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Social Protection in Africa: Beyond Safety Nets?

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Social protection is one of the most recent, yet fastest growing social policy instruments in low and middle income countries to end poverty. At least 50 countries in Africa have non-contributory social protection programmes targeting poor and vulnerable households and individuals. Are these social policies an extension of residual social policies, or do they signal new directions in social policy in the Global South? This article reviews the theoretical approaches that inform social protection policies as well as their practical application in different African countries. The analysis suggest that there is a changing trend towards more expansive social investment-oriented poverty reduction policies, especially in middle-income countries, with more limited policies in low-income countries. Despite significant challenges, these developments have the potential to grow welfare institutions that are more appropriate, responsive to the needs of people, and that could further a developmentally-oriented and justice-based notion of social protection. There is much to learn from how African countries are tackling the social challenges of poverty and inequality and how these are shaping their welfare institutions and regimes.

Keywords: Social investments; social protection; social development; new directions in social welfare; social protection in Africa; safety nets; social policy

Social protection is one of the fastest-growing social development interventions to reduce poverty in low- and middle-income countries such as Brazil, India, China and South Africa (Midgley & Piachaud, 2013). Similar developments are occurring in other African countries that have non-contributory cash transfers and in-kind social protection programs targeting poor and vulnerable households and individuals (Honorati, Gentilini, & Yemtsov, 2015; Plagerson & Patel, 2016). Are these social policies simply an extension of the residual or "safety nets" approach to social welfare advocated by multi-lateral international development organizations, or does it take us further along the road to understanding new directions in social welfare in the Global South? (Barrientos, 2013; Ferguson, 2015; Plagerson & Patel, 2016; UNRISD, 2013). Scholars from different disciplines such as economics, social policy and political science are exploring this question, often independently. However, this body of knowledge has paid limited attention to the literature from the perspective of social welfare policy and development scholars who have consistently argued that Northern welfare theories are limited in understanding the direction that social welfare is taking in the Global South (Hall & Midgley, 2004; Midgley & Tang, 2001; Patel, 2015; Surrender & Walker, 2013). To answer the question posed above, an analysis is conducted of social protection policies in Africa based on both published literature and research reports.

This article begins by reviewing the literature on social welfare theory and practice in development contexts with particular reference to developmental social welfare and social protection. James Midgley has, over a long career, left a substantial body of knowledge of social welfare in development contexts. Two seminal books, *Social Development: The Developmental Perspective in Social Welfare* (1995) and a later work titled *Social Development: Theory and Practice* (2014) provide a sound basis for understanding the approach and its theoretical and normative underpinnings.

The diffusion of social development theory and policies around the world was facilitated by both country-specific conditions and the social challenges that they face, as well as the receptiveness of international agencies to support the growth of social protection in the South (Surrender & Walker, 2013; UNDP & ILO, 2011). The social development approach to social welfare advocated by Midgley and others in various published works informed thinking and adaptation in different contexts. The approach is now accepted as the over-arching approach to inform social work education internationally (IASSW, 2014). This theoretical work is often overlooked by scholars outside the field of social welfare who are attempting to make sense of social welfare arrangements and social protection policies. It is possibly because they approach these questions from different disciplines. The intention here is to "bring back in" the social development approach with its focus on social investments and integrated social and economic development into our understanding of the new directions in social welfare in the South.

In part two, the emerging social protection programs in Africa are reviewed with reference to their drivers, nature and scope, goals, strategies, auspices, evidence of their impacts and some of the issues and debates. Next, the question is considered as to whether these programs are an extension of the residual approach to social welfare policies reminiscent of colonial welfare policies and the rise of neo-liberal ideas in the 1980s to the mid-1990s. Alternatively, one can ask whether these are a reflection of new directions in social welfare in the Global South with the potential to promote inclusive economic and social development. Finally, some conclusions are drawn about the implications of these new directions in social policy for welfare institutions and regimes in developing countries.

