

Strengthening Kenya's Social Protection Agenda through Research, Programming and Policy

1. Introduction

Social protection programmes are among the most successful development experiences the World has seen in recent years. They have proven to be key in developing countries' efforts to fight poverty and hunger. Countries and donor agencies across the World have adopted social protection strategies to complement and strengthen their efforts at reducing poverty and vulnerability.

In Kenya, social protection is entrenched in primarily three ways: through cash transfer programmes where beneficiaries attest to improved household food security, retention of children in schools, access to basic health care, enhanced social support networks, self-esteem and dignity¹; through the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) which provides social security protection to formal and informal workers in form of lump sum payments upon retirement; and through social health insurance implemented by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) through their subsidy programs for orphans and vulnerable children, persons with severe disabilities and older persons².

However, limitations exist in implementation and reach of the programmes with none of them attaining universality. Currently, social assistance programmes, mainly in the form of Cash transfers are reaching about 813,381 households nationwide, the National Social Security Fund has about 4.6 million members while the National Health Insurance Fund covers approximately 2.7 million contributory members with about 10 million dependents.

In Kenya, political leadership has demonstrated commitment to supporting investments in social protection programming through multi-year budget commitments based on periodic social budgeting. While this is a major step, more still needs to be done. Equally, availability of data on social protection programmes is vital for informed policy decision making. *Utafiti Sera* therefore finds relevance in this regard as its agenda is to unite researchers and policy actors to strengthen social protection programmes, policy formulation and implementation in Kenya.

Key milestones achieved by Kenya in the implementation of Social Protection

- (i) Formulation of a National Social Protection Policy
- (ii) Expansion of cash transfers to reach approximately 813,381 households (orphans and vulnerable children, older persons, persons with severe disability; and chronically poor people
- (iii) The establishment of a single registry
- (iv) Strengthened Management Information and Payment systems

2. The Key Gaps in Kenya's Social Protection Programming

Social protection programmes in Kenya, specifically the social assistance programmes, face five main challenges that need to be comprehensively addressed to improve the efficiency of the interventions:

- (i) Ineffective coordination of Social protection programmes: There is apparent lack of coordination across and within programmes limiting the ability to build synergy and benefit from the existing infrastructure and resources. For instance, programmes are implemented by different ministries and in different departments. The Government through the Ministry of East African Community, Labour and Social Protection has made strides towards ensuring coordination of the cash transfer programmes through the establishment of the Social Assistance Unit in July 2016.

¹ National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC). (2014). *Participation of vulnerable population in their own programs: Equity measures among most vulnerable children, persons with severe disabilities and elderly*. Government Printers. Kenya.

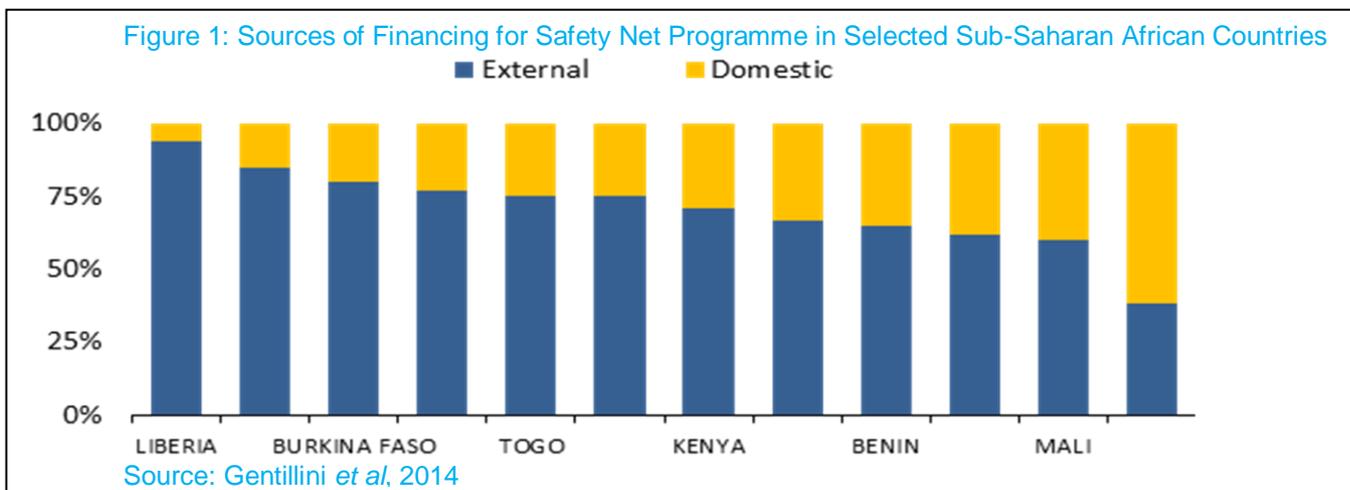
² NSSF website: <http://www.nssf.or.ke/about> (Accessed 28 June 2017)

