
A REVIEW OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES IN ZIMBABWE: LESSONS LEARNT

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ABSTRACT

This article makes an entrée into the social protection arena by exploring the political, technical, social, economic, legal and environmental dimensions of social protection using the ecology of human development as a foundation. As a point of departure, it argues that a clear understanding of the ‘total environment’ is critical in the design, formulation and implementation of social protection programmes. The method used for purposes of compiling this article is a desk study in which documents on social protection interventions used in Zimbabwe were reviewed. The key contribution of the article is a framework which may assist countries in the global south to understand social protection in general and to guide policy implementation and practice in particular. Some of the key lessons learnt from the Zimbabwean experience include the need to interrogate all interventions for feasibility, efficiency, effectiveness, dependency-reduction, appropriateness, sustain-ability, gender-sensitivity, incorruptibility, provision of exit mechanisms, administrative costs and adequacy of resources.

Key words:

social protection, poverty, targeting, social safety nets

INTRODUCTION

Historically Zimbabwe has operated various social security schemes such as occupational pension schemes and a public assistance programme. The problem with occupational pension schemes is that they exclude the unemployed, those in the informal sector, domestic workers, casual labourers and the rural people. For example, on one hand, the National Social Security Authority (NSSA) has since 1994 been administering the Pensions and Other Benefits Scheme which offers protection against retirement, invalidity and death of the bread winner. On the other hand, the Government of Zimbabwe administers a public assistance programme that targets the destitute, older people, people with disabilities and the chronically ill, and is means tested. More recently the Government of Zimbabwe has been operating a number of social safety nets to cushion needy members of society, through the Ministry of Public Service and Social Welfare in the wake of deepening poverty arising from the challenges the country has been facing since the 2000s.

This article argues that a clear understanding of the environment is critical in the design, formulation and implementation of social protection programmes. For instance, in terms of providing social protection, there are questions that arise relating to, for example, who disburses the assistance? In other words, who implements and coordinates? Government? Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)? Civil society? Individuals? Or the private sector? Also, the methods of intervention include a range of options each with both advantages and disadvantages, such as Public works? Cash transfers? Voucher/coupon transfer? Food transfer? Food-for-work? Cash-for-work? Inputs (seed/fertiliser)-for-work? Feeding scheme? In what combinations? Some, if not all of these decisions, fall into the political realm. The issue of coordination of the interventions is also critical to the success of the programmes. Smith (2001) maintains that the proliferation in Malawi of donors each proposing a different design and different incentives, and each proposing different methodologies and modalities with respect to targeting, contracting and community participation, over-stretches the limited administrative capacity. This over-stretching dilutes impact and confuses signals and incentives resulting in uncoordinated targeting in which programmes may cover some target households (or areas, or groups of beneficiaries) several times while others are not reached at all (Smith, 2001). Thus, the following section attempts to provide a theoretical frame for the study. Section 2 looks at social safety nets and targeting in place in Zimbabwe. It provides a brief historical perspective as well as a critique of their implementation. The methodology for this work is a desk study in which documents and reports that evaluated the social safety nets of

Zimbabwe were reviewed. This involved a perusal of Government of Zimbabwe reports as well as reports written by consultants on behalf of the Government of Zimbabwe and donors. Section 3 is the Discussion.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Undergirding this article is the works of Bronfenbrenner who argues that theoretical models in human development must focus on processes occurring beyond a single setting such as family to relations between systems, both formal and informal, critical to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Bronfenbrenner (1977) further argues that understanding human development requires an appreciation of “multiperson systems of interaction not limited to a single setting which take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject – I refer to this evolving scientific perspective as the ecology of human development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:513). He further argues that there is a need to understand the “process of accommodation between person and environment which constitutes the core of an ecology of human development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:527).

Furthermore, Ungar (2002:491) argues that social ecology allows deep ecologists to “proclaim that diversity, complexity, and symbiosis are in the best interest of humankind”. To that end he suggests that “the science of a new ecology challenges us to integrate into social work practice a perspective that promotes the value of diversity and diverse solutions to the problems facing distinctly different populations” (Ungar, 2002:491). In the same vein, Patel (2012:119) argues that there is need for “differentiated social development strategies that take account into particular local conditions”.

