United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Accounting for Social Policy: Reflections on Recent Developments in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Draft paper prepared for the UNRISD Conference
New Directions in Social Policy: Alternatives from and for the Global South
7-8 April, 2014, Geneva, Switzerland

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Introduction

Accounting for the trends in social policy in the last three decades, as envisaged in the *New Directions in Social Policy* programme, requires that we start from where the last major research programme at UNRISD on Social Policy ended: the idea of *Transformative Social Policy.* At the heart of the transformative approach to Social Policy is a set of interlocking ideas. For the purpose of the task at hand, we identify four such ideas.

First is the recognition of the multiple tasks (roles or functions) of social policy. The UNRISD Policy Brief summarising the lessons from the *Social Policy in a Development Context* research programme identified four such functions: production, protection, reproduction, and redistribution (UNRISD 2006). We have argued that the "social cohesion" or the "nation-building" task (and tasking) of Social Policy has always been important, and particularly evident in early postcolonial African contexts (Adesina 2007). Complementarity of the different tasks is important for our assessment of emerging or new directions in social policy, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Second is the inherent interconnection of economic and social policies. Put differently, economic and social policies are usually defined by shared normative commitments. Third is the diversity of instruments in the social policy repertoire—an especially important issue in shifting the mono-focus on social transfers (direct or indirect). Fourth is the wider vision of human wellbeing and capability that is embedded in *transformative social policy.* Salient to these are the norms of solidarity and equality: vertical and lateral. The transformative power and objective of social policy are as much about the productive capacity of society as they are about social relations and social institutions. The norms of solidarity and equality are as much about social provisioning and redistribution between classes and generations as they are between men and women. As Mkandawire notes, social policy is:

> Concerned with the redistributive effects of economic policy, the protection of people from the vagaries of the market and the changing circumstances of age, the enhancement of the productive potential of members of society, and the reconciliation of the burden of reproduction with that of other social tasks (Mkandawire 2011) .

It speaks to the necessity of social policy to be 'prophylactic (Myrdal. 1932).' Social Policy involves a range of institutional arrangements. The institutional architecture of the social policy framework requires that we go beyond evaluations based on state expenditure, and of social transfers even so.

Framing the assessment of "new directions in social policy" in sub-Saharan Africa, we would argue, requires a reaffirmation of the injunction of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere that "we must run while others walk (cited in Mkandawire 2010)." This is not simply in things economic or technological but in simultaneously engaging the multiple tasks (and tasking) of social policy, with a much broader vision of human wellbeing than seems to be currently the case, using a diversity of instruments. It is an injunction that makes *transformative social policy* an essential policy and conceptual handle of the challenges we face on the continent.

In the remaining part of this "think piece", we assess the new trends and pattern of social policy on the continent, examine selected country-cases in terms of the problems that the current wave of social policy approaches are meant to address, and offer some thoughts on policy drivers and the policy community that seem to be shaping the agenda. Finally, we offer some suggestions on the issues that should engage the Africa segment of the research agenda on the proposed *New Directions in Social Policy* project.

Accounting for Recent Directions in Social Policy

An assessment of possible "new directions in social policy" in the African context broadly and "sub-Saharan Africa" more narrowly requires a starting point of diversity and variation in social policy architectures, the extent of the role of external actors in defining policy issues and shaping the policy landscape.

In response to the question on the emergent new directions in social policy, we would argue that in much of sub-Saharan Africa the most significant break is perhaps more with the pre-1980 social policy framework than a major rupture from the neoliberal policy regime that took root in the 1980s. Here, again the diversity of the current social policy architectures is important. In this sense, the policy continuity in the main Indian Ocean island states (Mauritius and Seychelles), and the relative continuity in the Settler Colonial Southern Africa (mainly South Africa and Namibia) stand in sharp contrast with the disruption and changes in the social policy landscape of several sub-Saharan African countries. Much of the latter was within the framework of the neoliberal stabilization, adjustment, and liberalization policy regime, and the responses to the large-scale entitlement failure (social cost) that followed in its wake.

Broadly, in several sub-Saharan African countries, the social policy framework of the pre-1980s was focused on social investment (education, health, and production activation), social transfers in-kind (education and health), pan-territorial pricing (fuel and food), affirmative action, and the nation-building tasking of social policy. Except for the two Indian Ocean island states and the Settler-Colonial states, transfers in cash were rare. The pension systems that were in place were more likely than not employment-based than citizenship-based.

I would suggest that the response to the large-scale entitlement crisis of the neoliberal structural adjustment programmes evolved in two phases. The first was largely based on "safety net" provisioning, framed as responses to the "social costs of adjustment" focused on the "most vulnerable and poorest". The second wave has involved a greater use of cash transfer mechanisms as responses to vulnerability (old-age, disaster response, etc.). The liberalisation 'reform stretched across a range of policy spaces. To highlight two—the switch from single-payer health care provisioning (largely through the fiscus) to individual health insurance, and the retrenchment of state provisioning of education in preference for increased market-led provisioning. In the second phase, there has been some rolling back of the more egregious liberalisation with accommodation for 'basic' provisioning in education and health.