Social Welfare and Social Protection in Development Contexts

British and other European colonialists established formal public social welfare provision in most African countries. Initially, social welfare was the domain of the extended family and communal systems of support such as mutual aid and subsistence agriculture. Women were the main and direct providers of social care of vulnerable persons in their kinship group. Indigenous safety nets such as the chief's granary (contributions of grain by farmers known as *Zunde raMambo*) existed in Zimbabwe and in many Southern African countries. Colonial rulers were primarily concerned with the extraction of natural resources in these countries to support industrial development in their home countries. This was achieved through political control of indigenous populations that paved the way for distorted and unequal economic development—a process that resulted in the undermining of indigenous systems of social provision and care (Patel, Kaseke, & Midgley, 2012). Rising social problems resulting from unequal development further resulted in large-scale disruption of social and family life caused by migration, leading to labor scarcity in rural agriculture, hut and poll taxes, urbanization and increased vulnerability among specific target groups such as children. To address these emerging social problems, formal state social welfare services such as statutory child protection services, residential care for children and social security in the form of non-contributory social assistance for the elderly emerged in some African countries (MacPherson & Midgley, 1987). Early social policies were not only remedial but also minimalist in terms of state provision. There was an over reliance on treatment-oriented social interventions that were inappropriate in the local context, costly, and that had low social impacts.

MacPherson (1982) applied the development-underdevelopment thesis of international structuralism to make sense of the direction of social welfare provision in third world countries. The rise of social work as the principal profession in social welfare in the former colonies was influenced by modernization theories of development based on the primacy of economic growth, and the assumption that poor countries would catch up with their northern counterparts. The character of social work in African countries followed largely British and American social work education that was wholly inappropriate in addressing problems of mass poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. In his bold book on *Professional Imperialism: Social Work in the Third World,* Midgley (1981) drew attention to this phenomenon and the need for a more pragmatic and appropriate development-oriented social work practice (and by implication, social welfare policies).

Further analyses of social welfare in Africa refer to post-independence social welfare arrangements. Although there were continuities with past residual welfare policies, new opportunities emerged in the early years as post-colonial governments engaged with development questions through state planning and interventions as part of their nation building projects. In the new search for solutions, many countries attempted to transcend existing remedial social welfare and social work services through more expansive social interventions that incorporated a traditional concern with meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. These included first, social policies and programs that promoted human capital development through mass basic education and literacy programs, public health and primary health care. Second, social integration—for example, community development, participation in community development, and economic inclusion through state subsidies for staple foods, employment programs and social assistance, also known today as cash transfers. These initiatives were what Midgley (1995, p. 54) referred to as early ideas of "developmental social welfare, thereby challenging the notion that economic growth by itself will improve human well-being." Similarly, Patel (1992) documented the development initiatives of opposition movements in South Africa, showing how the latter informed developmental thinking in social welfare policy options in South Africa (Patel, 1992, 2015). In later work, Midgley and Sherraden (2000) argue that these developments constitute an alternative approach to social welfare that transcends residual and institutional or welfare state policies of the northern welfare states in the following ways.

First, developmental welfare interventions are framed as social investments in human capital development, rather than wasteful consumption expenditure, as argued by the critics of state welfare provision. Second, policies are needed to facilitate participation in the productive economy, which is the primary means through which people meet their needs. Third, social development needs to be accompanied by macro-economic and social policies and public social spending in line with national social priorities. Fourth, government interventions need to be combined with individual and community actions to promote economic development through maximizing people's income through social assistance, strengthening of the livelihoods strategies of people, asset building and social interventions that are inclusive and equitable (Midgely & Sherraden, 2000, p. 438; Sherraden, 1991). These views are echoed by other African social policy scholars who argued for a shift from "safety nets" as a corrective to policy and market failures, and stated that "social policies need to work in tandem with economic policy to ensure equitable and socially sustainable development"

(Mkandawire, 2004, p. 4). How best to achieve this was, and remains, a key challenge for African nations in the early years of the new millennium. Against this background, "developmentalist" thinkers in the South advocated interventions such as social protection, public employment, livelihoods strategies, micro-enterprises and micro-finance.

These ideas were challenged in the mid-1990s by radical conservative governments in the North, particularly in the U.S. and the U.K., which set the scene for the rise of "anti-welfareist" thinking. Neo-liberal policies gained ascendency, leading to the diffusion of these ideas advocated by multilateral, international and donor agencies. Its basic tenets involved the "rolling back" of state social welfare, privatization and liberalization of the economies as solutions in both the North and the South. Social welfare policies were conceived of by the proponents of neo-liberalism as a drain on national resources, arguing that these needed to be redirected to economic investments (Mkandawire, 2004). Post-independence African countries that were debt-ridden, faced with low economic growth rates, and poor and inadequate governance, were severely impacted by structural adjustment policies of The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund during this period. The latter's policies attached severe constraints on public expenditure, promoted the privatization of health and education and the resurgence of residual social policies with an over-reliance on families and non-governmental organizations (Surrender & Walker, 2013). These policies were supposed to stimulate economic growth, but by the mid-1990s, it was clear that economic recovery was negligible with limited social improvement. Instead, it had disastrous effects on human development in many African countries (Mkandawire, 2004).

