

A transformative social welfare model for South Africa: Lessons from the United States of America and Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Social protection is vital in ensuring that individuals and households escape poverty and livelihood vulnerability. Social protection presents a valuable means for governments to cater for the well-being and welfare of the chronically poor segments of society, especially their food needs. This article has two aims: firstly, it looks at the benefits and disadvantages of social grants as a safety net for vulnerable individuals and households. Secondly, the article advances the argument that the beneficial value of social grants can at times create a dependency culture on the part of the beneficiaries, especially if grants are long-term. The article therefore argues that conditional cash transfers provide a better form of transformative social protection, as shown in the United States of America and Brazil. These countries have well-developed systems of social protection that allow recipients to be self-sufficient and dissuade beneficiaries from using social benefits as a crutch and from becoming long-term beneficiaries. In South Africa, the right to social protection is constitutionally and legislatively entrenched. This right aims to ensure that those who cannot support themselves and their dependants receive assistance either in the form of cash transfers or food. Against this background, this article examines the South African social welfare system and its efficacy in promoting the transformative element of social protection.

Keywords: food security, poverty, protective measures, social grants, social protection, South Africa

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Introduction

Poverty alleviation interventions are necessary to meet both immediate and long-term food needs. The prevailing food needs of individuals and households are central in implementing poverty alleviation interventions. In other words, the government should ensure that the proposed interventions aimed at reducing poverty are relevant and achieve the objective of section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (the Constitution). The basis for such scrutiny when implementing food security measures is the fact that poverty levels vary from one settlement and one household to another (Taylor Report, 2002). In South Africa, section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution obliges the state to make short-term and long-term food security interventions. Section 27(1)(c) of the Constitution provides that everyone has the right of access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance. Again in South Africa, the common short-term measures aimed at food security and alleviating livelihood vulnerability take the form of social grants. Social grants fall within the broader measures aimed at social welfare termed “social protection”. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004:9) describe social protection as:

all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups.

In general, social protection consists of four elements, namely: protective measures, promotional measures, preventive measures

and transformative measures (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004:10).The most relevant element of social protection is protective measures. Protective measures refer to social protection interventions that governments adopt in order to ensure that the extremely poor are protected from poverty and lack through safety nets such as social grants (Devereux, 2010:1-3; Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004: 10-11). These interventions address the immediate poverty-related needs that affect the most vulnerable segments of the community, such as children, women and the elderly (McLean & Chenwi, 2009: 529-531; Goldblatt, 2009: 442-466). However, the protective nature of social protection has proved inadequate due to high levels of household poverty. The reason is that protective social protection is a “safety net” against livelihood shocks, such as lack of access to food, rather than an empowerment tool aimed at improving household self-sufficiency (Jones & Shahrokh, 2013: 4). It is therefore, proposed that social protection should be transformative in nature, that is, it should be provided within the broader ambits of other socio-economic programmes, because the current protective nature of social protection is limited to targeted income and other pro-poor transfers and does not empower households to break the poverty cycle (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004: 3).

This danger of social protection as a safety net is apparent from the number of social grant recipients in South Africa. The Living Conditions Survey 2008/2009 indicates that 58.7% of rural households relied on social grants for income during that period (Poverty Profile of South Africa: Living Conditions Survey of 2008/2009: 96).This situation has not changed much as rural households still rely on social grants as their main source of income (General Household Survey (GHS), 2015: 63-64). At least 21.7% of households nationally depended on social grants as a source of income in 2015 and rural households remained the most

affected (GHS, 2015). The GHS (2015) indicated that a high number of households in rural provinces relied on social grants: households in the Eastern Cape (37.6%), Limpopo (33.2%) and KwaZulu-Natal (28.0%) depended on social grants as a main source of income during the reference period.

By the end of 2018 there were almost 18 million social grant beneficiaries in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2018). It is therefore not surprising that one of South Africa's commitments in terms of the Rome Declaration, 1996 is to develop, within its available resources, well-targeted social welfare and nutrition safety nets to meet the needs of the food insecure, particularly needy people, children and the infirm. Principle 3 of the Rome Declaration (2009) provides that state parties must strive for a comprehensive twin-track approach to food security that consists of direct action to immediately tackle hunger for the most vulnerable. Paragraph 24 of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs) provides that state parties are committed to ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. Furthermore, everyone must enjoy a basic standard of living, including through social protection systems. Hence, Goal 1.3 of the SDGs provides that state parties should implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all by 2030.