Perhaps most significant in the second phase is the preponderance of "donor"-driven (bilateral and multilateral) efforts to shape the social policy landscape. This has involved a three-tier mechanism for driving the policy agenda: donor agencies mapping out the policy direction, international NGOs and consultancy agencies claiming to be research outfits (involved in implementation and evaluation), and a string of "local NGOs" created and funded by the top two tiers, with the responsibility for fronting the policy agenda locally. The latter serves, largely, to give local legitimacy to the policy framework as something being demanded by citizens of the countries.

Much of the research-consultancy activities have been driven by the "evidence-based policy" movement (Young, et. Al. 2002) involving pilot schemes and increasingly, randomized control trials. The ethical implications of the continued 'social vivisectomy' in Africa and the implications for undermining the social norms of reciprocity that have sustained many of these communities are matters addressed elsewhere (Adesina (2011), op.cit.).

Interestingly, in some instances policies that were initiated by national governments autonomously—and often resisted by the "donor-community"—would later become *cause célèbre*. The rollout of the old age pension scheme in Lesotho and the agriculture production subsidy in Malawi are two instances.

In very broad terms, the patterns in social policy that have emerged are driven by three core normative orientations of the period of ascendant neoliberalism; ***an aversion to***:

1. Coordinated, socialised provisioning and risk polling—especially with the state as the coordinating institution;
2. Solidaristic social provisioning and the mitigation of inequality, especially those involving inter-class redistribution; and
3. Universalistic mooring of social provisioning, regardless of the mix of targeting and universalism that shapes real encompassing social policy regimes.

In contrast to the broader framing of social policy objectives that one would find in the period before the 1980s, the most widely deployed instruments over-determines the 'social protection' task involving stingy, and highly restrictive targeting often for cash transfers purposes. In the sub-Saharan African context conditional cash transfer is less in use than non-conditional transfers. Nevertheless, vulnerability is often defined ex-post, with a focus on extreme poverty, vulnerability, and precarity. Even in instances of the revival of production-activation instruments (such as "agricultural subsidy"), the instrument of choice is targeting and a focus on "the most vulnerable households." Even in the narratives of the Social Protection Floor—the monotasking of social policy aside—the language of "basic" healthcare and education provisioning defines the 'floor'. This is in contrast to the broader healthcare provisioning of the pre-1980s in most countries in the region.

Much of the reform of the social policy architecture has largely been market-based, individualised, and fragmented. This is evident in areas ranging from non-basic education to healthcare insurance and pension.

On a note of departure for this section, it is important to note that over the period a sleight of hand has played itself out. "Poverty", you might say, "ain't what it used to be". Increasingly, what was understood as destitution (US$1.10 then US$1.25) has gradually slipped to replace what the Bank used to claim at the poverty line (US$2.50). These days when many of the people working in the field speak of poverty they may be (or are actually) referring to destitution. Perhaps MDG1 is the clearest example of the extent to which the UN's Faustian deal with the IFI has led to a diminution of vision. The poverty level referred to is actually destitution.

Against, the background sketched out above, we might wish to ask what has happened to poverty and inequality. We take the case of the two largest economies in the region to explore this question in the next section.

Poverty, Inequality and Unemployment

In the region's richest economy, Nigeria (Magnowski 2014), nearly three decades of the neoliberal reform would seem to have produced increased inequality and poverty. This is, in spite, of a bouquet of claimed cash-transfer schemes, pension reform, health insurance schemes, and so on. This speaks to whether the new directions in social policy that we see are 'fit' for the challenges of the 21st century.

Nigeria's Rising Tide of Inequality

If we take the relatively share of income between different deciles and quintiles the picture is one of growing inequality (cf. Table 1). Between 1986 and 2010 the share of the lowest 10 per cent declined from 2.47 per cent to 1.75 per cent, while the share of the bottom 20 per cent declined from 6.02 per cent to 4.41 per cent over the same period. By contrast the share of the top 20 per cent grew from 45.01 per cent to 54.01 per cent between 1986 and 2010. Similarly, the share of the top 10 per cent grew from 28.21 per cent in 1986 to 38.23 per cent in 2010.

No other country in West Africa has the level of inter-decile inequality that Nigeria exhibits. It could, of course, be argued that none of its neighbours has the wealth of Nigeria. Even so, compared with the world's richest countries of the world Nigeria's inequality offers no comfort. The top 10 per cent in the United States takes 29.85 per cent of the income share;

21.69 per cent in Japan, and 22.18 per cent in Sweden. One has to get to the former Settler Colonial countries of Southern Africa and Latin America to experience higher levels of inequality.

