Bank President were Jim Yong Kim, a US national and President of Dartmouth College, José Antonio Ocampo, a Colombian national and Professor at Columbia University, and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Nigerian national and Coordinating Minister of the Economy and Minister of Finance, Nigeria. The Executive Directors conducted formal interviews with the expectation of selecting the new President by consensus by the 2012 Spring Meetings. The reaction of parts of civil society to this process was predictable. The campaigners, including Oxfam, Eurodad and the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (Afrodad), have asked the US to announce that it will no longer seek to monopolise the Presidential position. Elizabeth Stuart of Oxfam said:

The way the World Bank picks its president needs to change. The Bank only operates in developing countries, so any candidate not supported by a majority of these countries would plainly lack legitimacy.

The pages of the Centre for Global Development noted:

The US had a chance to lead. It abdicated that chance to play domestic politics and put forward a US nominee who is manifestly less qualified to be head of the World Bank than the alternative candidate nominated by African countries: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

Nevertheless, on 16 April 2012, it was announced that Jim Yong Kim will be the next World Bank President, which made Oxfam reaffirm its criticism about selection process.

The appointment of the next Director-General of the ILO, meanwhile, was proceeding in a more open and transparent way with a hearing of all candidates at the ILO's governing body before a formal vote of its 24 government members, 12 worker members and 12 employer members on 28 May. The list of candidates for the post of Director-General was Gilles de Robien, Angelino Garzón, Ad Melkert, Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, Assane Diop, Mona Sahlin, Guy Ryder and Charles Dan. Would the wish to befriend an ILO donor (Sweden, France, Netherlands) win out over an appointment from the Global South or an insider (Diop from Social Protection, Ryder nominated by the workers)? Would Jomo's record as a global intellectual and his work at UNDESA count in his favour?

Meanwhile the uncontested and reappointed UN Secretary General announced his unremarkable and unexciting five year priority plan which included sustainable development, prevention, building a safer and more secure world by innovating and building on our core business, supporting nations in transition, and working with and for women and young people.

The World Economic Forum came and went with little impact. Its organisers simply note:

The outlook, after a week of intense discussion, is of a troubled world pressed for solutions across a number of fronts, but with optimism provided by human ingenuity and progress.

No attempt to capture the consensus was made. Furthermore, we no longer have the alternative World Social Forum standing in opposition to this event, rather the WSF has broken up into a series of thematic and regional meetings often in languages other than English.

For those of us briefly excited by some of the outcomes of the G20 meeting under the French Presidency in Cannes (See GSP Digest 12.1) we looked forward to the Mexican Presidency to continue some of the work on, for example, increased collaboration between international organisations on the social dimensions of globalisation. The publication of Mexico's priorities was unpromising, though: a) economic stabilisation and structural reforms as foundations for growth and employment, b) strengthening the financial system and fostering financial inclusion to promote economic growth, c) improving the international financial architecture in an interconnected world, d) enhancing food security and addressing commodity price volatility and e) promoting sustainable development, green growth and the fight against climate change. The work programme towards the June Summit allocates a very large agenda to the 'Finance Track' and leaves the issues of Development and Employment to the 'Sherpa's track' which does include the 'Employment and Social Dimension of Globalization sub-track' but this seems to be dominated by the last G20 decision to set up a G20 Working Party on Employment. Social Protection, for example, is not a subhead. There is to be a Business 20 meeting but no repeat of the 2011 Labour 20 meeting. Sherpas met 2-3 February and 15-16 March 2012. The Communiqué of the February Finance Ministers Meeting contains nothing of interest on global taxation.

The World Bank/IMF Spring Meeting meetings took place 16-21 April 2012. The World Bank launched its new Social Protection and Labour Strategy (see also Social

Protection section) but, interestingly at a special World Bank event entitled 'Event on Social Safety Nets'. The joint IMF/World Bank Development Committee reported on 21 April. The Civil Society Policy Forum was held 18 to 21 April 2012, and related views came from the Bretton Woods Project.