In this context, the tide began to shift again towards more developmental social policies and their potential to promote social transformation (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). In this regard, Surrender and Walker (2013) argue that the policy philosophy changed as the World Bank and other development agencies began to replace structural adjustment with the language of "pro-poor" and "transformative development" (Surrender & Walker, 2013). Thus new spaces opened for policy learning, advocacy by civil society organizations and some donors for greater innovation and equitable development in a globalizing world. This was also spurred on by large-scale epochal political and economic changes in many developing and former socialist countries in the 1980s and 1990s due to globalization, but also economic crisis, market reforms, and democratization accompanied by social dislocation in Latin America, East Asia and Eastern Europe (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008). Developments in South Africa leading to a peaceful settlement and the welfare commitments of the new democratic society also had a bearing on the expansion of social protection in South Africa, and especially in the southern Africa region (Ferguson, 2015). The constitutional right to social security and social assistance was institutionalized with the adoption of South Africa's Constitution and Bill of Rights of 1996. Developmental welfare strategies were fashioned on social development ideas and socio-economic rights that are now integral to the country's social and economic development plans (Patel, 2015; Republic of South Africa, 2011).

The success of social protection programs, with their positive developmental impacts in South Africa and in other African countries in reducing poverty, forms part of a bigger picture of the exponential growth of social protection policies, especially cash transfers, and their positive outcomes in the developing world (Barrientos, 2013; Hanlon, Barrientos, & Hulme, 2010). This also occurred because of the diffusion of ideas, knowledge, experience and policy learning between countries in the South. These ideas are continuing to be facilitated in different ways by academics, practitioners, and regional networks such as the Southern African Social Protection Experts Network (SASPEN) (2017). In addition, international agencies are playing an important role in promoting South-South and North-South exchanges, such as the knowledge exchange by researchers and policy makers from 16 countries on successful social protection floor experiences (UNDP & ILO, 2011).

Social Protection Strategies in Africa

What are the Drivers of Social Protection in Africa?

Different factors appear to have driven the introduction of social protection in Africa over the past 15 years. Social protection emerged in some countries that have improved macro-economic conditions, as is the case in Ghana, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Senegal and Morocco. In these countries, economic growth ranged between 2 and 9 percent in 2016, although it is occurring off a low base (World Bank, 2016). Democratization and improvements in governance have been noted in some countries that have grown their social protection systems such as South Africa and Namibia, Botswana, and Mauritius. These countries also have a longer tradition of social protection as former British colonies. However, smaller, low income countries with low rates of economic growth are also pursuing social protection strategies such as Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Cape Verde and some island states (World Bank, 2016). The adoption of social protection strategies are not the domain of democratic regimes only. Countries that are authoritarian regimes, such as the Ivory Coast, are also adopting social protection programs. Similarly, countries that have "hybrid political systems" according to the Democracy Index of 2015 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015), also have growing social protection systems such as Rwanda, Kenya, Nigeria and Morocco. "Hybrid systems" refer to democracies with substantial irregularities in the management of their elections which prevent them from being free and fair.

The historical trajectories of social protection vary across African countries and regions. In southern Africa and some east African countries such as Kenya, tax-funded social protection systems have their roots in colonial systems linked to formal labor markets, while in North Africa, donor-funded social assistance has increased following the Arab Spring uprising in 2011. Of particular significance is the influence of global and African social development agendas favoring social protection, some of which was influenced by the growing evidence from different parts of the world about social protections' benefits in reducing poverty. The focus on poverty reduction as a key global goal and as part of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the new Sustainable Development Goals 2030, contributed to speeding up the adoption of social protection as a policy instrument.

Nevertheless, what is noteworthy is the development of a pan-African consensus about the need for social protection since 2000. This is reflected in various documents adopted by the African Union. These are: The Constitutive Act of the African Union of 2000; the Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of

Action of 2004; the Livingstone Call for Action that prioritised social protection in 2006, The Social Policy Framework for Africa 2008 and the Social Ministers' Khartoum Declaration on Social Policy Action towards Social Inclusion of 2010 (Plagerson & Patel, 2016). A global and national receptiveness favoring social protection paved the way for policy innovation and donor funding for social protection in Africa, which is outlined below. However, the realities of human insecurity and persistently high rates of poverty and unemployment and the impact of economic crises of various kinds—political conflict, vulnerability to food insecurity, climate change and high rates of HIV and AIDs—remain critical contextual drivers of the need for social protection in Africa.

