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National policy frameworks for social protection in Africa

Through its Question of the Week, INCLUDE gathers viewpoints from its broad network of academics, policymakers, civil society organizations and other policy stakeholders on current policy questions relevant to inclusive development.[1] The highlights of the discussions on two questions related to national policy frameworks for social protection in Africa are presented below.

Question of the Week 24: How do political economy factors explain differences in the integration of social protection programmes in national social and development policies in African countries?

While social protection programmes are on the rise in Sub-Saharan Africa, the extent to which they are integrated into nationally-coordinated policies differs between countries. Some countries, such as Ghana, Kenya and Zambia, have more advanced coordination, proper integration into legislation and wide coverage among the country populations. Others have smaller programmes, which are often donor-driven. Three sets of explanations arose out of the discussion.

First, political actors need to be convinced of the importance of nationally-coordinated, integrated programmes. According to Mayke Huijbregts (UNICEF), the will to do so depends on four factors:

- The realization by members of parliament and ministers of finance that social protection programmes are affordable and the most desirable policy option to take care of vulnerable groups. In Huijbregts' view, this depends on recognition of the fact that the poor are by nature dependent on support from the state or members of their social network
- Long-term dedication to guarantee the sustainability of the programme
- The dedication to reach all eligible households in need of such support
- A solid response to the issue of 'dependency', which is often raised as a counter-argument to nationally-coordinated programmes.

The case of Zambia shows that the integration of social protection programmes into national policies is highly dependent upon government and state dynamics. In 2013, a 700% increase in the government budget for social cash transfers reversed the balance with donor funding, making the government contribution 80% of the total budget. To explain why, Kate Pruce (University of Manchester) points out that efforts by a coalition of donors, government officials and civil society actors to build an evidence base for social cash transfers was key to promoting social protection in Zambia. Moreover, a scandal in 2013 concerning overspending on agricultural subsidies led budgets to be shifted to social cash transfers. Ultimately, a shift in political dynamics led social protection to become more aligned with the interests and ideas of the new ruling coalition. Thus, technical evidence can play a role, but is not the only factor determining expansion into national policies.

As argued by Maria Klara Kuss (UNU-Merit), scaling up programmes does not automatically lead to integration in national policies per sé. Instead, the expansion in Zambia opened up an opportunity to renegotiate the existing welfare regime. Strong resistance emerged from the bottom and resulted in a change in the poverty reduction focus, and a different targeting approach. Hence, the integration of social protection programmes into national policies was not the result of upscaling in itself, but of the momentum it provided for renegotiation. According to Kuss: "to understand the 'integration' of social protection programmes, it is important to understand the values that are promoted by the intervention and those that are reinforced by the existing welfare regime of a country".

Roeland Hemsteede (University of Dundee) suggests that stakeholders, for example, donors, have strategic

[1] INCLUDE expresses its gratitude to all contributors to the Question of the Week, including those who are not mentioned in person in this document.

interests that lead them to advocate for programmes to become a standard upon which policy is built. In countries where many different social protection schemes are in place, they are often controlled by actors with different interests and have different support systems for their implementation. The potential for the integration of these schemes thus depends on the level of coherence of interests and implementation and, in particular, the extent to which policy coalitions can overcome these differences.

Question of the Week 3: What are promising examples of the design and implementation of social protection legislation in African countries?

With the rise of social protection programmes in Africa, and their integration into nationally-coordinated policies, several countries have started to develop and implement legislation on social protection. In Kenya, for instance, Article 43 of the Constitution obliges the national government "to provide appropriate social security to persons who are unable to support themselves and their dependents". Apart from Kenya, legislation on social protection in other African countries is scarce, particularly for vulnerable groups other than the elderly. Legislation on social protection can include labour laws and safety standards, out of which policies for health insurance, minimum wages and pensions follow. This builds on the approach of social protection as a human right.

Most notable is the comprehensive set of social protection programmes in South Africa, which are government-led and underpinned by a social contract that can be enforced by the courts. Similar to Kenya, the South African Bill of Rights requires the state to take "reasonable legislative and other measures, within its adequate resources, to achieve the progressive realization" of the rights contained in the bill. This allows citizens to appeal decisions made by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) if they are treated unfairly by the grant system.

As outlined by Franziska Gassmann (UNU-MERIT), in Africa most progress has been made on legislation for the protection of the elderly. Many African countries have fully functioning social pension policies in place, which are domestically-driven without donor support. However, social protection programmes for other vulnerable groups are less common, mainly because these are more difficult for policymakers to gain political support for. For instance, in contrast to Latin American and Caribbean countries, few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa integrate employment-related benefits with non-contributory programmes to support families and/or children at the national level. A promising exception is the child grant programme in South Africa, which benefits more than 10 million children.

Other promising examples, brought forward by Tavenga Nwongo (Africa Platform for Social Protection), are:

- Rwanda's Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), which covers access to health care, basic education and housing among others, and which is making serious efforts to reduce poverty in Rwanda.
- Lesotho's National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), including its Social Pension Act, which contains legal entitlements for its citizens.
- Zambia's National Social Protection Policy (NSPS), which brings together cash transfers and other social protection programmes into an integrated strategy to provide income security to vulnerable people to counter the impacts of risks and shocks.

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Weblink: http://includeplatform.net/downloads/national-policy-frameworks-social-protection-africa/