

Social Protection Initiatives for Zimbabwe's Vulnerable Groups: Lessons from sub-Saharan African Region.

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the theme of Zimbabwe's social protection for the poor, with particular focus on what lessons, if any, the country can learn from the sub-Saharan African region. A number of countries within the Sub-Saharan African region appear to have fared better than Zimbabwe in respect of provision of social protection, especially for vulnerable groups. At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe pledged to promote a viable social protection system that would be predicated on the principles of social justice and equality of opportunity. Nearly four decades later, an analysis of the country's overall performance in this regard suggests otherwise; in fact, over the last couple of decades, in particular, vulnerable groups across the country appear to have been short-changed. While on paper, a number of social protection programmes targeting the poor are in place, the reality is that many of these have performed rather dismally and hence, numerous deserving poor citizens have not benefited from the schemes. The question that then begs is: What lessons can Zimbabwe draw from the experiences of the sub-region to facilitate more efficient rolling out of social protection programmes for the benefit the country's vulnerable groups?

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Introduction

Social protection can be formal or non-formal. Formal social protection has been defined in various African Union (AU) documents as a "package" of policies and programmes whose aim is to reduce poverty and vulnerability of large segments of the population, through a 'mix' of policies/programmes that promote efficient labour markets, reduce people's exposure to risks, and contribute to enhancing their capacity to protect and cover themselves against lack or loss of adequate income, and basic social services (Pasgr.org, 2011). The AU further explains that the minimum package of essential social protection should cover essential health care, as well as benefits for children, for informal workers, the unemployed, older persons and persons with disabilities. Devereux and Getu (2013: 3) observe that social protection has two fundamental components – social assistance for the poor, and social insurance for the vulnerable. In its widest sense, the term social protection thus refers to public and private, or mixed public and private measures designed to protect individuals against life-cycle crises that curtail their capacity to meet their needs. In essence, social protection therefore includes social insurance, public assistance and welfare programmes (Dhemba, 2007).

Across the world, the theme of social protection has gained currency over the last couple of decades. Internationally, advocacy for social protection as one of the key initiatives to mitigate the impact of the global economic crisis, has been spearheaded by the International Labour Office ILO in collaboration with other United Nations (UN) Agencies. To this end, the ILO launched an initiative it termed the Social Protection Floor (SPF) campaign which urges countries to promote

nationally defined strategies that protect the minimum level of access to essential services and income security for all. According to Muiruri (2013), the SPF is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ILO Conventions on Social Security, as well as other human rights instruments, and it emphasizes services and transfers. Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance, states that, “*Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization of resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his/her dignity and the free development of his/her dignity and the free development of his/her personality*” (NCHRE, nd). In the context of Africa, the African Union, taking a cue from the ILO, has spearheaded efforts at promoting social protection for vulnerable groups.

The Social Policy Framework (the Framework) adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2008, in particular, calls upon member countries to strengthen their social protection systems in efforts to combat poverty and hunger. The Framework further urges member states to do all they can to create full employment and decent work opportunities for all, improvement of access to education and healthcare services, promoting of gender equality “ensuring” the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in mainstream development (Muiruri, 2013). Thus, both the UN system and the AU have strongly advocated for the promotion of social protection for the poor. While it is a fact that social protection initiatives were in place even before these calls were made, the fact of the matter is the calls by the UN system (led by the ILO and the AU), have brought about a new urgency to the idea of promoting social protection for vulnerable groups.

In many countries in the sub-Saharan African region, the emphasis has been on formal social protection, with very limited, if any recognition of non-formal social protection initiatives, although the latter is part and parcel of everyday life for the vast majority of the populace. Consequently, in many of these countries, the definition of social protection apparently does not include non-formal (social protection) measures. Tanzania appears to be probably one of only a very few countries in the region where the definition of social protection incorporates non-formal initiatives. In that country (i.e. Tanzania), social protection has been defined as: *“Traditional family and community support structures and the interventions by state and non-state actors that support individuals, households and communities to prevent, manage, and overcome the risks threatening their present and future security and wellbeing, and to embrace opportunities for their development and for social and economic progress”* (Oduro, 2010:1). This elaborate definition suggests recognition of the dual nature of social protection systems. The current paper, however, essentially focuses on formal social protection measures. Let us commence by considering social protection initiatives in place for the poor in a select number of countries in the sub-Saharan African region (See table 1).