Health challenges prevail amidst weakening systems of family and community support, such as maternal and child mortality and other social challenges, such as low attendance of girls in school and large numbers of children orphaned due to the AIDs epidemic. Crises related to food, fuel, financial and health challenges have deepened poverty levels and weakened family support. Reduced remittance flows from migrants have also resulted in increased vulnerability of children and families. Household risk mitigation strategies include reducing nutritional intake, migration and the sale of household assets (Dafuleya, 2017). These measures have contributed to deepening poverty and vulnerability (Plagerson & Patel, 2016). Climate change and the threat of droughts and flooding pose further threats to household livelihoods. It is against this backdrop of declining human development realities that many African countries have experimented with innovative social protection programs, in particular, non-contributory social assistance in the form of cash transfers.

Nature and scope. The term "social protection" is used differently across African countries. A diversity of strategies exist, such as statutory and public provision, also cash transfers. Others incorporate informal family and community systems of support; the delivery by non-governmental organizations funded by international donors; and fee exemptions and contributory insurance schemes. For this reason, Midgley (2013, p. 7) contends that the term is used as an "umbrella" concept to refer to a wide range of forms of social provision, and that social protection's concern with "non-statutory provision is compatible with social development's historical interest in community-based interventions." Based on their research in the African context, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) define it as measures to provide income or consumption transfers to protect poor and vulnerable individuals and their households against livelihood risks and to enhance their social status and rights with the overall objective of reducing their economic and social vulnerability.

There has been an astounding growth of social protection programs in Africa in the past fifteen years. Over 50 low and middle-income countries in Africa now have social protection programs (Cirillo & Tebaldi, 2016; European University Institute, 2010) reaching significant numbers of beneficiaries and their households. For instance, in South Africa, non-contributory, publicly-funded cash transfers for older persons, people with disabilities and children reached 17 million people in 2017, a third of the population, making up 3.4 percent of GDP. This has inspired strategies in other parts of Africa, such as child grants for children in Kenya, Zambia and Malawi (Handa, Devereux, & Webb, 2011). Although Ethiopia's Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) has different design features, in that it incorporates an employment component targeting labor constrained households, the PSNP reaches 10 million beneficiaries and is Africa's second largest program. Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have followed the Ethiopian example, combining cash transfers with public works programs (Honorati et al., 2015). Smaller countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and Swaziland) and the island states (Mauritius and Seychelles) have expanded their programs to be more broadly targeted. The newly established democracies, such as South Africa, reconfigured existing programs to be more inclusive through constitutionally guaranteed and legislated social rights (Plagerson & Patel, 2016). Some countries are reforming existing schemes, such as pensions, to be more inclusive (Cape Verde, Nigeria, Sierra Leona and Zambia), while others are reforming their health systems to be universal (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Senegal and Tanzania) (European University Institute, 2010). Programs are being redesigned based on country-specific needs that build on the successes or lessons of other African countries (UNDP & ILO, 2011).

Reforms of subsidy-dependent systems have also been initiated in favor of cash transfers in North African countries faced with high rates of inequality and political turmoil (Devereux, 2015). A wide range of countries are reforming their social legislation and incorporating social protection in their national development plans or agenda, such as Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Uganda, among others. And, unlike conditional cash transfers in Latin America, African countries have opted for far less conditions attached to receipt of cash, such as incentivizing school attendance and health checks for children (Ferguson, 2015).

Alongside legislative developments have been the establishment of formal welfare institutions to deliver social protection that did not exist previously. Innovative technology enabled solutions to manage the entire delivery process more efficiently are used in different countries. Biometric smart cards are used in South Africa and Namibia and mobile phones are used in Kenya to transfer cash to beneficiaries that are hard-to-reach in remote areas. Efficiency and cost effective solutions for the delivery of cash transfers is critical to its success, although the investments are costly. South Africa has delivered cash through partnerships with financial institutions for many years, but recent tender irregularities in the award of contracts almost grounded the entire system. Legal action by civil society groups and interventions by the Constitutional Court averted a near disaster for millions of people who were at risk of not receiving their benefits (see judgement of the Constitutional Court of South Africa in the matter between Allpay Consolidated Investment Holdings (Pty) Ltd and Others v Chief Executive Officer, 2013). Effective, independent, and ethical governance of social protection and capable institutions to deliver social protection are critical to the success of social protection in African countries. Opportunities for growing institutional delivery and management capability in the public sector are critical to its success. Box 1 provides examples of innovative social protection programs in Africa.

