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A REVIEW OF SOCIAL PROTECTION EXPERIENCES IN AFRICA

Introduction

Social protection has been defined by the UN in 2001 to be The set of public and private policies and programmes undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies to offset the absence or substantial reduction of income from work; to provide assistance for families with children as well as provide people with health care and housing. Social protection has several functions which include (a) protective – measures designed to save lives and reduce deprivation levels; (b) preventive – reducing people's exposure to risks through social insurance programmes such as pensions and health insurance; (c) promotive - enhance the capability of the vulnerable to protect themselves against hazards and loss of income; and (d) social justice – to reduce inequities and improve social integration through changes in laws, budgetary allocations and redistributive measures (Taylor, 2008; UN, 2001). The state has the obligation to ensure social protection to all citizens especially those who are most vulnerable to poverty and are socially excluded. It undertakes this obligation in collaboration with the development society. The importance of social protection in Africa today has been heightened because of the toll of the HIV/AIDS epidemic; volatile food prices; weather related calamities; war and conflicts; the global financial crisis; and the erosion of the extended family system which has been traditionally the main source of social security system. Literature[9] indicates the major sub-categories of social protection to include social assistance and welfare - public actions that are designed to transfer resources to groups deemed eligible due to deprivation(mainly including cash or food transfers, vouchers, or subsidies for utilities and staple food); social insurance actions aimed at reducing people's exposure to risks and vulnerabilities (such as health, life, and asset insurance, which may involve contributions from employers and/or beneficiaries); and labour market programs (such as micro-enterprise development, public works). Table 1 presents an overview of the different social protection strategies that can be implemented by countries.

Table 1   Overview of the different instruments used for social protection

Component of social protection	Examples of instruments used
1. Social insurance programmes-Financed by contributions and based on insurance principles	• Pension • Health insurance • Other social insurance
2. Social Assistance and welfare programmes Non-contributory, tax-financed benefits in cash or kind	
2.a. Social assistance to the vulnerable- protection and mitigation	• Cash transfers • Food transfers • Social services • Old age grant Targeted to persons with disability, older persons, children, orphans, persons affected by HIV/.AIDS
2.b. Promotive and transformational – aimed at building capabilities	• Health assistance – reduced fees, provision of free health services • Free primary and secondary education • School feeding schemes • Scholarships and fee waivers • Child Support Grant • Water and sanitation • Access to basic housing
3. Labour market programs	• Public works programs • Small business/enterprise development • Micro-finance • Skills training

Benefits of social protection

Besides being a human right social protection is an investment in the people that yields positive benefits to society. Social protection is important for social and economic development and critical for tackling poverty and reducing inequalities. Some of the most vulnerable groups in Africa include older persons; persons with disabilities; people affected by HIV and Aids; women; children and orphans; victims of humanitarian crises; among others. Social protection has wide-ranging benefits that include: strengthening access to nutrition, health, and education; reducing intergenerational transmission of poverty; and promoting political stability, and achieving economic growth (Adato and Hoddinott, 2008). In the short term, social protection helps provide relief to affected families and prevents them from falling into destitution. In the longer term, the promotive and transformational functions of social protection programmes address some of the underlying causes of inter-generational poverty. Thus in designing a comprehensive social protection package, it is important to come up with a good mix of the short and long term strategies of social protection.

Commitments

At the regional level, the African Union in collaboration with other stakeholders has made substantial progress in creating awareness and commitments on the importance of social protection among member States. It spearheaded regional meetings in Zambia and Cameroon in 2006. The outcomes of the meetings were Calls for Action on Social Protection where Governments were

called upon to: strengthen social protection and social transfer interventions; develop costed plans for social protection; engage in capacity building and experience sharing on social protection; adopt comprehensive social protection schemes for older people; and introduce universal social pensions.

In 2008, the AU in collaboration with Help Age International and other stakeholders held a series of national consultations in selected countries (that include Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Tunisia) followed by sub-regional consultations. Discussions in these meetings highlighted the importance of including social protection in national development plans and in PRSPs. The consultations and other literature emphasize that risks and vulnerabilities differ from country to country such that there is no single social protection strategy that can be recommended for all the countries since a social protection strategy should be specifically set up to meet the local needs. However there is general consensus on some guidelines or actions that countries can adopt to ensure successful implementation of comprehensive social protection strategies that can promote inclusive development. These are summarised in box 2.

Box 1. Actions that African countries need to undertake for successful implementation of a comprehensive social protection strategy

High level of political commitment. The primary responsibility for social protection lies with the state, which acts in collaboration with other stakeholders, it is important that the state provides a leadership role.

Development of a legislative framework that includes social protection.
For example integration of social protection in the national constitution.

Development of a national social protection strategy that addresses the country's peculiar situation determined by factors which include among many the proportion of persons who are poor; affected by HIV and AIDS; persons with disability; older persons etc.

Inter-ministerial collaboration and co-ordination of all the ministries and stakeholders that are involved in the implementation of the social protection strategy (ie. ministries of labour, social welfare, health, education, gender, agriculture, finance and economic planning and others).

Linking social assistance to basic services: eg. linking cash transfers to education on child and maternal health, prevention and treatment of illness, and nutrition; agricultural extension or to immunization.

Collection of gender disaggregated data for monitoring implementation and evaluating the impact and progress on social inclusion.

Sustainable funding for social protection from both domestic and external resource mobilization. In particular resources that can facilitate scaling up of effective interventions.

