

National Social Protection Dialogue “Social Protection: accelerating socio-economic transformation through human capital development”

**Speech by Ambassador William Carlos
Embassy of Ireland**

25th November 2020

Honourable Minister

Honourable Members of Parliament

The Permanent Secretary – Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

Heads of Missions and Agencies

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour to make these few opening remarks here today at this important **National Dialogue on Social Protection** the main purpose of which is to create a dedicated platform to articulate the strategic role of social protection in mitigating shocks and promoting human capital development.

I am especially pleased that Ireland has been able to support this event, not least because of our role as chair of the Social Protection group but also because of the great emphasis that we, in Ireland, place on the importance of social protection for the most vulnerable, both in our own country, and also as a central component of our international development policy and programmes.

I see this dialogue as particularly important for Uganda for **3 reasons**:

One, it comes during the year of the launch of the third **National Development Plan**, a critical plan to articulate Uganda's path to Vision 2040.

Secondly, this is an important moment for the Government of Uganda as ambitious preparations continue apace on the transition to a Programme Based Approach to planning and budgeting by the National Planning Authority.

And finally, and may I say most critically, it comes at a time when the COVID 19 pandemic has altered the landscape here in Uganda and globally and has presented even greater pressures and risks to the health, welfare and livelihoods of vulnerable and fragile populations – those populations that we all care deeply for and are here to support.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development for the tremendous work and sustained commitment towards implementation of various Social Protection Policy related programmes. We congratulate you today on the launch of the **Social Protection Sector Review Report**. I know a huge amount of work was involved in putting this Report together and it represents a significant volume of learning for all of us.

As you are all aware, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic is having a hugely detrimental effect on the health, social fabric and economy of countries all over the world including Uganda. While the pandemic affects and is of huge significance to us all, it has especially impacted those who are already vulnerable and fragile. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic has prompted the need to re-think how existing government systems can

address such large-scale shocks that have an impact on vulnerable people. We stand in partnership with you to achieve this.

The launch of this report is a landmark event which also represents an important test of commitment to Uganda's poorest people in the face of increased challenges and continuing economic difficulty.

I hope that the outcome of this dialogue will contribute to greater collective understanding of how we can intensify our commitment to address these challenges.

There is a critical need to increase efforts to protect and support people throughout the COVID 19 crisis, both in its health dimensions as well as its economic and social consequences. Ireland as Chair of the Social Protection Donor group this year, along with many international partners, has engaged closely with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and Ministry of Finance to examine and analyze the case for emergency unconditional cash transfers. Drawing on international best practice and listening to experts in Uganda, we do believe that this is an important means by which to reach the most vulnerable. We have seen increased resources mobilized by the Government of Uganda and development partners for older persons in particular in the last few months, which we wholeheartedly welcome.

Why do we believe social protection is so relevant to Uganda?

Uganda has achieved sustained economic growth over the last decade and a significant reduction in the poverty head-count. However, high levels of poverty and vulnerability remain. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics 21.4% of the population live

below the national poverty line and many more people have fallen below that line and are expected to do so as a result of Covid 19. Poverty in Uganda is closely associated with lack of labour capacity and high dependency ratios. **Globally, it is now well demonstrated and recognised that appropriate social protection measures alleviate poverty and protect more people from falling into poverty. It is a critical tool for “Leaving no one behind”.**

Our strong support for social protection is informed by international best practice. In 2019 Ireland, for example, contributed over 20 million Euro to social protection across a number of countries, with a focus on strengthening national social protection systems in fragile contexts. In these contexts, Ireland invests significantly in building the resilience of communities, including through funding social protection measures, such as social cash transfers, public works or food distribution, aimed at directly reducing poverty, strengthening poor peoples’ ability to build more robust livelihoods and stimulating more broad-based and sustained economic growth.

We acknowledge that while development assistance is vital, development assistance alone cannot overcome poverty. **New partnerships must come together to overcome these challenges.** These new partnerships should include all players who are willing to align their interests to eradicate poverty. The Social Protection Review provides important evidence to guide us on the best way forward.

There is of course **important learning and experience already generated in Uganda** that we can build and learn from in working to strengthen systems for better delivery of social protection. For example, Ireland is proud, alongside the government of the UK, to be strongly associated with the Government of Uganda’s flagship *Expanding Social Protection Programme* with its emphasis on the senior citizen’s grant and the

acknowledgement that even a small monthly cash transfer can have a transformative effect not just for the recipient but for family members and the wider community. I applaud the government of Uganda's investment in this programme.

Investment in older persons, both through financial support and listening and heeding to their concerns, is an investment in the population at large. We have noted that many older persons support a large number of family members and giving to them directly has in many cases contributed to better health and education outcomes for children. Clearly this is a two way street and investing in our young people, providing them with the education and tools for a productive and healthy life will help to, in turn, generate the support for their elders when needed.

Ireland as part of *Team Europe* will also work with the EU and other member states to build on our collective experience and advance support for social protection and human capital development.

Government and development partners have demonstrated impressive levels of adaptability at this time of crisis and I urge us all to continue to think smart and deliver well. The resilience shown by many, and in particular the people of Uganda, during the difficult months of 2020, demonstrates how we can all work together to combat COVID 19 and other shocks and challenges that face us.

Despite all these successes there are also many important take aways that remind us that there is much work left to do together. Stories from communities are a humbling reminder that as we attain economic growth, it is equally important to put in place interventions that **minimize the risk of leaving vulnerable people such as older**

persons, children, those unable to work, those with disabilities, and refugees behind.

As Development Partners, we look forward to our continued cooperation with the Government of Uganda as we work together to achieve growth that is equitable and to ensure that everyone in society has a fair and equal opportunity to succeed.

Thank you and I look forward to excellent deliberations this morning.