Yet from another perspective, Hassim as cited in Hochfeld and Plageron (2011) argues that through a social justice lens, social protection can be perceived as a worthy approach to bring about economic redistribution in response to social inequities. In expanding on Rawls’ theory of social justice, Garrett (2005) observes that Rawls propounds on the idea of justice as fairness representing a political conception of justice which gives substance to the principle that every person has an equal right to a scheme of equal basic liberties and that social and economic equalities must be open to all in conditions of equality of opportunity, with the proviso that the greatest benefits must accrue to least advantaged members in any given society. John Rawls in his ‘Theory of Justice’ (1971) also propagates the primacy of rights. According to Garrett (2005), Rawls also implies that when raising living standards of all in society and empowering people, this should be done in line

with the well-being of the least disadvantaged persons without discrimination. Related to this, but within the capability approach as postulated by Amartya Sen (1982, 1985, 1999), a person's well-being depends on a basket of functionings (beings and doings) and the freedoms and choices that person enjoys - giving human development a multi-dimensional perspective.

Shepherd, Marcus and Barrientos (2004) define social protection as a set of policies that governments can pursue in order to protect the poor and enable them to participate more productively in economic activity with the aim of reducing risk and vulnerability. They further note that a social-protection approach is premised on achieving a degree of agreement, across society, that citizens are entitled to certain minimum standards of welfare by virtue of their citizenship. The concept of social protection is broader than the concept of social safety nets. Social safety nets have connotations of being ad-hoc, short term and relief-related whereas social protection encompasses public assistance, social insurance, social security, humanitarian relief, pension, microfinance and micro-insurance and so on. Thus social-protection includes social safety nets and what Shepherd et al. (2004) describe as *ex ante* prevention and mitigation measures. This article focuses on social protection in general and social safety nets in particular.

Furthermore, this work aligns with the work of Patel and Hochfeld (2012:6) who claim:

Multiple methods of social work are considered appropriate such as micro-, meso- and macro-level interventions with service provision spanning rehabilitative, protective, preventive and developmental goals. From this perspective, social development theory is a synthesis of normative theory that accounts for its strong social rights and social justice orientation and people-centred development theories that aim to improve the welfare of the population along with economic development.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL SAFETY NETS IN ZIMBABWE

Since the late '80s and early '90s social safety nets have been used in Zimbabwe for purposes of ameliorating the negative effects of droughts and floods in the form of drought relief or humanitarian assistance. In the 1990s households were facing a variety of income shocks of which dominant idiosyncratic shocks included unemployment, retrenchment, death in families and long illness and covariant shocks included price increases/inflation, devaluation, taxes and drought (Mutangadura and Makaudze, 2000). Idiosyncratic shocks affect individuals or individual households, while covariant

shocks affect a number of households or communities (ibid). Below are some of the interventions carried out in Zimbabwe.

The Public Assistance Programme

Zimbabwe ran a fairly successful Public Assistance Programme in the 1980s and 1990s which was intended to assist destitute and indigent persons sixty years of age and over; or those handicapped physically or mentally; or any person suffering continuous ill-health. Slater, Farrington and Holmes (2008) note that targeting transfers is both a political and technical process whose criteria for inclusion must be simple and transparent, with robust delivery systems and with information being readily accessible. Cash payments have many advantages since beneficiaries can do many things with cash. A cash transfer provides choice. However, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that beneficiaries have used cash in some instance for the purchase of beer and other unproductive uses. In Zimbabwe, during the time of the hyper-inflation, the interventions were rendered worthless. In some respects, cash disempowers beneficiaries by promoting laziness and a dependency syndrome (Chambers, 2000). Hence Slater et al. (2008) suggest that when using cash transfers, questions about the feasibility, appropriateness, effectiveness and impact need to be addressed. Smith (2001) proposes that as far as possible, social safety nets should be self-targeting and be “productivity-enhancing (for example in the form of public works, or agricultural-inputs supplementation), rather than pure transfers. This would both reduce the risk of dependency, and maximise long-term income growth among the poor. The self-targeting should be selective of limited sub-groups that everyone can agree are needy” (Smith, 2001:13).

Social development fund

This fund was created in 1991 in light of the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme by the Government of Zimbabwe to provide welfare support during the transition period (Kaseke, Dhemba and Gumbo, 1997). Provision of school and health fees was means tested based on household income. The food money was abandoned as the administrative costs to both the government and the beneficiaries outweighed the benefits resulting in a low take-up rate (Kaseke et al., 1997). The health fee scheme was rendered ineffective by a shortage of drugs and lack of clarity on policy and procedure (Kaseke et al., 1997). Dashwood (1996) questions selecting ‘vulnerable groups’ in the Social Dimensions of Adjustment programme when poverty was so widespread in Zimbabwe.