A social policy framework that calls for strengthening social protection systems, combating poverty and hunger, creating full employment and decent work opportunities for all, improving access to education and health-care services, promoting gender equality, and ensuring the social inclusion of the vulnerable groups in mainstream development, was adopted at the conclusion of the first African Union conference of African ministers in charge of social development, held in Windhoek in October 2008 and at the 12th Summit of the African Union in January 2009.

Addressing social protection in the constitution or National Development plan

Implementing social protection efforts requires actions that are multi-sectoral going beyond the Ministry of labor and Social Affairs alone to include education, agriculture, health, housing, water and sanitation, finance and other sectors. The national development plan (NDP) or poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) sets out the development strategy for achieving socio-economic development in a country and the priorities for public expenditure by the government and can help show how social protection can be mainstreamed in all the relevant sectors. South Africa for example has been able to enshrine the rights to social protection in the Bill of Rights and the constitution. The state is mandated to provide some primary services including adequate nutrition, education, health and social security and social assistance as a basic right to its citizens.

Some countries have been able to include a social protection chapter in their National Development plans for example Zambia has a Social protection strategy chapter that is part of the Fifth National Development Plan.

National social protection strategic framework and supportive regulatory framework

A comprehensive national social protection strategic framework is important for developing a holistic social protection strategy for the country. It is important for pulling together fragmented policies and for developing costed implementation plan that can be used for resource mobilization. Some countries have developed a strategy on social protection that include: Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique. Mozambique has recently approved a Law on social protection and an Employment and professional training strategy (HelpAge and AU, 2008).

Table 2 shows the range of social protection strategies that have been implemented in selected countries.

Table 2. Social protection strategies implemented by African countries

Social protection	Strategy	Countries implementing
Social assistance to the vulnerable- protection and mitigation	Cash transfers	Mozambique National Institute of Social action, Ethiopia's Productive Safety Nets Programme Kenya - Cash Transfer Program for Orphans and Vulnerable Children Zambia- Kalomo pilot Sierra Leone
	Food transfers to the destitute	Ethiopia Gambia – Child Survival Project and the Sesame Growers' Association Institutional Strengthening Project Liberia – Internally Displaced People Relief Assistance Project Malawi – North-Central Food Response
	Food security input packs	Zambia, Malawi, Ethiopia
	Social pension for older persons	Botswana – Old-age pension (universal) Lesotho – Non-contributory old-age pension scheme Liberia – Old-age assistance Mauritius – Old-age pension (universal) Namibia – Old-age pension South Africa – Old-age pension (means tested)
	Child support grant	Botswana – Orphan care benefit system Mozambique – Minimum Income for School Attendance South Africa – Child Support Grant, Care dependency grant
	Disability Grant	Liberia – Disability assistance Mauritius – Basic disability pension South Africa – Disability grant (means tested)
Promotive and transformational social assistance	Targeted free health care for pregnant women, children under 6 years and the poor	South Africa, Tunisia
	Targeted free school (no fees) for the very poor.	South Africa
	Access to low cost housing	South Africa
	Free targeted quota of municipal services to the poor for electricity, water and sanitation.	South Africa
	Social services and residential care for children, older persons and persons with disabilities	South Africa
Labour market	Micro-credit schemes	Zambia, Mozambique

Social protection	Strategy	Countries implementing
programs	Public works programme	Zambia, Ethiopia's Productive Safety Nets Programme, Sierra Leone – Youth employment scheme Ethiopia – Cash for Work (CFW), Meket Livelihoods Development Programme (MLDP), Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) Malawi – Improving Livelihood through Public Works Programmes South Africa – Zibambele
Social insurance programmes	Occupational / contributory Pension	South Africa, Tunisia
	Mutual Health insurance	Burkina Faso
	Unemployment benefits	South Africa (contributory but the government and employer also contribute). Tunisia (through contributions to the National Social Security Fund) Mauritius – Unemployment hardship relief
	Disability pension	South Africa, Tunisia (through contributions to the National Social Security Fund)

Source: Help Age International and AU, 2008; Holmes R and A. Jackson, 2008; United States Social Security Administration, 2007.

Note: The table is not exhaustive.

Challenges to implementing social protection programmes in Africa

The major challenges that have been identified in implementing social protection programmes in Africa have been identified in different literature (Help Age International and African Union, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Norton et. al, 2001) to include:

- Lack of integration of social protection into national plans – as a result social protection is not broad based to target all areas of vulnerability.
- Planning constraints: Lack of a comprehensive plan on the implementation of social protection programmes.
- Inter-sectoral coordination: poor inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration with civil society.
- Financial constraints: poor budget allocations to social protection and poor mobilization of resources as a result the funding is not sustainable and is not adequate for scaling up.
- High dependency on donor funding for social protection.
- Ineffective targeting of recipients. For example, social protection programmes benefit people residing in urban areas better than in rural areas.
- Technical and institutional capacity constraints: Low institutional capacity to develop social protection programmes and to administer some social protection programmes.
- Lack of reliable data: Lack of reliable data on which policies on social protection could be based.
- Lack of monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of social protection programmes.
- Limited information dissemination on availability of existing social protection programmes.

Recommendations

1. Member States should adopt and implement broad-based social protection policies to mitigate and counteract all the sources of vulnerability including chronic crop failures, health epidemics, environmental disasters and other external shocks. IE. Social protection should be aligned to family policy on education, health, housing and food security.
2. Member States should collect reliable data that can be used to develop and monitor policies on social protection.
3. Member States should develop sustainable source of funding for social protection

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