Social protection initiatives in selected sub-Saharan African countries

Many governments in sub-Saharan Africa did take heed of the ILO clarion call to promote social protection initiatives for the poor, and hence have either since introduced new measures in this regard or are in the process of strengthening their existing social protection regimes. According to Devereux and Getu (2013, 1),

“In recent years social protection issues have gained unprecedented momentum in Africa”, with several countries having either introduced or considering new social protection measures. The two authors cite a number of recent milestones towards a consensus on the need for social protection in Africa, including The Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action (2004), The Livingstone and Yaunde Calls for Action (2006), The African Union Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) and the Social Ministries' Khartoum Declaration on Social Policy Action Towards Social Inclusion 2010. As a result of these calls, many social protection initiatives are in place in the region and these include such measures as cash transfers, food aid, education bursaries, health insurance, etc. The idea is to then determine what lessons, if any, Zimbabwe might draw from the experiences of these countries.

One country that has heeded the call to vigorously roll out social protection schemes for the poor is Lesotho. In *Lesotho's*, case for example, a number of social protection initiatives have been launched over the years, and according to Gwimbi (2013), these have had varying degrees of success. The schemes include an input subsidies scheme introduced in 1980, which included provision of subsidized inputs such as seeds and fertilizers, as well as subsidized veterinary services. The schemes, however, have reportedly benefited mostly those who already possessed some resources. Another initiative, The Old Age Pension scheme was launched in 2004 for all patrons aged 70 years and above to reduce poverty. A study by Nyanguru (2007) established that older people receiving the old age pension in that country, had benefited through improved food consumption and security, access to income to pay for health care, education and transport and other necessities. However, according to Gwimbi (2013) the scheme covered a very

small proportion of the population. In Lesotho, yet another initiative has seen donors sponsoring emergency food and cash transfers especially during drought episodes and this against the backdrop of challenges such as HIV and AIDS. Gwimbi cites as a success story, the example of the Cash and Food Transfers Pilot Project, launched in response to the 2007/8 drought with support from World Vision, which benefited many desperate people in the country. Tangible impacts included a drop in the number of beggars, and the crime rate. However, challenges remained and these included resource scarcity and poor targeting.

In Kenya, following a general appreciation on the part of the authorities of the fact that an effective way to reduce poverty and vulnerability and increase people's capacity to manage risks and shocks would be through social protection (Muiruri, 2013:44), the government crafted, in the context of its social pillar, Vision 2030, a draft National Social Protection Policy. A number of social protection initiatives, as a consequence, were put in place, and these included public and private initiatives that, on paper were meant to 'provide income and consumption transfers to the poor and vulnerable, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized'. The initiatives ranged from free health services and free education at all levels, to non-contributory pension schemes in the government sector; food subsidies, agricultural inputs and petroleum products. Many of these measures however, ceased to exist in the 1980s at the onset of the structural adjustment programme (SAP), but a few have survived. The areas of concern for social protection have included risk, vulnerability and uncertainty – themes which are cross-cutting as they cannot be simply be relegated to dichotomies of wealth and poverty, the rich and the poor, or the haves and the

'have nots' (Hebo, 2013). While it may be true that in reality, "Existing formal social protection systems do not offer complete coverage and inevitably exclude most of the population (Muiruri, 2013: 44), the fact of the matter remains that the political will on the part of the government to realize this goal has been most evident.

Uganda is a signatory to the African Union's Social Policy Framework for Africa, and it is in that context that the government of that country has promoted social protection initiatives targeting the poor in the country. The government of Uganda has defined social protection as all initiatives from the public, private and informal sectors that support individuals, households and communities in their efforts to prevent, mitigate, manage and overcome a defined set of risks and vulnerabilities (Aggrey, 2013:215). In Uganda as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, vulnerability, poverty and exclusion constitute issues of particular concern. The government of Uganda has shown the political will and appetite to address these concerns. Over the years, interventions have included the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), the Pension Scheme and the National Programme for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (NPOVC). In 2010, the national development plan, NDP 2010-15 was launched and the government stated that the main objective in rolling out social protection programmes during the plan period would be to expand measures to reduce vulnerability and enhance productivity of the human resource.