Table 1: Examples of Social Protection Programs in Africa

South Africa's Child support Grant (CSG) was implemented in 1998. It is means-tested reaching over 12 million children in 2017, and it is a fully publicly-funded non-contributory program making up 3.2% of GDP and reaches 60% of poor children. Initially the grant had no conditions attached to receipt, but a condition that the child should attend school is a new requirement. The grant is paid to the primary caregiver of the child, who may be either male or female, parents or relatives of the child. The value of the grant is approximately USD 34.50 and is paid monthly.
Lesotho's Old Age Pension was established in 2005. It is a nationwide, state-financed, unconditional non-contributory scheme available to all registered citizens over 70 years (and who do not receive any other form of pension benefit). The monthly transfer equivalent to USD 40 reaches more than 85,000 beneficiaries. Program expenditure was 2.39 percent of GDP in 2012.
Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme was established in 2007 as a leading program in the government's National Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy. It consists of three core initiatives to redirect social protection programs to vulnerable populations: (1) public works; (2) the *Ubudehe* microfinance scheme; and (3) direct support through an unconditional cash transfer. The program uses decentralized community-based targeting to provide direct support to poor families without labor capacity and public employment to poor families with labor capacity. The program reached over 300,000 individuals and households in 2014/2015. Program expenditure in the fiscal year 2014/2015 was USD 39.9 million, shared between the Rwandan state and international donors.
Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) was established in 2005 to improve food security and to support livelihoods for rural households. It consists of an unconditional cash transfer component and is Africa's largest public works program. Chronically food-insecure households are identified via geographic targeting and community-based targeting and benefits are paid in food, cash or a combination of both. It has an annual budget of USD 900 million (predominantly financed by international donors) and reached 10 million beneficiaries in 2015.
Kenya's Home Grown School Feeding programme was established in 2008 to improve school attendance and increase national food production. It is a conditional cash transfer targeting food insecure children in primary schools in semi-arid areas which are experiencing low enrollment and high drop-out rates. In 2013, 729,000 children were reached. Program expenditure was USD 4.6 million (2013).
Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme Fee Exemptions was established in 2003 to improve the population's access to affordable health care services. It uses means-tested targeting to identify very poor, pregnant women or existing beneficiaries of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer program. Eligible beneficiaries are then entitled to exemption from payment of a health insurance premium and access to health care benefits. The program reached 6.7 million beneficiaries in 2014.
Morocco's Cash Transfer for Children (Tayssir Programme) was established in 2008 to reduce attrition from and dropout rates in schools. It provides monthly cash transfers (conditional and unconditional) to parents of children at selected schools in rural areas. In 2013/2014 the program reached 825,000 students. Program expenditure was USD 86 million.
Sources: (Plagerson & Patel, 2016. Compiled from the following sources: Cirillo & Tebaldi, 2016; European University Institute, 2010; Garcia & Moore, 2012).

In summary, there has been a significant increase in targeted programs aimed at poor and vulnerable groups such as children, older persons and, to some extent, for people with disabilities. Although most of the programs are targeted, there is some progress towards more inclusive and universal programs for specific groups, such as older persons. But "safety nets" are still important and widespread in response to emergencies. Different targeting methods are used, such as means-testing, proxy indicators, self-targeting, community-based and geographic targeting and universal targeting of particular categories of people in need. While some programs have reached critical mass in their coverage, others remain small-scale pilot programs. How to convert these pilot programs into programs at scale remains a challenge.

Middle-income countries such as South Africa, with rights-based approaches and with more public resources and infrastructure, appear to be growing their social protection programs compared to low income countries that rely on donor agencies or partnerships between governments and donors, although there is also evidence of smaller, low-income countries that are developing more inclusive and universal strategies for selected groups. Besides funding constraints and a possible over-reliance on donor agencies to fund social protection, the expansion of social protection is also limited because of a lack of opportunities for formal wage employment among the poor (see Garcia & Moore, 2012; Plagerson & Patel, 2016).

Evidence of its impact. Evaluation studies, especially of those that are well-funded, point to positive impacts on poverty and improved food security (Bastagli et al., 2016; Honorati et al., 2014). In South Africa, social assistance is associated with demonstrated reductions in poverty and inequality (Bhorat & Cassim, 2014; Leibbrandt, Woolard, Finn, & Argent, 2010; Woolard et al., 2011) and in Mauritius, Honorati et al. (2014) report reductions in poverty by half. However, low coverage and low benefits levels were cited as the reasons why some programs were less effective than the more expansive ones (Devereaux, 2015; Honorati et al., 2014).

