

Social Protection in Africa - Current State and Way Forward

In 2004, concerns over lack of social protection in Africa and the need to address this were acknowledged (see [Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment and Poverty Alleviation](#)). Since then, social protection policies and programmes have become a key component of development policy and discourses in Africa evident in recent social protection conferences and workshops. A workshop on *Social Protection in Mozambique: International Frameworks and National Policies* was held in Maputo, Mozambique on 1-2 September 2014 ([workshop presentations](#)). On 27-28 October 2014, a Conference on *Social Protection in Africa: Making it Work for Children* was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (see [conference concept note](#) and [outcome document](#)). During the same month, on 29-30 October 2014, a conference on *social protection for migrants in the SADC: Prospects, vulnerability and benefits across borders* was held in Johannesburg, South Africa ([conference proceedings](#)). Further, on 12-13 November 2014, a conference on *Social Protection in Africa* was held in Nairobi, Kenya (see [conference details](#)). On 15-17 December 2014, an *International conference on social protection: Building effective and sustainable systems for equitable growth perspectives, policies and best practices* was held in Arusha, Tanzania (see [details](#)). More recently, on 27-30 January 2015, Kenya held a *Social Protection Conference Week on Enhancing Synergy in Social Protection Delivery* (find speeches by the [president](#) and [Cabinet Secretary](#)). The main messages are:

Africa requires social protection policies and programmes

Social protection is crucial in Africa for the following reasons: high levels of poverty and inequality; high levels of unemployment and/or underemployment; high degree of labour market informality across the continent; low coverage of social protection, and low social spending as percentage of GDP (see Prof. Marius Olivier presentation during the Workshop on Social Protection in Mozambique [here](#)).

Social protection policies and programmes have changed over time

Whereas in traditional African societies social protection was based on membership in a community, current policies for social protection in Africa range from those that emphasise on universality to that target certain segments of the population. When social protection policies are narrowly implemented as safety nets, they do not address different dimensions of well-being especially production, re-distribution, reproduction, social cohesion or nation building¹.

In Africa, social policies are at different stages of legislation planning and implementation. South Africa has the largest and best-developed social security systems in Africa with pension schemes dating back to the 1920s. In the last few years, several countries in Africa have formulated national protection policy frameworks or strategies such as Kenya's [National Social Protection Policy](#), Ethiopia's [National Social Protection Policy](#), Rwanda's [National Social Protection Strategy](#), Uganda's National social protection policy framework,

¹ Adesina, J. O. (2011). Beyond the social protection paradigm: social policy in Africa's development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 32(4), 454-470.

Tanzania's National Social Protection Framework, and Ghana's National Social Protection Strategy. Notably, formulation of national policy framework aims at consolidating fragmented social protection policies to enhance effectiveness and efficiency at country level. Overall, public social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP is increasing although it varies across the continent. Further, although coverage of social protection programmes is low, it is expanding and aiming towards national coverage.

Social protection as part of wider policy and for economic transformation

There is evidence that social protection programmes such as child grants and social cash transfers have contributed not just to poverty reduction but also to economic growth. For instance in Zambia, social protection schemes were found to have fostered economic growth and development, contributed to macroeconomic stabilisation, human development and social cohesion (see Prof. Alexander van den Heever, presentation on the *Economics of Social Protection: Investments, Returns and Fiscal Space* during the social protection workshop in Mozambique [here](#)). During the International conference on social protection in Arusha, Tanzania, presentations revealed how social protection schemes in Tanzania had contributed to reduction in poverty, increased school attendance, improved access to healthcare, enhanced food security and have potential to promote productive employment in rural areas and contribute to economic growth (for more details, read reports on the proceedings of [day 1](#); [day 2](#); and [day 3](#)). This shows that social protection is not only a key pillar of social policy, but also a key pillar of economic growth and development. Thus, economic and social elements of policy should not be treated as separate. Therefore, within a country's development policies, social protection should play multiple roles including investment or as a means of productive activation. For example, as shown below, a recipient of the Hunger Safety Net Programme cash transfer in Kenya used the funds to start a *kiosk* (retail shop).



©Abraham Ali-Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP)²

² <http://www.hsnp.or.ke/index.php/media-center/gallery/category/11-hsnp-beneficiaries>

Viewed as an element of development policies, interventions for social protection should be framed as a major instrument for economic transformation by linking them to economic growth and development. This should not be seen as a shift away from the view of social protection as a basic right emphasised in countries such as Mozambique during the workshop on social protection workshop (find presentation [here](#)) but as a counterargument to those who consider expenditure on social protection as expensive. Expenditure on social protection should be addressed through public policy changes by ensuring that social protection is at the centre of national development policies.

There is need to bridge the gap between different actors in social protection

There seems to be divergent views on how researchers, policy makers and practitioners conceptualise social protection policies and programmes and how these should be implemented. To overcome this, innovative ideas and approaches are useful to ensure that different actors especially researchers and policy makers work together in order for social protection policies to be informed by appropriate evidence. Further, models or instruments for social protection should be informed by country context including addressing challenges in societies experiencing conflict or in conflict situations.

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