The flagship programme would be the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE), a pilot scheme meant to focus on cash transfers. According to Aggrey (2013), in the context of SAGE,

the grants were divided into Old Age Grants (AOG), for poor older persons aged 65 and above, the Vulnerable Family Support Grants (VFSG) for labour-constrained households including those units headed by orphans, widows or people with disabilities. In efforts to come up with a coordinated approach, the Ugandan government designed a five-year Expanded Social Protection (ESP) programme. The Government and development partners have worked together in this regard, but scope and coverage of the social protection initiatives, has remained narrow and limited. Needless to state that in the case of Uganda, resources may be scarce but the political will and conviction have been evident.

In *Ethiopia*, the concept of social protection has been perceived to cover essential healthcare, benefits for children, informal workers, the unemployed, older persons and persons with disabilities. In this country, emphasis has been on the protective, preventive, promotive and transformative roles of social protection (Teshome, 2013). The selection of subthemes like protective, etc., suggests a thirst for comprehensiveness. The Social Security Agency was tasked with managing the social security package for civil servants across the country while the Private Organisations Employees Social Security Agency (POESSA) has the task of managing the private social security fund. In 2005, the government introduced the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) to address the challenge of chronic food shortages. Initiatives associated with this programme have included a public works programme for able-bodied, and direct assistance to the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, older persons and child-headed households (Teshome, 2013). The measures to address the plight of these children have included humanitarian assistance rolled out in times of disasters, mostly by NGOs. The government has shown an appreciation of the role of NGOs. Orphans and other vulnerable

children for instance, have benefited from cash transfer schemes spearheaded by agencies such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), while people with disabilities have received assistance from various NGOs. Other categories of vulnerable persons, such as older people have also benefited from schemes spear-headed by NGOs. While overall coverage by the social protection system in Ethiopia has by and large, remained limited in scope and narrowly focused essentially due to resource constraints, the government of that country has demonstrated seriousness of purpose in terms of ensuring social protection initiatives to address the basic needs of vulnerable groups in society.

Within the southern African region, Botswana has been hailed and commended for its long-standing commitment to state-led social protection measures, which have been hailed as being quite comprehensive by African standards (RHVP, 2011). Over the years the government of Botswana has managed to develop a fairly comprehensive and efficient social protection system. Despite implementation challenges and constraints, the social protection system in the country has proved to be quite robust and efficacious. It is not surprising that a number of scholars have hailed the social protection regime in that country as a possible model for Africa (RHVP, 2011). The schemes have included the Policy on Destitute Persons, the Orphan care programme, the Old Age Pension, a public works initiative called *Ipelegeng*, Community Home-based Care programme and the Vulnerable groups feeding scheme, among others. Notably, the country has 10 schemes altogether – in itself a major achievement for a country of just over 2,1 million inhabitants. Although Botswana's social protection schemes have tended to suffer from a number of challenges, including lack of coordination and poor implementation, targeting issues, ineffective utilization of

resources and lack of accountability, reviews have noted with appreciation, the positive impacts of the different schemes (RHVP, 2011; Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2012). The government of Botswana has also been hailed for the political will evident in its endeavours.

So much on examples of social protection initiatives that have been rolled out in the region over the years. The next segment of the chapter will focus on challenges countries in sub-Saharan region have faced in provision of social protection services to vulnerable groups within their borders.

South Africa has some of the most comprehensive social protection programmes on the Africa continent. This is to be expected given that it is the economic hub of the continent.

But perhaps more importantly, because the social protection is embedded in the country's constitution (1996). Section 27(1) of the post-apartheid constitution, Chapter 2 declares that everyone has the right to have access to healthcare services, (including reproductive health), sufficient food and water, and social security. Beneficiaries include vulnerable older people, vulnerable children, people with disabilities, etc. Programmes rolled out to address the needs of these vulnerable groups include the Child Support Grant, Disability Grant, Old Age Pension, Foster Care Grant (Chagunda, 2014). Both government and non-governmental organisations are heavily involved in rolling out the various social protections programmes. South Africa is one of only a few countries in Africa which is able to finance its programmes, without the need for international for external assistance.