Free food distribution

Free food distribution was introduced in 1995 to cushion vulnerable groups from drought-induced food shortages (Kaseke et al., 1997). Free food was given to older people, people with disabilities and the chronically ill. For able-bodied people, the government introduced the *Public Works programme* which required beneficiaries to work on public works designed to improve community infrastructure in return for money which beneficiaries could use to buy food (Kaseke et al., 1997). This programme was redesigned to become the *Food-for-Work programme* in which beneficiaries worked on community projects in return for food. The Achilles heel of the free food programme was the absence of exit strategies and lack of empowerment programmes to ensure self-sufficiency (Kaseke et al., 1997). Typically such programmes have high administrative costs relating to procurement, storage, security and disbursement.

The grain loan scheme

The scheme was introduced in May 1995 to replace the Food-for-Work Programme but was stopped in January 1996 (Kaseke et al., 1997). Persons were given grain loans and were supposed to return, in future, the exact amount of grain borrowed. While this scheme had the potential to propel people out of poverty, it also had the potential to threaten those who defaulted with repercussions hence, some small farmers were hesitant to use the facility. Logistical issues of how the grain was to be repaid were not sufficiently worked out. For instance, issues of quality were not addressed. Because the mechanisms of collecting the repaid grain were not clearly elaborated, the repayments were very low and some beneficiaries took it as a donation from government because no penalties were imposed and enforced; others considered the assistance as a right or entitlement (Sithole, Mapedzahama and Soko, 1999).

Child Supplementary Feeding Programme (CSFP)

The CSFP which was first introduced in 1982 and implemented in 1987 was expanded in 1992. It provided a daily supplementary meal of maize, beans, groundnuts and oil to all children under the age of five years needing feeding in drought stricken areas (Kaseke et al., 1997). Because of geographic targeting, some children who were not eligible also benefited thereby pushing up the costs. Adult nutrition was neglected as the focus was on children (Kaseke et al., 1997). The scheme overburdened teachers with the additional

chore of child-feeding although the assistance of volunteers did help somewhat. Perhaps most importantly those who did not attend school did not receive food.

Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM)

According to the *Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme* (RHVP) (2006) the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) was launched in January 2001 as one component of the *Enhanced Social Protection Project* (ESPP) which is a collection of programmes which formed a core part of the Government of Zimbabwe's wider social protection strategy at the beginning of the millennium. In 2005, the BEAM assisted 969,962 pupils representing 27 per cent of enrolment (RHVP, 2006). The guiding principles of BEAM include community-based targeting and community selection of the most needy children; full support with fees and levies for a full year of schooling for eligible children; continued support to a beneficiary child depending on school attendance as opposed to merit or academic performance; and at least 50 percent of assisted children at secondary level should be girls for purposes of bringing about equity between boys and girls (Government of Zimbabwe, 2010). RHVP (2007) notes that some of the weaknesses of the programme include the rampant increases in school fees, and the fact that potential beneficiaries cannot be funded mid-year as all funding is only approved at the beginning of the year. This reflects some programme rigidities which do not help in assisting the needy beneficiaries mid-stream. Yet, RHVP (2007) also notes that one of the weaknesses of this project is its focus on short-term solutions to social protection.

National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children

According to Government of Zimbabwe and UNICEF, (2008), the Zimbabwe programme of Support to National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Phase I was a partnership between the Government of Zimbabwe and donors. The programme operated through a network of non-governmental and community based organisations which targeted orphans and vulnerable children including children with disabilities, children affected/infected with HIV and AIDS, children with one parent deceased, married children, working children, children on the streets, child parents and so forth. Under this programme, children were assisted to obtain birth certificates; provided with access to basic education, given medical treatment and psychological support as well as benefit from nutrition, clinical, rehabilitative, vocational, outreach and training programmes. The massive programme targeted 400 000 such children.

According to UNICEF (2011), Phase II (2011-2015), “integrates action to help families cope with risks and shocks through three main interventions: a) cash transfers to the poorest families; b) education assistance through the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and c) child protection service delivery for children survivors of abuse, violence and exploitation”. The programme targets child headed; grandparent headed households; households with many dependents and those with chronically ill or persons living with disabilities will be given a cash transfer of “up to US\$25 per month, per household, to enable families to meet immediate needs for food and health care” (UNICEF, 2011).

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The provision of social protection can be considered multi-dimensional. The dimensions are political, technical, social, economic, legal and environmental and others – to give the ‘total environment’.