A second significant impact has been in increasing household food security and the positive nutritional benefits for children. For instance, The World Bank found that the NSNP prevented starvation of poor and food insecure households in

Ethiopia, while in other countries positive outcomes have been achieved in increased spending on food in South Africa (Neves, Samson, Van Niekerk, Hlatshwayo, & Du Toit, 2009). Achieving greater dietary diversity and reducing malnutrition in Lesotho and overall improvement in household food security was reported in a pilot study in Malawi, with Ghana also reporting increased spending on food consumption, especially in female-headed households (Garcia & Moore, 2012).

While the impact of social assistance on poverty and food security is well documented above and in other countries in the Global South (Barrientos, 2013), increasingly researchers are recording the multiple and multiplier effects of social investments in cash transfers in particular. These include contributing to more equal health outcomes, in general (ILO, 2014), and more specifically in countries such as Tanzania, Malawi and Ghana (Bastagli et al., 2016). Social protection's impact on education outcomes are also reported, such as higher enrollment and attendance rates in school, for instance, in South Africa (Heinrich et al., 2012) and in Malawi and Zambia (European University Institute, 2010). Positive gender effects have been noted in some countries in Southern Africa, in the stimulation of productive assets and work seeking, and in contributing to the demand for goods and services in local communities (Plagerson & Patel, 2016).

However, many questions are asked about the unintended effects of social protection policies in Africa, such as its potential negative effects on employment behavior for working age adults. This argument is frequently cited by proponents of neo-liberalism in the North who contend that non-contributory social benefits have negative behavioral effects on employment behavior and foster a culture of dependency on the state. Similar arguments have been advanced in South Africa about the effects of the country's expansive social protection program in creating dependency on the state, incentivizing teen-age pregnancies among beneficiaries of the Child Support Grant (CSG). These arguments were countered by Makiwane (2010), who illustrated empirically that the CSG is not the cause of teenage pregnancies and that fertility levels have, in fact, declined in South Africa over the past two decades, despite the introduction of the CSG.

There is also no evidence that social grants have disincentive effects on employment. Surrender et al. (2010) illustrate in their research that most people want to work. This desire to work is undermined in a context of unusually high rates of structural unemployment in South Africa, amounting to a quarter of the working age population. Employment opportunities for people with low levels of skills are scarce due to declining resource-based industries, increasing mechanization, digitization of economic processes, and the drive for global economic competitiveness, requiring a work force with higher skills. Despite this unfavorable economic environment and its social costs, the evidence from social protection in South Africa suggests the contrary effect. Cash transfers provide a regular source of income in beneficiary households that in turn enable household members to save and preserve assets when faced with risks, facilitate job searches, and develop complimentary livelihoods strategies (Neves et al., 2009).

Other examples cited in Africa suggest that farmers are likely to stop farming due to the expectation that they will receive food aid from the state and donors. Devereux and White (2010), however, found that there is no basis for these assumptions. This does not mean that there may not be other unintended effects that are not yet known. Carefully designed programs that are sensitive to the local context are needed which are rigorously evaluated and monitored. In this way, unintended negative effects could be minimized while optimizing the positive unintended benefits of social protection.

Community involvement, citizen empowerment and citizen accountability initiatives are integrated in social protection programs in some African countries. Rwanda involves community members in the selection of beneficiaries (Ruberangeyo, Ayebane, & Laminne de Bex, 2011) while human rights approaches are contributing to citizen empowerment (Devereux, 2013) and in legal advocacy where citizens' rights are violated, as well as advocacy by civil society organizations to promote accountability of governmental agencies in South Africa. In a pilot cash and food transfer program in Lesotho, help desks staffed by community volunteers assist people to lodge complaints. In Kenya, a rights charter clarifies roles and responsibilities of beneficiaries and administrators (Mwasiaji, Reidel, Mistiaen, Sandford, & Munavu, 2016). In addition, in Malawi, its Social Action Fund Project is a channel for citizen feedback as well as the use of "score cards" to monitor program efficiency.

How to engage community constituencies in social protection and social development activities needs further study.

Reflections on the Direction of Social Protection

The focus now returns to the question as to whether the developments in social protection in Africa are a continuation of neo-liberal social policies associated with the spread of global capitalism associated with residual welfare policies (or the "safety nets" approach)? Alternatively, are the new social protection policies a reflection of new directions in social development in the Global South? If so, what are its emerging features, its underlying assumptions and potential to promote social justice and transformation? The country case studies on which the analysis is based are not sufficiently detailed to draw definitive conclusions about the direction of social protection policies across all the countries that have social protection policies. Much more detailed country-level data and analyses are needed. Six key themes emerging from the aforementioned discussion are elaborated on below.