Even so, it is important to keep in mind the constraints of this measure of inequality. First, it is focused on size distribution of income. Even if you could capture the income share of the rich and the powerful it would be more on the wage-side and would tell us little about (extended) functional income distribution. Second is the problem of accurately capturing the data for those within the top decile; it is a lot easier for the rich to “hide” their wealth than the very poor. Congealed wealth in terms of assets that can be passed on inter-generationally are more difficult to capture. In the Nigerian context, the challenge of an accurate measure of income inequality is compounded by the phenomenon of illicit flow of resources.

Table 1: Income Share (Deciles and Quintiles)

Year	Lowest 10per cent	Lowest 20per cent	Second 20per cent	Top 20per cent	Top 10per cent
1986	2.47	6.02	10.41	45.01	28.21
1992	1.42	4.00	8.80	49.37	31.53
1996	1.89	5.00	9.12	52.11	37.10
2004	1.99	5.13	9.67	48.61	32.42
2010	1.75	4.41	8.27	54.01	38.23

Source: Index Mundi (Accessed 18 November 2012).

Poverty and the Rising Tide of Mass Entitlement Failure

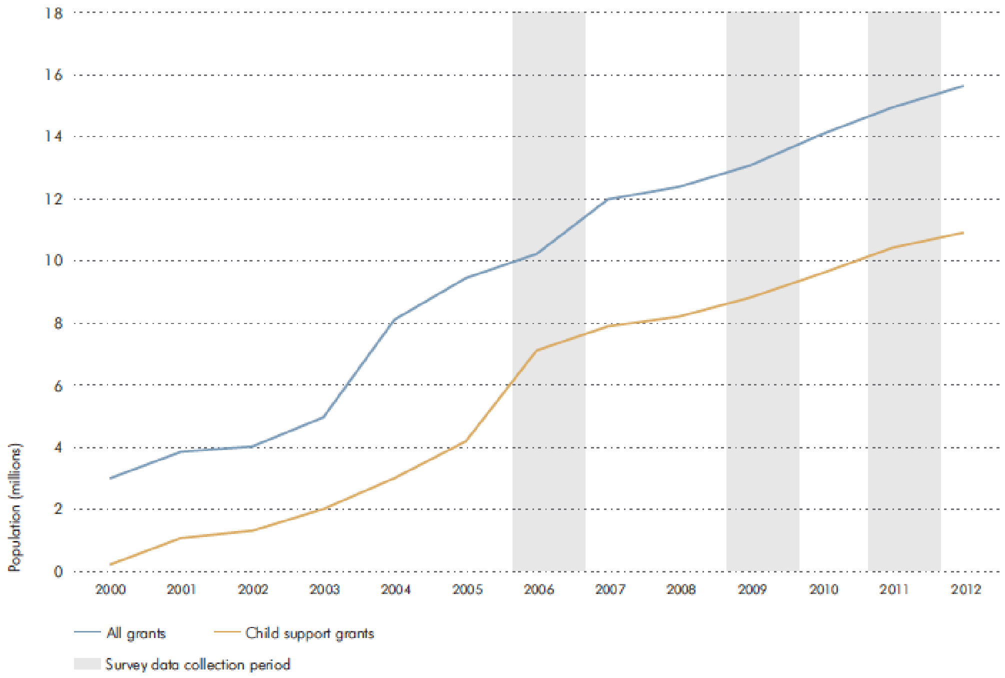
It is perhaps on the poverty-side of the phenomenal growth in human insecurity that the magnitude of the crisis becomes clearer. The 2012 poverty report released by the National Bureau of Statistics puts the number of Nigerians living in ***abject poverty*** in 2010 at 61 per cent or about 112.47 million people. This is up from 54 per cent in 2004 (or 68.7 million people). The rise in the level of poverty between 2004 and 2010 put paid to the prospect of a sustained decline in poverty that was initially signalled when the proportion of people in abject poverty declined from 65.6 per cent in 1996 to 54.4 in 2004; even though the number of people in abject poverty rose from 67.11million in 1996 to 68.7million in 2004. In other words, precisely at the time when the Nigerian economy was growing at an average of more than 6 per cent per annum (the magic number that Neoclassical economists assured us that ‘trickle down’ will be triggered), 31.3 million Nigerians fell into destitution. For the same year (2010), the World Bank put the proportion of Nigerians living in poverty at 84.5per cent of the population.