Political dimension

The debate in the political dimension begins in the arena of targeting. Cornia and Stewart (1993 as cited in Kaseke et al., 1997:12), note two types of errors in targeting that can be committed: “the error of the omission of the poor from the scheme and the error of the inclusion of the non-poor”. It seems decisions about who benefits and who does not are political. Equally political are such decisions related to how many shall benefit? Who are the beneficiaries? Is it only the vulnerable groups such as orphans, people with disabilities, and older people? Or people falling below a given minimally accepted standard of living? Child-headed households or just children? Families or individuals? Table 1 on the following page expatiates on the political frames within which interventions are designed and executed.

Table 1: Political debates

Who are the beneficiaries?	<i>Only vulnerable groups such as orphans, the disabled, and the elderly? Or people falling below a given minimally accepted standard of living? Child-headed households or just children? Families or individuals?</i>
How many shall benefit?	<i>Numbers</i>
Who coordinates?	<i>Government? Non-governmental organisations? Civil society? Local authorities? Individuals? The private sector? Chiefs? Councillors? Community?</i>
What schemes are to be implemented?	<i>Public Works? Cash transfers? Voucher/coupon transfer? Food transfer? Food-for-work? Cash-for-work? Inputs(seed/fertiliser)-for-work? Feeding scheme? In what combinations?</i>
Type of intervention/strategy?	<i>Focused or differentiated by area or need?</i>

Source: Author

The virtues of targeting reside in excluding those who do not qualify. As Kaseke et al. (1997) contend the error of omission [Type I error] renders a social safety net unable to reach the intended beneficiaries whilst the error of inclusion [Type II error] of the non-poor reduces the impact of a social safety net on the welfare of the poor. In a situation of mass poverty, as is in the case of Zimbabwe, the costs of committing error I are less than the costs of trying to identify the undeserving. In that case geographic targeting, namely identifying the poorest areas and assisting all residents within the area, may be meritable. To avoid the commission of Type II error, community targeting may be helpful. Furthermore, in a situation of mass unemployment, understood within the context of loss of jobs in the formal sector and an Africa-wide setting in which wage employment is minimal, means-testing becomes almost redundant as almost everyone can be considered 'poor'. The non-poor would 'self-exclude' from the benefits intended for the poor in a form of targeting that is self-exclusionary. Table 2 shows the framework of the advantages and disadvantages and scope of targeting methods.

Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of scope of targeting methods

<i>Targeting</i>			
Universal		Narrow	
Advantages	Disadvantages	Advantages	Disadvantages
Easy to administer	High incidence of leakages	Leakages can be minimised	Difficult to administer
Potential for gender-friendliness, that is non-discriminatory on the basis of gender unless it is gender-focused e.g females only or boys only	Expensive to run	Less costly to outlay	Expensive to run
Allows risk taking	Inefficient in targeting	Focus is on intended target	Can easily 'taken over' by the non-poor – elite capture
Can either be developmental or humanitarian or both in character	Has the potential to create a sense of entitlement, dependency, a crisis of expectation	Value for money/return on investment may be higher. May lead to cost savings	Has potential for political manipulation by politicians because the benefits are limited and while the beneficiaries could be many.

Source: Author

The immaturity of the democracy can also be blamed for the partisanship associated with the dispensing of social-protection assistance. Food aid and seed packs are channelled on partisan lines by both governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which leave the citizenry politically divided. This creates conflict between government and NGOs in which NGOs have been viewed by the government as working against it and the Government being viewed by NGOs as working against them. Furthermore, nutrition should have been the prime motive in Food-for-Work programmes in Zimbabwe, yet donors sometimes provided food in these programmes simply because they had surplus food to give and not because it was suitable.

These programmes also tended to destroy local production in cases where the food was imported. On analysis, therefore, cheaper free food may destroy the incentive to produce crops but can support food production if the food is sourced locally by providing an economic incentive for increased production. Pilferage, decay, theft and food passing its consume-by date are some the attendant problems associated with free food distribution.

Furthermore, while seed and fertilizer transfers have the potential to increase agricultural production, inputs, however, may end in the hands of the non-poor leading to elite capture. There is even anecdotal evidence in Zimbabwe to suggest that inputs were sold by beneficiaries for cash which was used to buy beer. This sounds stereotypical because some deployed the resources as intended but might still be true in some isolated cases.

All targeting methods have their pros and cons, which implies that when selecting a method a cost-benefit analysis must precede that selection in which the benefits must outweigh the costs. Table 3 below expatiates on the pros and cons of selected methods.