Table 1: Summary of Examples of Social Protection Initiatives

in the Sub-Saharan Region

Country	Examples of Policies/Scheme	Benefits
Botswana Government & NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destitute persons programme • Orphan care programme • <i>Ipelegeng</i> • World War 2 veterans • Community homebased care (Ntseane & Solo, 2007) 	Benefits afforded by the various schemes include: Food and cash, school fees, uniform, clothing, transport, counselling, rehabilitation, grants for income generation, etc.
Ethiopia (Govt & NGOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POESA (Private Organisations Employees Social Security Agency) • PSNP – Productive Safety Net (2005) – food shortages Protective, preventive, promotive, transformative (Teshome , 2013)	Health care, child benefits, older people, disabilities Public works, direct material assistance to vulnerable.
Kenya (Govt & NGOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Social Protection Policy (fashioned in context of country’s Vision 2030). (Some of the schemes ceased in 1980’s SAP period (Hebo, 2013; Muiruri, 2013) 	Free health care, non-contributory pension, food subsidies, agricultural inputs and petroleum products
Lesotho (Govt & NGOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-pup scheme (1980) • Old age pension (2004)(70yrs) • Cash transfers (for drought). (Gwimbi, 2013; Nyanguru 2007) 	Seed & fertilizer, veterinary services, food consumption & security, health, education, transport assistance

<p>Uganda</p> <p>Gove and NGOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Social Security Fund • Vulnerable. Family Support Grant • National Programme for OVC • SAGE (Social assistance grant for employees) • Old age grant (65+) Aggrey, 2013). 	<p>Vulnerable families, orphans, widows, people with disabilities, older people</p>
<p>South Africa</p> <p>(Govt & NGOs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child support grant • Disability grant • Old age pension • Foster care grant <p>(Not all cash transfers means-tested (Chagunda, 2014)</p>	<p>Vulnerable older people, vulnerable children, people with disabilities, etc.</p>

Source: Author's own compilation.

Common features emerging from the above discussion include: that the task of social protection provision cannot be left to the government alone; non-governmental organisations and donors play a pivotal role. That implementation of social protection is always fraught with challenges, no programme is without its challenges; that resource scarcity is a perennial challenge. Finally there is always limited coverage as the catchment areas tend to be large, with some areas also not accessible by vehicular transport. The next segment briefly considers the challenges faced in disbursing social protection initiatives in the region in question.

Challenges and constraints of schemes

The social protection programmes in the selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa reviewed above have not been without implementation challenges. The challenges have included those

related to resource constraints and poor targeting, among a host of other issues. With many of the reviewed schemes, concerns have been raised regarding the question of sustainability. Programmes in the various countries have tended to focus on poverty alleviation rather than sustainable livelihoods (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2012). Exclusion of certain groups has also emerged as an issue of particular concern with programmes in many of the reviewed countries. While some groups, such as migrants for instance, have been deliberately left out of the equation (in countries like Botswana for example), in certain other countries in the region, some deserving candidates have simply fallen through the cracks. Other challenges include the observation that most of these schemes are modest in nature, a good number of them are means-tested and perhaps most important, there is varied commitment on the part of the states to promoting redistributive social security systems hence in large part, the schemes have ended up failing to contribute significantly to poverty reduction. Gadbaloe (2011) has pointed out that very often the downside of schemes was that many initiatives had created a dependency syndrome instead of empowering people so that they get out of welfare.

With the exception of only a few countries that include South Africa, and Uganda where social protection is embedded in each country's constitutions, most countries in the region operate on the basis of mere guidelines. This suggests that citizens have no meaningful recourse to the courts of law in each country, in the event they feel aggrieved. In the case of South Africa, for instance, the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of 1996, gives the power to enforce and adjudicate social protection rights to the country's courts, especially the Constitutional Court. In countries such as Lesotho, Ghana and Nigeria accessibility is expressed as merely a directive principle of state policy. Interestingly, only a few of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa can afford to self-finance social

protection programmes, and this worked out at only 4% of GDP in 2012/2013 (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2012).

Another limitation evident across the board is that in most of these countries, the social protection regime is not couched in a *social justice* approach. According to Plagerson (2014) where social protection is seen as an act of *justice*, it is rolled out as a *right*, meaning the state guarantees redistribution for the benefit of all concerned. In such a scenario, social protection is normally clearly articulated and embedded in the country's constitution, thereby firmly establishing the state as the provider and guarantor of social protection for its people. The constitutional provision would normally be backed up by an appropriate legislative framework which will help enforce the rights and hold government accountable. The constitution guarantees people's rights. Most of the reviewed countries have thus been found wanting in this regard as there does not seem to be a firm basis for aggrieved citizens to take their government to court, for example.

