

# Reclaim People's Dignity - Transformative Social Protection: A Democratic and Human Rights Response to the Crisis

Thursday 24 September 2009, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 15 September 2009).

WHEREAS the current financial and economic crisis is the worst that could be experienced in systemic boom-and-bust cycles since the Great Depression of the 1930s, occurring alongside crises in food security, energy, and climate change, causing 230 million to lose their jobs by the end of the year (ILO estimates) and pushing millions of workers and peasants back to hunger, poverty, and deprivation;

WHEREAS this **multiplicity of interlocking crises and its social costs are unfolding into a human rights crisis of global proportion**;

*Contrary to international laws, to which individual states have committed, millions of people are denied (not accorded) their rights to guaranteed jobs and livelihood, adequate food, and access to quality and affordable essential services like housing, education, health services, water, electricity, and even clean air—preconditions to living a life with dignity. With massive job losses created by these crises, these basic human rights are being violated in an enormous scale.*

WHEREAS the present corporate-driven socio-economic paradigm that puts profit and market over people, society, and nature violates these human rights, and caused these multiple crises;

Even before the crises, profit- and market-oriented states were already negligent in their duty to provide their constituents these rights because the system serves not people, not society, not nature. Instead of creating a humane society conducive to living a life with dignity, this system (in policies such as deregulation of the economy, liberalisation of trade, and privatisation of essential services) has unleashed market forces that have allowed poverty with increased inequality dramatically. The public sector becomes smaller; the private sector becomes more dominant and more greedy. More and more people become marginalised, falling into deeper misery. This system robs the poor of the ability to return to traditional livelihoods because natural resources such as forests, fresh water sources, and marine life have been destroyed. This system disintegrates communities and families, turning more and more people into migrants and refugees. This system not only creates a huge mass of people who live outside the real economy in a grey zone of informalisation, but also provides glimpses of an alternative to the present turmoil.

The global economic crisis poses a severe threat to economic and social rights, but it is also a challenge to rethink how we hold states accountable for their fulfillment. Now more than ever, people's movements need to articulate vigorously the fundamental principles that cannot be rescinded even in times of recession and show how these should guide policy responses to the crisis. This involves intensifying efforts to identify new methods and venues through which to scrutinise governments' compliance with their obligations to fulfill economic and social rights.

WHEREAS the old neo-liberal paradigm is discredited by the multiple crises that we are experiencing, putting us at a critical juncture of being able to offer an alternative paradigm that prioritises people, society, and nature above corporate greed;

Although the crises demand a major system overhaul, states can only offer token and palliative welfare measures that are inadequate, minimalist, and charity/safety-net type. In contrast to the billions of dollars in bailouts of corporations whose profits are not socialised, this kind of state response is sheer mockery of the poor. The emergency solutions of the world's decision makers to the crises are confined within the present dominant framework, addressing the needs of the capitalists, **subverting real alternatives that advance the values of equity, justice, and sustainability.**

An opportunity now opens up for pushing alternatives where people are empowered and the global socio-economic order is transformed inside out—through more democratic access to resources and greater public participation in decision-making.

The crisis is also an opportunity to rethink the role of the state in regulating the creation of wealth and redistributing its benefits towards the universal realisation of economic and social rights. The transnational impacts of the crisis highlight the need to frame accountability in global terms, and to assert more vigorously the notion that states' responsibilities to respect, protect, and fulfill economic and social rights do not stop at their national borders.

WHEREAS people are not merely productive instruments of growth, but are more importantly agents of change who possess intrinsic worth and inalienable rights and are able to empower selves and others, and to transform societies.

THEREFORE, understanding that the current crisis that has kept hundreds of millions of people from exercising their basic human rights is not an aberration but an inherent outcome of a profit-driven paradigm; and recognising the need to assert an alternative paradigm that protects, promotes, and fulfills these rights,

We, **the people**, assert that everyone is entitled to institutional transformative social protection as a means to a life with dignity.

*We contend that transformative social protection **addresses power imbalances in the society, creating a policy environment conducive to pro-poor growth, accountable and responsive governance systems, and a social equity-grounded development approach.** Transformative social protection goes beyond targeted resource transfers; it extends to such arenas as equity, empowerment, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. It requires legislation, financial commitment, and accountability.*

We, **the poor and vulnerable groups**, empowered by collective action and resolved to organise ourselves, proactively claim what are rightfully ours.

*We overcome our sense of helplessness and powerlessness by building on small successes at the local level as an organised force with a common voice, engaging states and other power holders, seizing opportunities to participate in decisions concerning our lives, and expanding our right to self-determination.*

We, ***the progressive sectors of society—the civil society groups, social movements, and parliamentarians***, advancing the demands of the poor, engage governments and international institutions at all levels (national, regional, and global), and compel them to create with us a socio-economic order with human rights at its core.

The multiplicity, interconnectedness, and global nature of the crises necessitate a corresponding multiplicity, interconnectedness, and global approach to solving them. The solutions are beyond the ability of one state, making it imperative that we work together.

As responses to the crisis have shown, the progress made in advancing the legal justiciability of economic and social rights has not been matched in the arena of politics and public policy. Bridging this gap will involve releasing the still-latent potential of economic, social, and cultural rights advocacy as a powerful tool for social mobilisation and transformation.

We, ***all***, hold those responsible for the crisis accountable, and contend that they abandon the skewed paradigm that brought us these crises and enable participation and solidarity of the majority.

*The task is not only to keep off or lift out of poverty millions of people, but more importantly to redesign the global socio-economic architecture that would guarantee dignified life for all. And this gargantuan task cannot be accomplished without the participation or involvement of the rural and urban poor and other vulnerable groups such as migrants, informal workers, women and children, peasants, senior citizens, indigenous peoples. We push for the pursuit of this strategy: **Address the ills of society by empowering the most vulnerable.***

In reclaiming people's rights and control in basic social services such as housing, health, education, water and electricity, looking to assuring universal provision,

WE DEMAND from our respective states and multilateral formations what are rightfully ours!

- Guaranteed jobs and livelihood with wages and working conditions that are in accordance with ILO standards;
- Adequate and affordable food for all where no one goes hungry;
- Universal health service;
- Free and quality education;
- Socialised decent housing;
- Universal access to water and electricity, giving subsidised water and electricity for the poor; and
- Better quality of life that is environmentally sustainable.

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