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of various targeting methods

<i>Geographic targeting</i>	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Administratively easy and simple to run	<i>Non-poor benefit – leakages/elite capture</i>
Cheaper to run	<i>Costly because non-poor benefit</i>
Reduced transaction costs	<i>Overall economic costs can be high</i>
<i>Individual/Household targeting</i>	
Attempts to assist only the needy	<i>Requires correct information on the individual/household making it administratively cumbersome</i>
Attempts to avoid leakages	<i>May involve travel to obtain benefits which may be a disincentive</i>
<i>Community targeting</i>	
Easy to run	<i>Destroys cohesion between communities – particularly between those that benefit and those that do not</i>
	<i>Assumes the community has the capacity</i>

<i>Cash transfers</i>	
Easy to administer	<i>Create dependency</i>
Affords beneficiaries choice	<i>Target individuals/households</i>
Helpful in a stable macro-economic environment	<i>In a hyperinflationary situation, the value of the assistance can be eroded before disbursement rendering the assistance worthless to obtain</i>
<i>Public works</i>	
Self-targeting	<i>Quality of outputs generally poor</i>
Low wages are provided	<i>Expensive</i>
Create new infrastructure	<i>Distraction people from own farm activities especially in the rural areas</i>
Labour-intensive	<i>Requires skilled labour especially for infrastructure such as dams, irrigation equipment</i>
Done in the neighbourhood	<i>Requires a lot of supervision with the necessary project management and technical design skills</i>
Developmental in nature	<i>Wage rate lower than minimum wage</i>
Emphasise local people	<i>Cosmetic work done/poor infrastructure created</i>
People assert right to employment	<i>Creates employer-employee relationship</i>
Selection criteria is established before hand – usually self-selection	<i>Potential for patronage</i>
Enhance social contract between the state and citizens	<i>Can be hijacked by NGOs to proliferate own agenda</i>
Enhance societal cohesion	<i>Work days are made short to cater for large numbers of participants</i>
Has potential to involve large numbers of people	<i>Massification of low-skilled vocations</i>
<i>Food distribution</i>	
Provides nutrition	<i>Can create dependency. Approach is uni-dimensional. People may need nutrition including other needs</i>
Logistics are focused on food distribution	<i>Creates logistical problems</i>
Requires robust administrative systems	<i>Breeds corruption in procurement and logistics tenders</i>
Set menu	<i>Food provided may be non-nutritional</i>

Allows production, procurement, storage and security to be involved.	<i>Administrative costs are high, storage, security costs have to be incurred</i>
Supports local markets if the food is locally produced	<i>Destroys local production and markets for food if food is imported</i>
Creation of robust value chain facilities	<i>Potential loss of food due to decay, theft, expiring</i>
<i>Agricultural inputs</i>	
Input distribution which may result in increased output	<i>Inputs sometimes end up in non-poor</i>
Increase productivity	<i>There is need to monitor use of inputs</i>
Inputs are a valuable asset for production	<i>Inputs are sold for cash</i>
<i>Agricultural inputs-for-work</i>	
Self-targeting	<i>May distract small farmers from own farm production</i>
Beneficiary may not sell own inputs	<i>Risk of beneficiaries selling the inputs</i>
Has potential to propel people out of poverty	<i>Uptake may be low</i>
<i>School/child feeding scheme</i>	
Developmental in nature	<i>May ignore the mothers and others</i>
Builds human capital	<i>Ignores those not of school going age</i>
Boys and girls are educated and children are retained in schools longer	<i>Could be an incentive to stay longer in school</i>
Politically supported by political leaders and communities	<i>Provides standardised meals and does not give options/choice in terms of menu</i>
Function can be outsourced to community	<i>Over-burdens teachers with the additional chore of feeding/additional funding may be required if outsourcing is done</i>

Source: Author

The duration of any intervention must rest on the approach to be used. For instance, for humanitarian assistance on the one hand, the intervention ideally must be short-term with a quick turnaround time. There must also be the capacity to deliver and clear lines of coordination as well as the necessary political support. On the other hand, for say poverty-reduction, the interventions must be of a long-term nature. The linkages between the dimensions

have to be clearly understood. For instance, the issues at the political and technical levels are inter-linked such that the required capacity has to be created depending on the scale of the operations and duration thereof which requires a political decision. This includes decisions to scale up or scale down operations.