Even in the case of Botswana, whose social protection initiatives have been hailed as being among the best on the African continent, the social protection system is still based on statutory arrangements provided by the state through policies and legislation (Ntseane & Solo, 2007). RHVP (2011:7) too has corroborated this observation by stating that most of Botswana's social protection initiatives are provided through policy guidelines rather than being imbedded in a proper rights-based approach. Hence, with the exception of a couple of countries, social protection provision in the sub-region is not explicitly embedded in the constitutions. This suggests lack of a clear legal framework to drive the social protection process forward. This obviously makes it difficult to facilitate enforcement of the rights and at the same time providing an avenue to hold government accountable.

Be that as it may, with most social protection programmes in the

countries reviewed above, positives include the fact that schemes are functional, political will on the part of the government is evident, and generally there is harmony between state actors and non-state actors, in particular non-governmental organizations. Let us now turn to Zimbabwe's experience in regard to rolling out of social protection programmes for vulnerable groups.

Brief Historical Overview of Social Policy in Zimbabwe.

In order to better appreciate the state of Zimbabwe's social protection system as it pertains to the poor, it will be important to begin by giving a brief historical overview of the socio-economic and political situation of the country. Zimbabwe's social policy regime has gone through 4 key phases, and these have naturally impacted the shape and scope of social protection initiatives as they impact the poor, at each phase. The pre-independence phase can be subdivided into the traditional and the colonial eras (1890 to 1979). Traditionally, people survived on the basis of non-formal social protection initiatives, which included heavy reliance on the extended family network, and also other innovative measures such as the *Zunde raMambo* (chief's granary) concept. The dawn of the colonial era in 1890 saw the gradual launching of a formal social protection system. During the colonial period, socio-economic policies were characterised by apartheid South Africa-type "dualism", where the government promoted separate development based on one's skin colour. The colonial social protection system inevitably, followed a similar pattern, with the white settlers enjoying a far superior social protection system to that afforded the black majority. The country forsook colonial rule in 1980, and this event took the country to a new level. Phase 2 (1980-1990), saw the independence government promulgate a raft of socio-economic policies that were based on socialist, egalitarian philosophy, and this ushered in an 'incremental' model of social protection, characterised by expansion of social welfare services to the poor majority (Hall & Mupedziswa, 1995).

The third phase (1990-2000) saw the government introduce the Economic Structural Adjustment (ESAP) programme, at the urging of the international finance institutions, which ushered in social policies that had the effect of impoverishing the generality of the population. This programme was launched because the government had begun to struggle to keep the economy afloat. Challenges faced at the time of the launch of ESAP included a perennial shortage of foreign currency, shortage of skilled human-power, transport bottlenecks, with the impact of HIV and AIDS adding to the many woes (Ushamba, A & Mupedziswa, 2008). These developments resulted in a marked shrinking of the country's social protection system, and naturally it was vulnerable groups that suffered the most.

Phase 4 (2000 – date) in the historical unfolding of social policy in Zimbabwe has been characterised by total economic meltdown. The launching of the controversial land reform programme coupled with the violence that followed the presidential elections conducted in 2000, set the stage for an economic freefall of unprecedented levels which the country is still reeling under to this day (Mupedziswa, 2009). Predictably, this has had an enormous negative impact on social protection services provision in the country.

Brief Overview of Current Socio-economic State of Affairs

Post the ESAP period, cuts in public spending coupled with the introduction of cost-recovery measures have meant living standards have dropped rather dramatically since 2000. The country has metamorphosed from being the 'bread basket' of the region to being a pathetic economic 'basket case'. Challenges have included unprecedented levels of unemployment and perennial cash shortages as well as lack of foreign currency reserves. Poverty has proved endemic with vulnerable groups such as orphaned children, people with disabilities and older people suffering the most (Mupedziswa & Mushunje, 2012).