First, the growth and significance of social protection in African and other developing countries can easily be overlooked if only a neo-liberal lens is applied. Ferguson (2015) contends that the global narrative positing the success of free-market capitalism and the rolling back of welfare states meant that the rise of social protection, and particularly cash transfers, in the South has been missed. In some country contexts, Ferguson (2015) points out that these developments could lay the basis for more distributive and innovative social policies. Although this might be considered to be too optimistic a view, given the constraints in realising welfare systems with expansive distributive goals, there is now widespread acceptance in Africa and internationally that social protection has played and will continue to play an important role in reducing poverty in developing countries (Barrientos, 2013; Hanlon, Barrientos, & Hulme, 2010).

This changing trend breaks with past, conventional wisdom that social protection was not a viable policy solution in Africa due to fiscal constraints, low economic growth rates, a lack of institutional capability of the state, and governance failures, among others. However, the evidence and case examples outlined above show that instead of "rolling back the state," many African governments are experimenting with new social development programs that do not neatly fit the conservative neo-liberal milieu or classification of a social welfare regime that is widely used in the North (Esping-Anderson, 1990). An attempt to understand these developments needs to move beyond the classification approach of welfare regimes in Africa. A better understanding of the authenticity of these programs in the African context is needed—what gave rise to it, what policy instruments are devised to achieve particular ends, and how these ends are allied to the wider societal goal of achieving social well-being and social justice.

Using Northern lenses in the South is useful in uncovering the differences and similarities in the development of welfare regimes around the world. That said, it leaves little room for understanding the nuances within and between countries, the cross over between different systems, the rationales that inform policy choices, questions of feasibility, sustainability, the role of agency of beneficiaries in improving their lives, the role of civil society, families, communities and how gender norms shape welfare policies and institutions in development contexts.

The influence of globalization on African economies and how these developments are shaping employment patterns and unemployment are also crucial for the sustainability of social protection policies, as well as what complementary social and economic policies are needed in the South. Midgley (1981) has long cautioned against the uncritical application of northern modalities and classifications of welfare regimes in the African context, and he encouraged northern scholars to also learn from the South in solving their own social challenges.

Second, the features of the programs and their under-lying assumptions suggest that some of the programs, at least, are attempts to find pragmatic and appropriate social development solutions to the social and human challenges that African countries face. There is great variation in the programs in relation to commitments to social rights, the level of institutionalization of the programs, the extent of coverage of vulnerable target groups and the use of both selective and universal principles of eligibility. Selective principles are rejected, as they are associated with residual approaches to social policy that are based on the poor law principles of making choices between the "deserving" and the "undeserving poor," suggesting a residual or neo-liberal paradigm. Normatively, preference is expressed for universal eligibility requirements, because these are more inclusive and are tied to citizenship rights associated with social democratic welfare systems.

The analysis above shows that low and middle-income countries in Africa use both principles in the targeting of their social development programs, including community targeting and self-targeting, among others. Some target the most disadvantaged or the chronically poor, while others view selective targeting as part of a longer-term plan to expand coverage to be universal. Different targeting methods are used based on pragmatic considerations, with the view to expand services and access to resources to people who have not previously had access to such resources such as migrants, people with disabilities, informal sector workers, women and other groups who have been excluded. Policy intentions, their long-term societal commitments and actual progress towards more just social goals, also need to be taken into account when making assessments about the potential of social protection to achieve wider social change. It makes little sense to use the principle of selectivity as a proxy for neo-liberal social policies, because in reality there is often a blurring of the boundaries between selective and universal principles of eligibility. Selective programs targeted at the most disadvantaged have also been found to be redistributive in countries by reducing income inequalities in South Africa (Leibbrandt et al., 2010). This does not detract from the fact that in some country programs, residual social policies are intended to remain minimalist, relying on the belief that economic growth on its own and the free market will bring human prosperity.

Despite variations in policies and programs, some countries are further on the road to promoting social inclusion and social justice than others, especially in middle-income countries that have more welfare resources to distribute and institutional capability (Garcia & Moore, 2012). Nevertheless, some low-income countries are redesigning their programs to be universal in covering eligible groups with significant experimentation in the design of programs and in the combination of food, cash and employment strategies.