The relationship between the G20, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the UN ECOSOC were the subject of a special panel discussion convened by ECOSOC on 7 March 2012. Among the contributors was World Bank President hopeful Ocampo who noted that:

the G20 is less important than it thinks it is, and that at the foremost, it is a dialogue between powerful countries [...]. the battle between legitimacy and effectiveness is the lasting war of all democratic institutions, and the main problem of 'elite multilateralism'.

In March 2012, the Global Fund's Executive Director Michel Kazatchkine stepped down, following the decision of the Global Fund's Board to appoint a General Manager, namely Gabriel Jaramillo, former Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sovereign Bank. He functions now "to oversee a process of transformation as it accelerates the fight against the three pandemics by focusing on its management of risk and grants." He will report to the board and will assume full executive responsibilities for the Global Fund. Centre for Global Development's Amanda Glassman supported the choice of a banker filling the position at the Global Fund. However later, when a doctor was chosen the new World Bank's president, comments:

it's the world turned upside down. Either it's a really good idea that will generate creativity and enhanced impact, or it could end up to be a colossal mistake on both counts.

In a somewhat different context and intention, Duncan Green used the image of 'The World Turned Upside Down' referring to UNCTAD head Supachai Paitchpakdi's report to the UNCTAD meeting. That is the thirteenth session of UNCTAD which took place 21-26 April 2012 in Doha. Its topic was 'Development-centred globalization: Towards inclusive and sustainable growth and development'. Green calls Paitchpakdi's previously mentioned report "one of the most comprehensive critiques of the WTO model of globalization [...]" seen from an official body" (a related blog contribution from Oxfam, and another comment on the session comes from the Bretton Woods Project).

International Actors and Social Policy

HEALTH

The global health world was relatively quiet in the period under review. Apart from new appointments to head international organisations (see Global Social Governance section), and the World Health Day there were very few developments. Amanda Glassman (Centre for Global Development) even stated that “the G8 dropped global health off the agenda. ... [and] global health never made it on the G20 agenda either.” Indeed there was not more than a much welcomed call by the G8 Foreign Ministers for new donors to support the Global Fund’s work. So, is the World Social Forum on Health’s claim - ‘a health for all is possible and necessary’ – just a dream? Also the declaration of the International Forum on Universal Health Coverage (Mexico, 1-2 April 2012) does not appear to be particularly exciting calling upon governments, CSOs and international organisations to promote universal health coverage in the international development agenda.

World Health Day (7 April) gave reason to focus on the health of older people. The WHO’s website provides data and information, saying

over the past century life expectancy has increased dramatically and the world will soon have more older people than children. This social transformation represents both challenges and opportunities. In particular, countries may only have a single generation to prepare their health and social systems for an ageing world.

With respect to health publications there were some new outputs which came from the World Bank and WHO. A Background Paper on Conceptual Issues Related to Health Systems Research to Inform a WHO Global Strategy on Health Systems Research was released in February 2012. The WHO further published a Methodology Reader: Health Policy and Systems Research edited by Lucy Gilson. World Bank staff and associates published new books on health insurance.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Early 2012 has been an exciting period for those tracking the development of international organisation policy with regard to views about national social protection policies. There have been significant developments within the ILO, World Bank and UNICEF. The ILO reported an overview of the responses it had received to a previously circulated questionnaire regarding the proposed new ‘Recommendation on the Social Protection Floor’ to be discussed at the JUNE ILC. It is stated that

A large number of replies show a broad general consensus with respect to the possible content of the proposed Recommendation concerning national floors of social protection.

Thus it finalised the draft of the Recommendation which provides for all countries to be recommended to:

put in place and complete as rapidly as possible, and maintain, their social protection floors comprising basic social security guarantees. The guarantees should ensure at a minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level.

The June ILC will decide on the final wording.