State-funded social services such as health, education, housing and social welfare, have suffered irreparable harm. While the government has persistently blamed economic sanctions imposed on the country by the international community (following the chaotic land reform programme), it is evident that corruption and maladministration have played a major role. The country's 'fall from grace' has been rather spectacular, and the situation continues to worsen. For instance, while in 2007 the official rate of inflation, dubbed the highest in the world, stood at 165 000 per cent, by 2009 IRIN (the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) was reporting that Zimbabwe's inflation had climbed to a whooping '6.5 quindeillion percent' (cf. Mupedziswa, 2009). Although political changes that ushered in the so-called 'inclusive government' (which involved the ruling Zanu Pf party sharing power with members of opposition Movement for Democratic Change - MDC political party), and the introduction of a multi-currency system did somewhat help halt the rampant inflationary pressures, the country's economy never fully recovered. Today the situation is much worse with unemployment figures reportedly hovering at over 90%, and banks being unable to dispense any meaningful amounts of cash on demand.

In Zimbabwe today, vulnerability and social exclusion constitute issues of particular concern, among both rural and urban residents. Vulnerable groups currently face a plethora of challenges including limited access to health and decent shelter, limited education opportunities for their children, and above all, they struggle immensely to put food on the table. As noted earlier, poor management and corruption among a host of other challenges, have been identified as the key causal factors where the crippled economy is concerned. It is in this unsavoury, suffocating environment that the social protection system in Zimbabwe currently plays out. Let us now consider the key issues in respect of the social protection regime in Zimbabwe today.

Social Protection Regime in Place in Zimbabwe Today

Zimbabwe's social protection regime today can be divided into two – formal and non-formal system. Some of the non-formal schemes, with the exception of remittances perhaps, do pre-date the modern (formal) schemes, and these non-formal 'schemes' by definition, operate outside normal regulations. As table 2 shows, the non-formal schemes have included *Zunde raMambo*, remittances, burial societies and savings clubs (Gandure, 2009). Traditionally, the *Zunde raMambo* (chiefs granary) concept involved people working in a common field owned by the chief. The harvest so generated would then be mobilised and kept in the chief's granary for distribution especially to the poor in times of need (e.g. when there was drought) (Kaseke, Gumbo & Dhemba, 1998). Apart from the *Zunde raMambo* concept which strictly speaking is no longer in popular use, the other initiatives continue to operate today.

Table 2: Non-formal Social Protection Initiatives in Zimbabwe

With regard to the (formal) social protection system, Chirisa

Intervention	Provider	Type
Zunde raMambo – Chief's Granary	Communities	Food aid – collective production of relief food supply
Remittances	Households	Cash and in kind
Burial Societies and	Communities	Community based social insurance – cash or material support
Savings Clubs	Communities	Community based social insurance – cash or material support

Source: Gandure (2009).

(2013) has noted that in the context of Zimbabwe, the schemes can be classified into three broad categories, namely social security, income security and social safety nets. The social safety nets comprise basic programmes that merely facilitate coping, such as education and health fee waiver schemes, drought relief and food distribution schemes (Kaseke, Gumbo & Dhemba, 1998). Income security initiatives have included mitigation measures like seed packs, heifer schemes, price subsidies, public works programmes and drought relief and food distribution (Gandure, 2009). Thus, as tables 3 and 4 show, the social protection initiatives in Zimbabwe focus on such broad areas as health, education, employment, food security, disabilities and death.

Table 3: Social protection in education, health and labour sectors of Zimbabwe

Education Sector		
Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM)	Govt – DSS	Cash for school and exam fees and levies
Support to Children in Difficult Circumstances	Govt – DSS	Monthly cash transfers and material (eg wheelchairs)
Block Grant Scheme	NGOs	Cash
Resource Exchange System	NGOs	Material resources
School Feeding Programmes	NGOs	Food aid
School Fees Bursaries	Private sector (espec. banks) with NGOs	Cash
Health Sector		
Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTOs)	Govt – DSS	Fee waiver voucher (+ block grant from MoLSS to referral hospitals/ clinics)
National AIDS Trust Fund - AIDS Levy	Govt – National Aids Council	Awareness, prevention, orphan care, drug procurement
Home Based Care for HIV and AIDS affected	NGOs	Mainly food aid

Medical Aid Societies	Private sector	Voluntary insurance: cash
Labour Sector		
Pension and Other Benefits Scheme	Govt – National Social Security Authority	Compulsory insurance: cash – includes survivor’s benefit (pension or grant)
Accident Prevention and Workers’ Compensation Scheme	Govt – NSSA	Compulsory insurance: cash (pensions and other benefits)
Occupational schemes	Private sector	Cash: retirement, disability, funeral and death benefits
Taxation policies	Govt	Tax relief for vulnerable groups

Source: *Gandure (2009)*.