The scale of the inter-temporal mass decline into poverty is perhaps best understood when we take a much longer-term view. In 1980, the incidence of absolute poverty was 28.1 per cent and a relative poverty estimate of 27.2 per cent in Nigeria or 17.1 million. In other words, the number of people in relative abject poverty grew by a factor of 4.5; with 84.74 million additional people falling into poverty. The scale of this mass entitlement failure is perhaps best understood in the disruption to the structure of incentive in the country. It used to be assumed that if you strived for education and you work your way out of poverty, then you can disrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Yet if we take households headed by people with secondary education as an example, the grim nature of the failure of human security becomes particularly disturbing. Poverty within this class of households grew from 7.6 per cent in 1980 to 44.3 per cent in 2004. The proportion of those defined, in relative poverty terms, as non-poor declined from 72.8 per cent in 1980 to 31.0 per cent in 2010.

Inequality and Poverty: South Africa

In the immediate period of post-1994, South Africa's social policy regime was shaped by adverse fiscal outlook and the retrenchment of social democratic aspirations within the governing party (the African National Congress). This was perhaps most apparent with the replacement of the State Maintenance Allowance (meant for mother and child) with the Child Support Grant. As Lund noted, the choice of "grant" rather than "benefit" was not accidental; it was to signal that this was not a citizenship-based entitlement (Lund 2008). Nonetheless, the country has seen a dramatic increase in the disbursement of social grants, driven in large part by the number of Child Support Grant recipients (cf. Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Social Grants Disbursed (2000 - 2012)



Source: StatsSA 2014

Beyond cash transfer (social grants), the government claimed in its 2013 MDG Country Report that it spends about 60per cent of its total expenditure on social wage (Government of South Africa 2013). This ranges from basic provision of water, electricity, and housing, to "no-fee schools" for the ultra-poor. Nonetheless, the levels of inequality remain extremely high (cf. Figure 2), and the latest poverty estimate released by Statistics South Africa suggests a decline in poverty rate from 57.2per cent in 2006 to 45.5per cent in 2010 (Statistics South Africa 2014). Similar to Nigeria, South Africa's official unemployment remains above 25 per cent.

Figure 2: Income Inequality in South Africa (Gini)

Whole population	All races	African	Coloured	Asian/Indian	White
1993	0.67	0.55	0.43	0.46	0.42
2000	0.67	0.61	0.53	0.50	0.47
2008	0.70	0.62	0.54	0.61	0.50

Source: Child Gauge 2012

While a favourite exemplar in much of the advocacy policy merchandising work in the region, the South African social policy architecture remains extremely incoherent, and

reflects several of the attributes of the neoliberal social policy reform mentioned earlier. Outside of the CSG, the Old Age Pension, and Disability Grant, there is little or no coverage available for people between the ages of 18 and 60 years. The only area of universalistic aspiration and solidarity-based provisioning is the work-in-progress National Health Insurance—which has a 14-year plan to reach full implementation.
South Africa's labour market situation remains quite grim in the high levels of precarious employment in the service sectors, and the persistence of migrant labour system in the mining industry. Contestation over a production regime anchored on low wage and the migrant labour system was responsible for the massacre of striking workers in 2012 at the Lonmin operations in Marikana. In 2014, the platinum mines are in the grips of the longest strike in the history the sector. The strike started on 23 January 2014 and persists through 7 April 2014, with no prospect of resolution. In an environment where mine workers earn as low as R5 000 a month (post-Lonmin settlement), executive pay was as high as R17.8 million per annum at Amplats, R13.85 million at Lonmin. At Gold Fields, it was R45.33 million (Steyn 2013).

Policy Drivers of the New Trend in Social Policy

It is useful at this stage to reflect briefly on the issue of the key policy drivers of the new trend in social policy in the region. While in the 1980s and the early 1990s, the policy drivers were largely the Bretton Woods Institutions there has been a shift in the community of advocacy driving the new social policy agenda. In the first phase, the contestation for policy dominance was often between the World Bank and the IMF on the one side and agencies such as the ILO, WHO, and UNICEF on the other hand. We would suggest that in at least two senses, there has been a change in the policy landscape.

First, over the last ten years, a number of European bilateral (national) agencies have assumed the leading role as drivers of the social policy agenda in the region, using the levers of aid and grants. Secondly, we would argue that in the effort to re-centre itself and its policy influence, the United Nations has in fact shifted in making common cause with the IFIs. In this regard, we would refer to the significant differences (in orientation and instruments) between the *Millennium Declaration* and the *Millennium Development Goals*. The latter, we would argue was the outcome of a Faustian deal reached with the Washington-based institutions. As H-J Chang (2010) reminds us, "how development has disappeared from today's development discourse." The MDGs are an important example of this.

As we mentioned earlier, the second and third layers of policy drivers is made up of the army of consultant-researchers, funded by the bilateral agencies vigorously and commissioned to find evidence to support the efficacy of the policy choices already made about the nature of social policy reforms. Along these are the international NGOs, funded by the bilateral agencies, and have the responsibility of implementing pilot schemes that the consultant-researchers