The final draft of the new World Bank ‘Social Protection and Labor Strategy’ (SPL) was circulated in full for final observations on 16 March 2012 and was officially launched at the time of the World Bank and IMF spring meetings in April 2012. Its main messages and slogans had shifted from the earlier three Ps formulation of Prevention (Social Insurance), Protection (Social Assistance) and Promotion (Access to Work, Human Capital Development) to the less alliterative formulation of R and E and O. *Resilience* was still associated with insurance, *Equity* with assistance and *Opportunity* with work and human capital development. Most significant is a new section of the policy document: ‘A Global Challenge: An Emerging Consensus’ in which the growing international concern to centre-stage social protection and labour policy was acknowledged. The document noted that:

This emerging global consensus is manifested in numerous country actions and global initiatives, including the prominent One-UN Social Protection Floor initiative (SPF-I), adopted by the United Nations (UN) Chief Executives Board in April 2009. The SPL strategy and engagement is consistent with these core principles of the SPF-I [...]. The World Bank has been a strategic partner in the One-UN Social Protection Floor initiative (SPF-I), and has an important role to play both in helping countries who sign on to the SPF-I to operationalize it.

On the vexed issue of pension policy

The World Bank’s advice will be pragmatic and context-specific, focused on balancing coverage and adequacy of pensions with financial viability, closely guided by the country’s demographic/aging profile, its social contract, its fiscal capabilities and regulatory/administrative capacity.

However the previous Bank position advocating private defined contribution pensions is fully supported by many Bank officials at the country levels and the background paper, by Dorfman and Palacios focused on pensions is apparently unfinished, as on the web page there is only a bland “executive summary” of the forthcoming paper.

Almost simultaneously with the Bank output UNICEF also published on 15 March 2012 its Social Protection Strategic Framework entitled ‘Integrated Social Protection Systems’ in which, in its executive summary it says,

UNICEF promotes the development and strengthening of integrated social protection systems as a highly effective approach for addressing the multiple and compounding vulnerabilities faced by children and their families [and] UNICEF supports countries considering putting in place a national Social Protection Floor – guaranteeing access to essential services and social transfers – as an initial step” (own emphases)

Additionally, UNICEF had hosted the fourth UN Inter-Agency Meeting of the UN Social Protection Floor Initiative in New York in January attended by many UN agencies and civil society organisations. Among the outcomes were a

strategy to keep the SPF on the international agenda and to get SPF into the post MDGs [and to] work closely with the civil society [...] and use this demand-led approach as a strategy for generating interest on the SPF among UN country offices.”

In terms of the G20 request (see GSP Digest 12.1) that the World Bank and ILO and UN work closely on the social dimension of globalisation and on social protection the meeting decided “the coalition members will meet again after the ILC and Rio+20 to set up an action plan”. UNICEF’s role in global economic and social policy analysis was given a boost in February by the outcome of the Pratolino conference.

Significantly, following the UN’s Special Rapourter on Extreme Poverty to the UN Human Rights Council attendance at this meeting was the Statement and Recommendation she made. She urged that:

The Rio+20 commitments should reaffirm that universal access to social services and a universal and comprehensive rights-based social protection floor are essential to consolidate gains in development and poverty reduction, and to achieve further progress.

The UN SPF-Initiative also received a boost during the Commission for Social Development Meeting immediately following the SPF-I meeting when the Civil Society Forum proceeding the Commission focused on the SPF. Its subsequent statement to the Commission supported the SPF. There are critical global civil society voices regarding the consensus around the SPF. For example, the global social justice website is concerned that it does not break from a poverty reduction.

The ILO and International Social Security Association (ISSA) have formalised an agreement aimed at reinforcing their collaboration in support of the extension and promotion of social security, during a ceremony held in Geneva on 22 March 2012. The Memorandum of Understanding is the outcome of the concluded decisions from the International Labour Conference in 2011 that called on the ILO to strengthen cooperation with other international organisations in the area of social security.

