

Social Protection in South Africa: Building Back Post COVID-19 (Webinar hosted by DSD-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security)

Meeting/Project Name:	Social Protection in South Africa: Building Back Post COVID-19		
Date of Meeting: (MM/DD/YYYY)	8 September 2020	Time:	13:00 - 14:00
Meeting Facilitator:	Stephen Devereux	Location:	Zoom

Panelists			
Name	Department/Division	E-mail	Phone
Isobel Frye	SPII	isobel@spii.org.za	084 5081271
Lynette Maart	Black Slash		
Prof Alexander Van der Heever	Wits University		

Meeting Objective

Temporary increase to Social grants will come to an end in October. What will happen post-October when the current relief package comes to an end? The objective of the webinar is to discuss how South Africa can build better social protection after the end of the country's 6-month emergency relief measures.

About the DSD-NRF Centre of Excellence in food Security

DSD-NRF Centre of Excellence in food Security undertakes research to achieve a sustainable food system and realise food security & nutrition for all. The webinar series is for the purpose of strengthening collaborations and bring about change needed for sustainable livelihoods.

Focus

What social protection rights do people in South Africa have and has this been protected during the COVID-19 pandemic?

South Africa has a social wage

- Public services
- Raising the amount of existing grants and implementing social assistance benefits for people. between 18-59 ages as a relief package during the pandemic.
- Active labor market initiatives - public work services and skills development.

Socio-economic entitlements are protected in the legislature

- Section 27 of the Constitution makes provision for adequate food and water. Our constitution guarantees rights for all in South Africa.
- However, there are structural weaknesses in policies that excludes people from accessing social assistance – we have structural winners and losers and we need interventions to ensure social assistance is accessible to all.
- We do not have a formal definition of social protection and no policy framework has been developed around that.

What has the COVID-19 crisis revealed?

- The pandemic has identified the gap in social protection for people between 18-59 years. This is worrying considering the high levels of poverty and unemployment- this was evident with the long queues for food parcels and the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grants.
- The UIF System needs to be reviewed- no integrated system for income support and to transition people from one employment to another.
- SASSA is poorly managed!
- Food parcel distribution was an absolute catastrophe.
- Absence of a proper functioning administrative system. Social protection is not designed to respond to crises, but it should be ongoing to provide more general support to people.
- Government cannot achieve social protection overnight- COVID-19 revealed little forward planning at national level.
- There is poor engagement with the citizens as we have no clear definition of what our social protection rights are.

How well were the government interventions implemented to provide social relief?

- Government introduced two new grants- the care-givers grants and the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grants. Additionally, there were top-ups to existing grants.

Major challenges

These grants are inadequate as they do not cover basic supplies people need to have a decent standard of living- R1200 per month would be a good start to cover basic needs.

- Access to SASSA has been a serious challenge-long travel time, long queues.
- Outdated database.
- Automated response messages sent to grant applicants.
- Problems with eligibility criteria- those who received income in the last 18 months were not eligible.
- Social Relief of Distress grant is just a starting point but not a coherent solution to provide income support to unemployed working age people.
- We urgently need social assistance for the unemployed.
- The care giver's grant should be a permanent component to compliment the Child Support Grant.

- SA's current social protection is premised on the Apartheid system. People from working age population were given social assistance for the first time during this pandemic.
- There is a need for demand from poor communities.

Moving forward post-October

-Government has recognized that we have structural problems which cannot be solved only by 'trickle-down' economic interventions, but we also need social interventions in place like BIG.

- Basic Income Support- Top-ups should be made permanent. The 18-59 age group should be given social assistance and the Care giver's grant should remain permanent.

-Political-economy- we need better co-ordination between the Department of Social Development and National Treasury.

-We need to include people's voices in exclusionary spaces to ensure meaningful solutions. South Africa cannot afford to not have a basic income grant.

- Fiscal position of government has worsened since the beginning of the year so government is likely to argue that they cannot afford to increase grants. However, we need interventions that will allow for incremental expansion- evidence has shown the multiplier-effects of fiscal stimulus. It is not about taking from one person to give to another but ensuring that everyone has their needs met.

- Do we concentrate income support at individual level or house-hold level? We need to consider gender-dynamics in the home and who makes the decision. Hence individual income support could likely result in greater economic independence for women.

Main takeaways of the meeting

- Basic income support for people between 19-59 years is a realistic possibility.
- We need a clear legal framework for social protection in South Africa.
- There needs to be political will to implement adequate social protection.