The various social protection schemes are administered by various bodies, which include the state and quasi-government bodies like the National Social Security Authority (NSSA), among others (See tables 3 and 4). For government, the key player is the Department of Social Services (DSS) whose officers are mostly by members of the social work profession (Ushamba & Mupedziswa, 2008, Mupedziswa & Mushunje, 2012). In terms of funding and related resources, the donor community has played a pivotal role particularly given that (as noted earlier) the country's economy has been on a free-fall for nearly two decades now. Challenges faced have included the limited coverage of the schemes which has resulted in the social exclusion of the bulk of the population. This has been a function of such factors as major resource constraints faced by the country, corruption, mismanagement and to some extent lack of political will.

Table 4: Social protection in the food and livelihoods sectors in Zimbabwe.

Intervention	Provider	Type
Food and Nutrition Sector		
Public Works Programme/Drought Relief Support	Govt – DSS – + local authorities	Cash for work and free cash for labour-constrained households. Works projects supervised by local authorities
Vulnerable Group Feeding	NGOs	Food aid (2005-06)
Food for Assets	NGOs	Food aid
Monthly Food Distribution	NGOs	Food aid to vulnerable chronically ill households
Livelihoods Sector		
National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children	Govt – DSS lead	Multiple donors (UNICEF lead) – NGO/CSO implementation: services, material support, food aid
Children in Especially Different Circumstances [possible reference to Children in the Streets Fund?]	Govt – DSS	Cash – monthly to vulnerable children – and grants to NGOs/CBOs
Institutional Grants	Govt – DSS	Per capita grants to residential institutions for children
Support to Families in Distress	Govt – DSS	Means-tested non-contributory public assistance – cash transfers and travel warrants
Maintenance of Disabled Persons	Govt – DSS	Disability aids, training, project loans
Care for the Elderly	Govt – DSS	Means-tested non-contributory public assistance for elderly in institutions

Transfers to Heroes' Dependents	Govt – DSS	Cash transfers
Unconditional Cash Transfers	NGOs (under DFID Protracted Relief Progr)	Cash transfers
Urban Food Voucher Programme	NGOs	Food vouchers (until June 2007)
Small Livestock Programme	NGOs	Transfer of livestock or livestock purchase vouchers
Market Assistance Programme	NGOs	Food subsidy through milling and retail of donated sorghum
Input Trade Fairs	NGOs	Vouchers for agricultural inputs

Source: Gandure (2009)

On paper, the list of social protection schemes targeting vulnerable groups in Zimbabwe appears quite impressive. However, the reality on the ground is that the social protection schemes, particularly those that are meant to assist vulnerable groups, are not operating as efficiently as they should (Mupedziswa & Mushunje, 2012; Chirisa, 2013). Challenges encountered as a consequence of the poisoned political and economic environment obtaining in the country have included limited resources and lack of capacity, poor targeting and the limited coverage of the schemes. As a result of these limitations, many deserving clients have often fallen through the cracks. Several commentators (including Chirisa, 2013) seem to suggest that the untenable state of Zimbabwe's social protection regime continues to deteriorate and has become worse than initiatives in other countries in the sub-region. The reason for this state of affairs is not far to find. Chirisa (2013) summed it all up by correctly observing that social protection in Zimbabwe has suffered from massive and severe economic and political strain.

The question that then begs becomes: Are there any lessons that Zimbabwe can learn from the experiences of the reviewed countries in the sub-Saharan African region? The last segment of the paper attempts to answer this crucial question.

Lessons for Zimbabwe.

While, on paper, Zimbabwe's social protection system as it pertains to vulnerable groups compares quite favourably with those of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa reviewed in this paper, in reality there are a number of valuable lessons the country (Zimbabwe) can draw from the experiences of these countries. From the discussion it is obvious that all the countries reviewed do struggle in regard to containing corruption in their implementation of social protection programmes, have to grapple with targeting challenges as well as maladministration. Also evident is the fact that most of the countries have to grapple with resource scarcity and hence end up heavily relying on the benevolence of non-governmental organizations. The structure of the programmes in most cases is such that the creation of a dependency syndrome (as opposed to creating an environment conducive for self-sustenance and self-reliance) on the part of beneficiaries of the social protection programmes, is not a far-fetched assumption. Yet these countries still have a number of object lessons that they can offer to Zimbabwe. The bottom-line is all these countries have not abandoned their vulnerable groups due to political bickering. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about Zimbabwe.