Still in the context of global crisis, the ILO published a report on 'Global Employment Trends 2012 – preventing a deeper jobs crisis'. Plus the IMF published two working papers – 'Crisis, Labor Market Policy, and Unemployment' and 'Labour Market Flexibility and Unemployment'. On which the Bretton Woods Project commented IFIs labour approach “will get us in trouble”. Here again, a particular focus was on youth employment (see also Rights section). For example at a preparatory meeting for the 2012 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Meeting (AMR) 'Breaking new ground: Partnerships for more and better jobs for young people'. UN DESA held an e-Discussion on Jobs, Decent Work and Inclusive Growth. Meanwhile, on 20 April 2012, the ILO and the World Bank met up for discussing Jobs and Policy Responses to the Crisis.

EDUCATION

In the lead up to the preparations for the International Women's Day, on 29 February 2012, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) presented to the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) the main results of an international survey on gender discrimination in education. According to the GCE President, Camilla Croso:

The report shows that gender discrimination and stereotyping are embedded in education systems. Not only must there be no gender discrimination in education but we must pressurise for education systems that foster overall gender equity in broader society.

GCE is seeking support from CEDAW to include all-age education as part of CEDAW's own reporting on gender discrimination as well as to develop specific, education-focused recommendations to states. UNESCO's first World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education visualises the educational pathways of girls and boys in terms of access, participation and progression from pre-primary to tertiary education. It contains over 120 maps, charts and tables that feature a wide range of sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. The Atlas also illustrates the extent to which gender disparities in education have changed since 1970 and are shaped by factors such as national wealth, geographic location, investment in education and fields of study.

In addition to this spotlight on gender in education was this year's Global Action Week (GAW) (22-28 April 2012) which focused on 'Early Childhood Education'. The GAW is an annual campaign organised by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to raise awareness of the importance of Education for All. Under the slogan 'Rights from the Start! Early

Childhood Care and Education Now!’, the 2012 GAW will be dedicated to the first of the six Education for All (EFA) Goals “Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children”. This year, UNESCO officially supported the GAW. According to UNESCO, the Global Action Week 2012 will allow them to follow up on commitments made at the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (27-29 September 2010, Moscow) and mobilise stronger political support for the development of early childhood education.

The Education for All Global Monitoring Report follows with concern the way the global recession has reduced the official aid budgets in numerous donor countries. According to recent OECD foreign aid figures, in 2011, official development aid has decreased in real terms for the first time since 1997. In the context of the financial crisis, the majority of the OCED’s Development Assistance Committee members reduced their aid budgets. The most drastic case is that of Spain that had become an important donor in the education sector in the last years, but has made cuts of over 30%. Japan cut its aid by 10%, while other key donors such as Canada, Norway and France introduced more modest cuts. The specific effects of these cuts in the education sector are still uncertain, but according to Elise Legault, research officer at the EFA Global Monitoring Report, the right to education in those countries that are most aid-dependent is at risk:

Many developing countries depend on donor support to reach development goals such as Education for All. They have also suffered directly from the financial crisis, through pressure on their own budgets, decreases in exports earnings and drops in foreign investment (on aid levels see also Redistribution section).

Nevertheless, the World Bank approved on 22 March a US\$500 Million project to strengthen the universalisation of secondary education in India. This credit, which is unusually big for the education sector operations within the Bank, will contribute to fund the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA, ‘Secondary Education for All’), a program of the Indian government that aims at making “good quality education available, accessible and affordable to all young persons at the secondary level”. This credit was approved a few months after the Bank organised a much-talked-about Conference on Public-Private Partnerships in India (New Delhi, 29-30 August 2011) that aimed at promoting private participation in education provision and financing as the best way to achieve the EFA goals. Not coincidentally, according to the appraisal document of this multi-millionaire project, “the project is designed to make a major advance on the private sector’s contribution to public policy goals of improving access, equity and quality.”

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) organised the All Children Reading Workshops Africa between February and March 2012, a series of workshops to improve

children's reading skills in early grades in low-income countries. The workshops were carried out in Kigali, Rwanda, and were attended by Ministries of Education, civil society and donor countries representatives from 25 African countries and Haiti. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to translate the workshops discussion into an action plan to improve early grade reading and boost children's literacy. The GPE justifies the importance of this type of initiatives due to the fact that 25% to 75% of children in developing countries are failing to learn to read in a timely manner.

