

Launch of the Social Protection Sector Review in Kenya

Venue: Intercontinental Hotel

Date: Friday 11 October 2019

Ministry of Labour and Social Protection,

- Cabinet Secretary – Amb. Yukur Yattani,
- Chief Administrative Secretary - Hon. Abdul Bahari,
- Principal Secretaries present Mr. Nelson Marwa and Mr. Peter K. Tum,
- Director of Administration Mr. Ibrahim A. Maalim,
- Representatives of development partners (WFP, World Bank, DFID, SIDA)
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- All protocols observed.

Hamjambo! (Good Morning/How are you?)

May I first say how pleased I am to be back in Kenya to serve the children of this country. I was last here in 2005 and feel lucky to have another assignment in this beautiful and dynamic country.

It is a pleasure to join you this morning to launch the Social Protection Sector Review in Kenya. This is an important milestone towards a comprehensive social protection system in Kenya. UNICEF is proud to be working alongside the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and our development partners on this vital issue.

Social protection is an important way to reduce vulnerable people's risk of poverty, including through unemployment, ill health and old age. If care givers are living in poverty, it is harder for them to provide for their children. By improving living standards and access to services, social protection therefore protects children's rights and development.

Distinguished guests,

The sector review that we are launching today started in 2016. It highlights important landmarks in the social protection sector in Kenya and demonstrates the Government's commitment to achieving inclusive and equitable services for all.

The review gives us a detailed situation analysis of the sector. It looks at poverty and vulnerability, following the life cycle approach. It includes a comprehensive financing and expenditure review. It looks at the effectiveness and efficiency of the sector. And it provides an updated baseline of vulnerability indicators.

The evidence gathered during the review process has contributed to new areas and approaches. These include the introduction of the 'Universal Innua Jamii' senior citizen programme in 2017 and the planned introduction of a universal child benefit scheme in 2020.

It has helped strengthen shock responsiveness in existing social protection programmes, mitigating the impact of shocks such as droughts and floods on

vulnerable families. Effective linkages with other social services also maximizes the impact of social protection measures on reducing poverty and vulnerability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Investing in social protection is also a key way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in Kenya. It will help us meet several of the targets, including Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger and Goal 10: Reducing Inequality.

Evidence from around the world has shown that a strong social protection system can help break the devastating cycle of poverty. Without this, children from ultra-poor families – lacking livelihoods and access to education – often find themselves in the same situation as their parents when they grow up and have children.

By helping people participate economically and protecting those who are most vulnerable, we can build a more equal and prosperous Kenya. I am happy to see that Kenya is among the best performing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, when it comes to expanding social safety nets. In 2004, there were just 500 households receiving social protection services in Kenya. By 2018, that number had risen to 1.2 million households, covering 5 million people across the country, according to this review.

Since 2013, through increased support to the National Safety Net Programme, 22 percent of eligible poor households have been reached nationally with social

protection, according to the Kenya Institute for Public Policy, Research and Analysis. This is a great achievement and Kenya should be recognised for it.

Kenya's national social safety nets programmes have been designed to leave no one behind. They cover key vulnerable groups, such as women and children, people living with disabilities and the elderly, addressing the specific needs of each of these groups.

Distinguished participants,

Much has been achieved on social protection in Kenya, but there is also more that remains to be done. The adoption and finalization of a new policy framework – including a policy, strategy and comprehensive investment plan – will help achieve the Government's vision to end poverty and vulnerability.

As UNICEF, we are delighted to see universal child benefit as a priority programme in this framework. Investing in children's early years through a universal child benefit will bring measurable and significant returns to the Kenyan economy in the years to come.

During early childhood – especially in the first 1,000 days – poverty can have negative and irreversible effects that last until adulthood. For example, inadequate nutrition in the early years can hamper children's cognitive development, affecting their education and employability in later life.

We also need a strong social protection workforce, in order to ensure that services reach the most vulnerable. We encourage the Government to continue its efforts to build a workforce that works closely with communities to deliver essential services.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is 2019 – a special year when we commemorate 30 years of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. This is an international agreement that has helped transform children’s lives around the world.

Since then, we have seen great advances in child rights in Kenya. However, there are still too many children who don’t enjoy a full childhood. Strong social protection systems are one way to go the final distance and ensure that no children are left behind.

In conclusion,

I would like to thank the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, under the leadership of Cabinet Secretary Ukur Yatani and Principal Secretary Nelson Marwa, for inviting us to be part of today's celebration.

UNICEF congratulates Kenya for its commitment towards social protection. We remain dedicated partners of the Government as it leads the way in reducing

poverty, hunger and vulnerability for the poorest children. This will lay the foundations for future economic growth and development in Kenya.

Asanteni Sana (Thank you very much)