

European Commission – Development DG

Media release

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## A social safety net for Africa?

*Leading figures from the European, African and international development community explored what role social protection can play in combating poverty and vulnerability and in promoting growth and social inclusion in sub-Saharan Africa – the theme of this year’s European Report on Development. These discussions took place against the backdrop of the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).*

Ahead of the ‘UN summit’, 70 leading academics, development professionals, civil society representatives and policy-makers from Europe, Africa, other donor countries and international agencies gathered in Florence to discuss the ‘zero draft’ of the second edition of the European Report on Development (ERD 2010/2011). The report focuses on how social protection mechanisms – both formal and informal – can boost the resilience of Africans to shocks, improve their daily lives and promote inclusive growth and social cohesion (see box).

“Several EU donors already support social protection based on the belief that it is both a human right and a catalyst for promoting pro-poor growth,” explains Giorgia Giovannetti from the European University Institute, the lead author of the ERD. “This year’s edition of the ERD will explore how social protection can become an integral element of development policy.”

The choice of social protection as central topic for the report is also timely in the context of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion<sup>1</sup>, and highlights the synergies between internal and external EU agendas and policies in the fight against global poverty.

### **The Millennium Development Goals: the global policy context**

This week, the UN General Assembly convened to discuss ways of accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as we approach their 2015 deadline. Despite progress in many fields – such as education and access to water – and the tens of millions of people who have been lifted from poverty in Asia and Latin America, much still remains to be done.

One place facing particular challenges is sub-Saharan Africa which, recent progress notwithstanding, remains the poorest region in the world. Despite the fact that extreme poverty has dropped from 58% in 1990 to 51% in 2005, the number of poor people rose, on the back of population growth, to 388 million, up from 296 million in 1990. Moreover, a series of external shocks – from the food and fuel crises to the more recent financial and economic crises – have increased the vulnerability of African populations and threaten past records as well as future progress.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.2010againstpoverty.eu>

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### **Luxury or necessity?**

In the European Union, we take social protection for granted. Social protection measures – including health insurance and cash transfers – made a significant historical contribution to eradicating abject poverty in Europe. In addition, cross-border social solidarity helped, first, southern European and, later, central and eastern European Member States eliminate the most extreme forms of poverty in these countries.

Despite its proven track record, social protection is regarded by some observers as a “luxury” which only wealthy countries can afford. However, this attitude has begun to shift in recent years. “There are more options for proactive social protection in African countries than previously thought,” notes Giovannetti. Moreover, informal social protection mechanisms exist in most African countries, and quite a number of countries run successful social protection public programmes, such as South Africa, Ethiopia, Lesotho and Ghana.

Nevertheless, more resources and greater capacity are needed for social protection in sub-Saharan Africa. This can be achieved via a variety of avenues, including the greater mobilisation of domestic resources, such as tax revenues, as well as donor aid flows to support social protection programmes, at least in the early stages. The success of existing social protection initiatives, however, is closely related to their political effectiveness.

In this regard, the European Union is well-placed to make a difference. The EU and its Member States are not only the world’s largest aid donor, Europe also possesses a diverse and varied range of experiences in the area of social protection that can benefit African countries. Europe and Africa have a long-standing co-operation partnership based on local ownership and mutual learning. In addition, the EU remains strongly committed to global sustainable development and the MDGs.

### **A European perspective on development**

The European Report on Development (ERD) seeks, in close co-operation with developing partner countries, to enhance the European Union’s perspective on development issues on the basis of independent knowledge excellence, innovation and enhanced bridges between top-level academics and policy-makers. It is a concrete manifestation of the commitment of the EU, the world’s largest provider of development assistance, to the Millennium Development Goals.

The ERD initiative is supported by the European Commission and seven EU Member States (Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden and the UK).

For more information: <http://erd.eui.eu/>

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### **Transformative shield**

Fragility in sub-Saharan Africa and options for boosting its resilience was the central topic of the first edition of the European Report on Development, which was released in October 2009. As a natural follow-up to that theme, ERD 2010/2011 is focusing on the question of social protection and its role in reducing vulnerability and bolstering resilience.

The European University Institute (EUI) in Florence is leading the research effort. As the ERD depends on a thorough consultative process with various stakeholders, preparatory consultations have already taken place in Brussels in March 2010, as well as in Paris and Dakar in June 2010.

In Florence, stakeholders got the opportunity to review the ‘zero draft’ version of the report. At a conference on 4 November 2010, the final draft of the report will be discussed. The official release of ERD 2010/2011 is due to take place on 7 December 2010 in the context of the European Development Days in Brussels.

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