Third, contrary to the assumptions made by neo-liberalism, Midgley (2000) and Midgley, Dahl and Conley Wright (2017) have consistently made the case for viewing social protection policies as social investments in human capital development that could yield positive long-term economic returns for a society, enhance economic participation of excluded groups and development. The evidence, based on the country evaluations that were reviewed, show the positive multiple developmental impacts of social protection including on education, nutrition and the health outcomes for children and families and in protecting households against risks. These investments are associated with improved outcomes in employment and income and are borne out by some of the findings. Because most of the programs have not been longitudinally evaluated, these claims require further rigorous evaluations of social protection policies in African countries.

Fourth, a partnership between the state and other social actors, including communities, is emerging in some countries, especially low-income countries that are more reliant on donor agencies to kick start social protection programs. Proponents of conservative social welfare modalities have consistently argued for less government social spending, while the state has always been central to conceptions of social democratic welfare states in developed countries and in developmental welfare states in Asia. Again, the evidence from Africa suggests that many countries are crossing the margins between state and non-state forms of social provision and giving rise to more pluralist forms of delivery. In some countries, a collaborative partnership model exists, with the state being the main driver of social and economic development, while in other countries there is over-reliance on donors to initiate and implement social protection programs, especially in low-income countries. Consequently, too many donor funded pilot programs are not converted to national programs at scale. The danger is that African governments do not gradually build the institutional and fiscal capability to proactively lead and implement their own programs, although this is not the case in all countries. The level of innovation across the countries reviewed would not have been possible without donor support, which attests to the potential of mutually beneficial partnerships in development assistance and possibly new ways of international collaboration.

On the other hand, donor funding of social protection can lead to the abrogation of responsibility by African governments for poverty reduction. The sustainability of social development programs that are donor funded can be compromised, especially when donors withdraw if their funding is exhausted or if there is substantial policy, and political and economic change in their home countries. Donors are also not accountable to the electorate in the same way as governments are in democracies. Electoral support for social protection in democratic regimes, especially in the early stages of building social protection floors in developing countries, is likely to become important in future debates on the direction of social protection.

Fifth, new constituencies are emerging that are supporting these programs among poor voters with the potential to hold governments accountable (Patel et al., 2014). As social protection programs grow, especially rights-based programs, it is likely that in future, beneficiaries will gain greater electoral power that could also shape the direction of social protection programs to be more transformative. Corrupt governments and elites who use social protection policies for "clientelist" ends (and not as a citizenship right), could lead to more populist and unsustainable social protection policies. Social protection has been criticized for being a passive instrument in promoting development in African countries, but there is some evidence of citizen and community involvement in social protection delivery, promoting accountability and advocacy for the expansion of social assistance.

Experimentation with community involvement in social protection in different countries also need to be rigorously assessed for its positive and negative benefits. Asking questions about who controls resource allocations in local communities, who benefits, and how best to enhance local engagement in policy design, implementation and in monitoring and evaluation could provide insight into how best to integrate these principles in their design and delivery.

Finally, while all the countries in the review were concerned with meeting the needs of their citizens, the needs of migrants and refugees are receiving increasing attention in regional and global social protection systems. Since there is considerable population movement between African countries in different regions in Africa, and especially in southern Africa with a long history of population movement in search of better economic and social prospects, cross border issues and debates in social protection are likely to continue to feature prominently on the social development agenda.

Moving Beyond Safety Nets

In conclusion, this review of social protection policies and strategies in Africa points to changing trends in some African countries towards more expansive social investment-oriented poverty reduction policies, especially in middle-income countries with more resources than low income countries. These developments have the potential to grow welfare policies and institutions that are more appropriate, responsive to the needs of people and that could further a justice-based notion of social protection that includes the disadvantaged and that maximizes opportunities for improving their lives (Barrientos, 2016).

Social policies to reduce poverty and inequality by 2030 is a global social goal. African countries are lagging behind other developing countries in Asia and Latin America in their efforts to reduce poverty and inequality. The need to reduce poverty and inequality, particularly in both low and middle-income countries in Africa, remains a critical regional and global goal. Learning from what African countries are actually attempting to do and how, amidst significant constraints to enhance citizens' welfare in a globalizing world, could provide rich opportunities for policy learning and action in both the North and the South. Social protection policies are likely to continue to play a significant role in rethinking social welfare modalities in Africa, in shaping social interventions and reimagining welfare institutions. Rigorous and critical analyses are needed in order to maximize the rich learning opportunities presented by the growth of social protection in Africa and other developing countries.

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