These commitments align with South Africa's vision as outlined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (the RDP) of 1994 and the National Development Plan 2030 (the NDP 2030). The central aim of the RDP was to ensure the improvement of the quality of life of all South Africans. The RDP therefore set out the ten priority areas on which the government needed to focus to achieve its objectives of a better quality of life for all. The priority areas included the provision of basic services in the form of

nutrition, social security and social welfare. This called for an all-encompassing social welfare system that was consistent with section 27(1)(c) of the Constitution.

In furthering the purpose of the RDP, the NDP 2030 aims to inform government policy on eliminating poverty and reducing inequality. The NDP 2030 calls on the government to develop a comprehensive social protection system that will include the provision of social grants, since social grants play a vital role in alleviating household poverty, especially in child- and female-headed households (Nkosi, 2011: 89). This means that social grants as a food security intervention provide a formidable immediate strategy in reducing food insecurity in rural households, which is the result of unemployment and lack of income.

Therefore, this paper critically examines the efficacy of the protective nature of the social welfare system as it prevails in South Africa and its impact on promoting sustainable livelihoods and household self-sufficiency, and thus promoting the transformative element of social protection. The paper considers the role that social grants play in providing chronically poor individuals and households with access to basic amenities, including access to food. Firstly, the evolution of South Africa's social assistance programme is examined. Secondly, the role and beneficial value of social grants is discussed and examined within the broader concept of protective social protection measures, using existing literature, international instruments, regional instruments and case law. Thirdly, the transformative element of social protection is brought to the fore. Finally, the South African, the United States and the Brazilian welfare systems are compared in order to determine the implications of long-term social assistance to the poor. The United States and Brazilian models were chosen because they provide better models of social welfare

that prevent beneficiaries from using social benefits as a crutch and from becoming long-term beneficiaries.

The evolution of South Africa's social welfare system

Social security during apartheid

The social security system in South Africa spans many decades, with the first pension fund providing for retirement insurance for whites only (Van der Berg, Siebrits & Lekezwa, 2010). According to Berg, Siebrits and Lekezwa (2010) the reason for social insurance covering mainly whites was the fact that less skilled workers were generally excluded from social insurance. This meant that blacks employed in industries such as agriculture, domestic work and catering could not enjoy the benefits of social insurance cover. As a result, social insurance remained tainted along racial lines and catered for skilled workers. However, unlike social insurance, social assistance in the form of social grants was largely accommodative, with a variety of social welfare packages being available to different racial groups (Woolard, Harttgen & Klasen, 2010). Such flexibility in the distribution of social grants meant that households vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity obtained a minimal measure of relief from socio-economic constraints.

Social security post-apartheid

Despite the relief that social grants brought to the most vulnerable households, social assistance became available to all South Africans only in 1992. This paved the way for the inclusion of social security rights in the RDP White Paper, with the result that the democratic government included social security and social welfare rights as one of the ten priority areas that needed attention in achieving the objective of a better quality of life for all. As stated above, since social security and social welfare services have a direct effect on the right to food, there was a need to give proper

effect to their realisation. The importance of a social security system is summarised thus in chapter 7 of the White Paper on Social Welfare:

A social security system is essential for healthy economic development, particularly in a rapidly changing economy, and will contribute actively to the development process. In a society of great inequality, the social security system can play a stabilising role. It is important for immediate alleviation of poverty and is a mechanism for active redistribution (Department of Social Development White Paper on Social Welfare 1997, Chapter 7 para 27c).

The above provision indicates the crucial impact of social security services in ensuring that households, especially those that are regarded as poor, can achieve a minimum basic standard of survival and food security. In South Africa, social grants target particularly vulnerable parts of the population, namely the disabled, children, foster children, people who need care and the elderly (Brockerhoff, 2013: 10). Moreover, the impact of social grants has been meaningful judging by the number of recipients who have benefited from state grants.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme, 1994

When South Africa became a democratic state, there was a move to adopt and implement laws, policies and programmes aimed at social upliftment (Raewyn & Govender, 2001: 39). A prominent programme that gave effect to social and economic development was the Reconstruction and Development Programme, 1994 (the RDP). The central aim of the RDP was to ensure the improvement of the quality of life of all South Africans. The RDP laid down guidelines for address socio-economic issues: the equitable distribution and allocation of natural resources; developing the

economy and job creation; improving living conditions through better access to basic physical and social services; health care; education and training for urban and rural communities; and establishing a social security system and other safety nets to protect the poor, the disabled, the elderly and other vulnerable groups.