Technical dimension

It can be observed that there are also numerous issues which are of a technical nature such as the timing of the intervention. Is it short-term or long term? Time-bound? Continuous? When should it stop and how should it stop? How should targeting be conducted? The issues at the political and technical levels are inter-linked. For instance, capacity has to be created depending on the scale of the operations and duration thereof. Who should be targeted (counting the poor) and how should targeting be conducted, are also pertinent issues. Table 4 below elaborates on the framework of the technical issues.

Table 4: Technical level issues

How should targeting be conducted?	<i>Means testing? Proxy testing? Geographic? Universal? Narrow? Indices? Conditional or non-conditional? Or any other method?</i>
Timing	<i>Continuous? Temporary? Time-bound? Persistent?</i>
Capacity?	<i>Are the technical, logistical, anti-corruption, supervisory, management skills available?</i>
Cascading of benefits?	<i>Transitory poor or chronic poor</i>
Exit strategy?	<i>How do beneficiaries exit the scheme? How does the programme end?</i>

Source: Author

Related to the issue of counting the poor is the issue of how to reach the poor when providing poverty relief. Social safety nets attempt to address the issue of reaching the needy with assistance whether for moral, socio-political or humanitarian reasons. They are normally government-mandated interventions to alleviate the plight of an identified group of persons. The interventions are not limited solely to government activities, but the scope of social safety nets can be expanded to include the activities of non-governmental organisations, civil society, the community, private firms as well as individuals.

Social dimension

The debates on the delivery of social protection also concern what Smith (2001:13) points out as to “whether safety nets should be designed primarily to address shocks (e.g drought years) or to raise incomes to relieve chronic poverty more generally”. That is, the issue is about reducing vulnerability, or reducing poverty or both? Or is it about creating jobs and providing skills or merely engaging citizens while governments attempt to wriggle themselves out of the huge social problems that confront them?

Economic dimension

The economic dimension relates to the quantum (costs), the funding models as these are fundamentally linked to the question: Who bears the costs and ultimately sets the agenda? Whose agenda? The benefactor would be asking about what returns they will be getting from their investment. What opportunity costs are incurred by the benefactors? And the beneficiaries? The economic dimension is also linked to the political dimension. For instance, should the intervention be disbursed/implemented before, during or after an election? Who gets what? What is the influence of the gatekeepers such as chiefs, councillors and the politician? What is the role of non-governmental organisations and the private sector? What do they get in return?

Legal dimension

The legal dimension relates to the fact that people have rights. The rights are guaranteed by the state. This dimension, when it comes to social protection, tends to bring in some element of entitlement. However, the rights come with attendant obligations and responsibilities on the part of all stakeholders.

Environmental dimension

The environmental dimension relates to the issue of conditional intervention such as agricultural inputs-for-work. This means that the work must be environmentally friendly and ensure sustainability for current and future generations. The same should apply to public works programmes.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

It is clear from this article that political, technical, economic and social issues have a bearing on the delivery of social safety nets. Countries in Africa face the challenges of how to protect the poor given an environment of harvest

failures, persistent food-price escalations, currency depreciation and food shortages making these challenges real. The frameworks provided in this article can assist in understanding the pros and cons of the various methods. Some of the key lessons learnt from the Zimbabwean experience include the need to interrogate all interventions for feasibility, efficiency, effectiveness, dependency-reduction, appropriateness, sustainability, gender-sensitivity, incorruptibility, provision of exit mechanisms (when interventions are temporary), administrative costs and adequacy of resources (for the scheme to be viable and doable).

For South Africa, the ecological circumstances and changes which include a post-apartheid dispensation with new policies and legislation, pressure on and breakdown of the extended family, prevalence and impacts of HIV and AIDS, heightened expectations on service delivery, a human-rights-aware citizenry, a strong non-governmental organisation sector - all of these circumstances need to be taken into account in pursuit of human development in South Africa and social work practice at the local level. Patel and Hochfeld (2012) acknowledge the important role played by the South African government in investing in cash transfers whose impacts have been felt at the individual and household levels in reducing chronic poverty and food insecurity. They also praise the government for providing traditional protection and therapeutic services including support to community development initiatives, income generation, local economic development and micro-enterprises development to enhance the livelihood capabilities of the poor (Patel and Hochfeld, 2012).

Thus, the issues examined in this article firstly, provide the backdrop and impetus to critically analyse the situation in a given context and to understand the socio-politico and economic circumstances under which the interventions will be implemented and, secondly, provide an opportunity to look for new tools which will help in addressing some of the problems confronting society associated with rolling out social protection programmes. Assessments of the impacts of social-protection measures in hyperinflationary environments such as those that were obtaining in the recent past in Zimbabwe beg to be done.

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