



Social Protection through the Mirror Glass, By Daniel Kumitz¹

Thankfully social protection has been talked about a lot more recently. But not all parties refer to the same understanding of social protection. Social protection is a rather broad concept and begs clear definition. Social protection is about providing for those in society unable to provide for themselves, the poor, the incapacitated; the unemployed, those not supposed to work, such as children and women during maternity. Social protection thus deals with life's contingencies and provides a floor or safety net to keep people from falling into poverty. Society as a whole is easily able to shoulder burdens, collectively, which could crush the livelihood of individual persons or families. In a capitalist world where individual fortune is often decided by market forces far from our control (often even far from the countries we live in), social protection is thus most relevant in protecting human dignity and the human right to social security.

In low income countries like most of SADC, social protection has become particularly prominent through new poverty reduction programmes, the social cash transfers. This is both an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity is that finally SADC countries may look after their poor and not hide behind trickle-down rhetoric. The threat is that this may herald a set-up where traditional social security in form of social insurance (pension funds, unemployment funds, workman's compensation funds) remains small and limited to formal sector employees, whereas the broad masses in rural areas and informal employment or self-employment are only catered to at minimalist levels with social protection as a disguise for new poverty reduction programmes designed to cushion the worst rather than to provide human rights.

The policy brief "Scoping Social Protection" which I developed for the Platform for Social Protection Zambia attempts to tackle these issues by exploring details of social protection definitions and analyzing conceptual and policy frameworks. Indeed, many arguments abound where to draw the line for social protection.

The ILO has defined nine minimum standards in Convention 102 of 1952 to deliver livelihood and income protection in eight cases of need (contingencies of the life-cycle): sickness (2 standards, treatment and income protection), childhood, unemployment, old age, employment injury, parenthood, maternity, invalidity/disability and widowhood/orphanhood. More recently in the ILO Recommendation 202 of 2012, "Global Floors of Social Protection" four minimum guarantees have been prescribed, regarding children, the able-bodied unemployed, non-able bodied persons and persons with disabilities and the elderly, all of whom are to have income security. As a cross-cutting

¹ Mr. Daniel Kumitz is a German sociologist and development and social protection expert. He works for Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Zambia and coordinates the regional social protection experts network SASPEN (www.saspen.org).

guarantee, everybody (not just the above groups) is to enjoy access to essential healthcare. This seems less than the 9 minimum standards of 1952, but the Recommendation specifically defines the guarantees as a floor, a bottom line. As such, a floor is a beginning or first step on the social protection staircase. The first goal is horizontal expansion to cover everyone (a situation we in the SADC are further away from than near), after which vertical expansion is to improve and add benefits.

The transformative model of social protection by Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Stephen Devereux considers social justice the overarching objective and outcome of social protection. It combines safety nets and springboards. Provision is immediate and helps people in need (social assistance), whereas prevention as social insurance prepares help in advance. Together the two form a safety net to keep people out of poverty. Promotion and transformation add a springboard to escape economic poverty and vulnerability altogether, by providing agricultural support, women's empowerment, microfinance or minimum wages. In this, transformative effects change the very social structures that produce poverty in the first place. For example, adequate maternity protection empowers mothers to overcome gender discrimination in other parts of life.

Ultimately, the main dividing line between frameworks is whether they view social protection as a tool to assist those who are in need or as the human right to social security (Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948). A rights-based approach considers recipients as clients rather than beneficiaries, expects no gratitude, but self-organization for social dialogue and places the duty on the state to ensure that every individual is duly protected, rather than targeting artificially defined target groups. While supposedly simple matters such as child and maternal mortality remain breathtakingly high in our region and need to be eradicated with broad measures, in all the efforts to bring social protection systems to our countries, we should also consider visions that see the potential of social protection to transform the very world that creates poverty and vulnerability in the first place. Social protection, then, is not an emergency relief for the world crisis in human welfare, but rather a vehicle towards a better world.