A key lesson for Zimbabwe relates to the role of political stability and solid governance in successful implementation of programmes. These two factors are evidently a pre-requisite for successful rolling out of social protection programmes (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2012). In Zimbabwe today, political

upheavals and uncertainty are the order of the day, with ordinary citizens feeling very insecure. Zimbabwe can learn from countries such as South Africa and Botswana, where promotion of the issue of civil rights is concerned. In South Africa, for instance, the constitution allows people to have their voices heard through demonstrations, etc. Ordinary people do participate in their governance, and they can freely criticize the authorities. Botswana too is a stable democracy whose structures (e.g. traditional decision-making institution, the *Kgotla* system) have facilitated citizen participation in decision-making (Mupedziswa and Ntseane, 2012). The presence of peace in that country has meant that substantial resources have been directed towards the social sectors, social protection programmes included. Yet in Zimbabwe, vulnerable groups, including informal sector operators, continue to experience the wrath of the authorities, whenever they try to express their concerns.

Political stability is paramount. In Zimbabwe the ruling ZANU PF party is currently split right down the middle with serious factionalism being the order of the day. The squabbling has been going on especially since 2014, and recently reached a crescendo with purges of prominent functionaries on the political front. The level of in-fighting has been phenomenal, and not surprisingly, this has had the effect of negatively impacting service delivery across the country. Politicians now spend more of their time denigrating each other, than facilitating development initiatives. The politicians spend precious time undermining each other's efforts, at the expense of the vulnerable groups. In some cases, members of opposition political parties have been caught in the crossfire. What is lacking is peaceful co-existence across the political divide. Members of ZANU PF for example cannot peacefully work (i.e. collaborate) on a community development project with members of the opposition MDC. Zimbabwe can

learn from countries like Botswana where political stability is the order of the day. It should be appreciated that without political stability the poor will continue to wallow in the quagmire of poverty, with little assistance from any quarter.

Another issue of concern has been the apparent lack of political will on the part of the state to roll out viable social protection programmes. Clearly, there has been lack of any semblance of appetite on the part of the policy makers to focus on resuscitating the economy. This has been partly because of such factors as rampant corruption, but also because many people in positions of authority spend precious time scheming on how best to undermine fellow party members belonging to different factions. Unfortunately in some cases civil servants have either been roped into the factionalism or have simply been ordered to do the bidding of politicians even against their better judgement. This has resulted in resources being diverted for personal political aggrandizement. It is not uncommon in Zimbabwe for civil servants to be ordered by powerful politicians to deny services to a certain category of villagers for the simple reason that they belong to opposition parties. This kind of behavior has been rampant especially in drought-stricken areas of the country where opposition supporters have often been denied food aid. In some cases the aid would have been provided in the context of existing social protection schemes. Thus, lack of political will (which has manifested itself in different forms, including in terms of rampant corruption and impunity) has not augured well for the success of social protection programmes in Zimbabwe.

In sub-Saharan Africa, a few countries (e.g. South Africa and Botswana) almost entirely fund their social assistance programmes from domestic government revenue (RHVP, 2011). According to Devereux (2010:3,) that is how it should be because “externally-driven social protection projects have little domestic traction”. However, the reality is most countries in the region have

to depend for resources on development partners such as the donor community. This is inevitable because of the challenge of resource scarcity. The countries that depend on the goodwill of non-governmental organizations do realize their own inadequacies and hence appreciate the crucial role that these agencies play in national development, across the continent. The difference however comes with regard to how these donor agencies are treated. Despite the country's heavy dependency on NGOs, Zimbabwean authorities are paranoid about the role of NGOs and hence they are constantly at loggerheads with these not-for-profit agencies. In many instances, the government has treated the NGO community as 'vermin'. The reason is apparently the unfounded suspicion that the NGOs are colluding with opposition political parties, and that together they are bent on advancing a regime change" agenda. As a consequence of the negative attitudes, some agencies have in the process, ended up with no option other than to curtail their development activities despite the desperation among the poor. Thus, an object lesson that Zimbabwe ought to learn in this regard is essentially the need to refrain from biting 'the hand that feeds' the country.

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