- ii. Targeting errors: Generally, across all social protection programmes there is lack universalism. Currently each cash transfer programme has its own targeting process apart from the older persons cash transfer and cash transfer for persons with severe disabilities that use the same approach. This has led to high levels of inclusion and exclusion errors whereby several people who are ineligible are enrolled into the program and several others who are eligible excluded.
- iii. Inadequate exit, graduation and sustainability mechanisms: There are inadequate structures to ensure that those who no longer qualify for support are removed from the programmes. This hinders sustainability and prospects of beneficiary households weaning themselves off social assistance schemes and become self-sufficient.
- iv. Inadequate mechanisms for financing social protection: It is notable that social assistance funding in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, is characterised by large external financing. Even though the Kenyan government spends about 0.9 percent of its Gross Domestic product on social assistance, most of the financing comes from its development partners (estimated at 70%) (*See figure 1 below*).
- v. Lack of comprehensive legislation on social protection: The National Social Protection Policy (2011) outlines three pillars: social assistance; social security; and health insurance. However, there is no legislation that ties these three pillars together to ensure a coordinated and coherent approach to social protection programming.

3. Bridging the Gap between Social Protection Research, Programming and Policy

Research, programming and policy on social protection influence systems in the sector in the country. The responsibility for the collection and management of data lies with key stakeholders who are implementing the various social protection programmes. These stakeholders include key government ministries, development partners, non-state actors, communities and beneficiaries.

Generally, there is a high degree of policy interest in social protection in Kenya judging from social protection interventions especially cash transfer programmes being implemented in Kenya. For instance, the government has in the last four years increased funding for cash transfers from Ksh7.9 billion to approximately Ksh19.5 billion, cumulatively amounting to Ksh80.5 billion. This has resulted into increased beneficiary households and by June 30, 2016, around 813, 381 households were benefitting from the National Safety Net programme. Table 1 shows the number of households benefitting from the programme.



Although the Government and stakeholders in the social protection sector have made strides in implementing social protection interventions, it is not clear how research evidence may have influenced the policy and programmes the country. There is therefore need for policy makers, programme implementers and researchers to work together for an effective social protection system. Synergy can be created through:

- i. Creating a network to share information on social protection. There is need for innovative ways of engaging network members such as conference calls and occasional meetings;
- ii. Formulating a comprehensive communication and influencing strategy to raise awareness of social protection and to engender the necessary ownership of the programme by the various stakeholders and implementing partners;
- iii. Conducting of rapid assessments of what research evidence have been undertaken, what informed the studies, the methodology among others, and share the information within the network;
- iv. Regular organisation of research-policy actors' fora to discuss research evidence that is relevant to policy actors and practitioners; and
- v. Researchers teaming up with the media, lobbyists and advocate organisations that have access to policy makers and practitioners so research evidence will be at the "door step" of those who need it for policy and programme design.

Utafiti Sera involves an intentional stretching of the boundaries of policy engagement through sustained actions and efforts by a community of actors who work to own both process and structure and realise that there is a commonality and identity of basic interests in the problem.

Activities under *Utafiti Sera* include conducting research, holding consultative meetings and dialogue sessions with key stakeholders in social protection. In Kenya, *Utafiti Sera House* organised a stakeholders' forum that brought together programme implementers, researchers from various institutions and policy makers, including the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of East African Community, Labour and Social Protection on May 10, 2016.

4. Policy Recommendations for Social Protection in Kenya

- (i) Development of a comprehensive legal framework on social protection. This framework should aim to harmonise and integrate the three pillars of social protection and link key stakeholders in the social protection sector.
- (ii) Enhancement of political will which is vital to gaining and maintaining fiscal space to sustain the programmes.
- (iii) Exploration of alternative strategies by the national Government to obtain additional revenue through measures such as debt relief; curbing illicit financial flows and corruption; responsible borrowing; and prudent use of funds.

Table 1: Number of Households Reached through Cash Transfers in Kenya

Programmes	2013/2014	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17 (Projections)
Older Persons Cash Transfer Programme (OPCT)	162,604	167,044	315,454	460,000
Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC)	249,486	225,984	361,175	509,000
Cash Transfer for Persons with Severe Disabilities (PWSD-CT)	24,963	25,505	47,460	77,000
Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP)	70,345	76,733	89,292	100,000
Total	507,398	485,266	813,381	1,146,000

The Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) and the African Institute for Health and Development (AIHD), are in partnership to bring together implementers, researchers and policy makers within one space to address social protection issues. This has been made possible under the *Utafiti Sera* project which is funded by the Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Development (INCLUDE).

- (iv) Implementation of comprehensive cash transfers that encompass productive components, for example, microfinance. A multi-faceted cash transfer programme is likely to have a broad-based impact on the lives of beneficiaries compared to a stand-alone programme.

- (v) Involvement of stakeholders at all levels in social protection to build greater awareness that is fundamental for effective delivery and sustainability of social protection programmes. There is need to develop a comprehensive, practical participatory framework to provide communities with a platform for participating in the programmes.
- (vi) Recognition, collaboration and support to existing formal and informal social protection interventions across the country.
- (vii) Enhancement of spending efficiencies by strengthening institutional capacity, coordination, programme administration and evaluation.

For further information on the activities of *Utafiti Sera* contact:

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