Based on a recent publication series, the OECD has released a series of videos titled 'Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education' that highlight education reforms and education policies that have successfully contributed to improving students learning in different parts of the world. The school systems featured in the videos, which have been produced by the OECD jointly with the Pearson Foundation, were chosen for their strong performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

In the context of the 'Bologna Process', the European Students' Union and the Council of Europe organised the international seminar on 'Student participation in higher education governance' in Armenia on 8-9 December 2011. The objective of the seminar was to look into current issues of student participation in higher education governance, from institutional to national and international levels, outlining the main problems and obstacles, looking for examples of good practice and proposing a way forward.

FOOD

United Nations Agencies, the European Commission and USAID met in Rome in February 2012 and issued a joint statement on the deteriorating situation in the Sahel. As the food crisis continues, UNICEF races to prevent another major food crisis, and points to its implications on children in the Sahel particularly. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) called for an additional \$69.8 million to provide assistance to farmers. The European Commission responded to the Sahel food crisis by presenting a "three-phased approach based on close coordination between international humanitarian and development aid agencies and national governments." On 20 April, a number of organisations including Development Seed at the 'Resilience Dialogue: Preparing for a Changing World' and together with the Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction (GFDRR)", launched SahelResponse.org. This is a data sharing portal that features information about the crisis, visualises regional conflicts, changing weather conditions and shows areas that are most at risk for food insecurity.

Also the World Economic Forum (see also Governance section) discussed a 'New Vision for Agriculture', with the World Food Programme's Executive Director present. Nevertheless, in April the UN warned that a lack of funds threatens response to the food crisis in the Sahel region. The ONE Campaign has issued a related report 'Food. Farming. Future. Breaking the Cycle of malnutrition and poverty', also discussed at the CGD website and another connected post is from their blog.

In addition, on 4 April 2012 in Nairobi the Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Humanitarian Affairs, Catherine Bragg addressed the Heads of States of Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) on the Horn of Africa. Bragg's main message was the need to "manage the risk, not the crisis."

A World Bank publication 'Living Through Crisis: How Food, Fuel, and Financial Shocks Affect the Poor' document's ordinary peoples experiences in dealing with hardships as a result of the global crises. One of the editors, Rasmus Heltberg, reflects on the lessons learned and points out that the securing of food entails long work hours, which leads to exhaustion and health problems.

HABITAT, LAND, HOUSING

The 6th World Water Forum 'Time for Solutions' took place from 12-17 March 2012 in Marseille. Before the meeting, UN water and sanitation expert Catarina de Albuquerque warned about sidelining of the right to water and sanitation at the Forum. The manifesto adopted by large consensus is also intended to inform the Rio+20 conference (see special section above). Amongst other things it advocates to:

ensure that access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all, in terms of availability, quality, acceptability, accessibility and costs, particularly for the most vulnerable populations is a priority and allocate the necessary financial resources to these issues at all levels.

On the occasion, the UNDP launched an international platform for global water solidarity, while the Bretton Woods Project criticised the IFC for water privatisation.

Soon thereafter, and also addressing the upcoming Rio+20 conference, on World Water Day (22 March) Catarina de Albuquerque "called on countries not to go back on their decisions to recognize the right to water and sanitation for all, and act consistently with them." Meanwhile a report by UNICEF and WHO stated that the MDG target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water had been met, even in advance of the 2015 deadline. Nevertheless, there are still millions of people lacking access to safe drinking water, and the MDG for sanitation is still far from target.

The State of the World's Children 2012 'Children in an Urban World' was published by UNICEF (for more on children see also Rights section).

On the link between climate change and social policy (see special section in digest 12.1) there is also continued debate at global level. The OECD warns

as countries struggle with the immediate challenges of stretched public finances and high unemployment, they must not neglect the longer term. Action needs to be taken now to prevent irreversible damage to the environment.

The Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty took place in Washington, 23-26 April 2012 under the main theme of 'Land governance in a rapidly changing world'. The conference considered the implications of better land governance in various contexts and for other issue areas such as economic transformation and climate change.