The problems that the RDP sought to address have a direct impact on the sustainable livelihoods of households and individuals and have the potential to plunge households into poverty and food insecurity. One objective of the RDP was to create an integrated and sustainable programme that would cater for the needs of the most marginalised members of the society and those previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies, in order to eradicate social and economic disparities. This meant that policies aimed at improving the lives of citizens and food security had to not only cater for the physical needs of citizens, but had to ensure that interventions aimed at addressing those physical needs would provide a long-term intervention aimed at sustainable livelihoods. To this end, the RDP intended to address nutrition and social welfare.

The need to address nutrition and social welfare requires policies and legislative frameworks to ensure their realisation and also required a coordinated policy that would cater for their short-term and long-term realisation, taking into account the varied needs of those affected by poverty and food insecurity. The RDP adopted a human rights approach in addressing these socio-economic needs that have a direct impact on the realisation of the right of access to sufficient food, by considering the fact that rights are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Hence, the RDP's goals were to eradicate poverty and deprivation by eliminating hunger; providing land, housing and access to safe water and sanitation;

ensuring the availability of affordable and sustainable energy sources; eliminating illiteracy; raising the quality of education and training for children and adults; protecting the environment; and improving health services. To achieve these goals, the RDP was fashioned to comply with prevailing international law and regional law standards as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948 (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, 1966 (ICESR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (CRC), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1984 (ACHPR). This compliance is also apparent from the legislative framework that has been promulgated pursuant to the RDP.

As indicated above, the two priority areas, namely nutrition and social welfare, have a direct effect on the realisation of the right of access to food and this involves the development of a fair and non-discriminatory social security and social welfare system that caters for all citizens. Since the social security system in place prior to 1994 largely catered for the needs of the white population, it had to be revamped (Goldblatt, 2009). The social security system was extended to all South African citizens and permanent residents (*Khosa & others v Minister of Social Development & others* 2004 (6) SA 505 (CC) para 80).

Section 27(1)(c) of the South African Constitution 1996 provides that everyone has the right of access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance. In other words, the state must ensure that those who are impoverished due to their poor conditions have access to basic needs, including food. Therefore, the White Paper for Social Welfare (the White Paper) was adopted in 1997; its vision was to develop a welfare system that would facilitate the development of human capacity and self-reliance within a caring

and enabling socio-economic environment (White Paper Chapter 2 para 1) 1997. One goal in the White Paper was to facilitate the provision of appropriate developmental social welfare services to all South Africans, especially those living in poverty, those who are vulnerable, and those who have special needs (White Paper Chapter 2 para 7). This meant that the state had an obligation to develop an all-encompassing social welfare system that included a structured social security and social assistance system.

According to the RDP (para 2.13.3), social welfare includes the right to basic needs such as shelter, food, health care, work opportunities, income security and all those aspects that promote the physical, social and emotional well being of all people in our society, with special provision made for those who are unable to provide for themselves because of specific problems. As stated in the RDP, social welfare encapsulates both social assistance and social security (s27(1)(c) of the Constitution). Chapter 2 of the White Paper makes provision for various principles, including the securing of basic welfare rights, which reiterate the provisions of section 27(1)(c) of the Constitution. In addition, paragraph 44 of the White Paper defines social security as a programme of social assistance with a uniform social grant system.

Chapter 7 of the White Paper provides a wider definition of social security that covers a wide variety of public and private measures that provide cash, or in-kind benefits, or both, in the following circumstances: in the event of an individual's earning power permanently ceasing, being interrupted, never developing, or being exercised only at unacceptable social cost and such person being unable to avoid poverty; and in order to maintain children.

Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004

According to the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South

Africa, 2002 (the IFSS) social grants provide an immediate form of relief to poverty-stricken households. Therefore, social grants play an important role in alleviating poverty in food insecure households. One objective of the *Social Assistance Act* 13 of 2004 is to provide for the administration of social assistance and the payment of social grants (s 3(1)(a) of the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004). Section 4 of the Act sets out the types of social grants available in South Africa: a child support grant, a care *dependency* grant, a foster child grant, a disability grant, an older person's grant, a war veteran's grant and a grant-in-aid. These grants assist households to some extent in meeting their basic survival needs (Brand, 2002: Lalthapersad-Pillay, 2008).

Nkosi (2011) observes that the majority of the South African children living in rural areas are poverty-stricken. She also states that most children in rural households receive the child support grant (CSG), which indicates the significant role that social grants play in alleviating poverty. According to a study conducted by Altman, Hart and Jacobs (2009) social grants are the most important contributors to reducing poverty and food insecurity in the poorest households of South Africa. Social grants also play an integral role in increasing overall welfare in African rural households, especially in the former homeland areas of South Africa (Armstrong & Burger, 2009). This indicates that social grants, although the amounts are negligible by international standards, provide an immediate source of income for poor households and keep such households from falling into deeper poverty.

The provisions of the *Social Assistance Act* make it clear that the different types of grants that are available are intended to comply with the requirements of section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution and the White Paper on Social Welfare. The purpose of such grants is to

bridge the gap between food-secure households and those who live in abject poverty, thereby providing for a minimum realisation of the right of access to sufficient food. In other words, social grants ensure that the government provides households with the basic essential form of assistance to lead dignified lives and to secure food. Therefore, taking into account the above discussion it is clear that the RDP has set a sustainable platform for realising all socio-economic rights, including the right of access to sufficient food. Hence, in realising the right of access to sufficient food and in considering any interventions aimed at alleviating poverty and enhancing food security at household level, the provisions of the RDP are very important, because the RDP sets the benchmark of what an ideal legislative framework aimed at food security should encompass. Furthermore, the RDP approaches food security as requiring a human rights approach, which means that the notion of the interdependence of rights in implementing poverty alleviation interventions is vital.

The role of social protection in promoting food security

In international law, social protection is an important food security intervention in realising the right of access to food. Accordingly, social protection measures act as cushions for individuals and families against economic shocks and other life contingencies, and enhance their capacity to manage and overcome the challenges that affect their well-being (para 3 of the Note by the Secretariat Commission for Social Development: Emerging issues: Social Protection, 2011 49th session). In addition, article 22 of the UDHR provides that everyone has a right to social security and is entitled to its realisation, through both national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the resources of each state. Article 11(2) of the ICESCR requires state parties to adopt programmes to ensure that everyone is free from hunger. This means that state parties should adopt programmes that will meet immediate food needs by promoting food security. Hence,

social grants present a vital strategy in achieving food security for poor households.

Poverty is viewed as a denial of opportunities and choices that promote human development (St Clair, 2006). The defining feature of poverty is that it entails the restriction of opportunities for a person to pursue his or her well-being (Kapindu, 2006; Mubangizi, 2007). Poverty diminishes human capabilities and renders the affected persons not only economically vulnerable, but also physically insecure (McMurray & Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Spicker, 2013; Laderchi, Saith & Stewart, 2003). Poverty has a human rights perspective and connotes a failure of institutions, communities and groups to respect the rights of individuals (St Clair, 2006: 21). This therefore calls for robust strategies that not only address the reduction of poverty but also enable individuals and households to be empowered to escape poverty (Fortman, 2006). One such strategy that ensures that individuals and households escape the poverty trap is the provision of social protection by governments. Hence, social protection has the following objectives:

- (a) to provide policy-led support to those outside the labour market, or with insufficient assets to achieve a secure livelihood;
- (b) to ensure basic acceptable livelihood standards for all;
- (c) to enable people to take economic risks to pursue livelihoods;
- (d) to ensure continuity of access for all to the basic services that are necessary for developing human capital and meeting basic needs; and
- (e) to facilitate investment in human capital for poor households and communities (Norton, Conway & Foster, 2001).

In other words, social protection reduces the incidences of vulnerability to lack and economic risks among the poor

(Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler 2004). Thus, social protection is a vehicle that assists those at risk of poverty with attaining a decent standard of livelihood (Jones & Shahrokh, 2013). Social protection also promotes food security by:

- (a) stabilising incomes: mitigating seasonal stress, managing risk and insuring against shocks;
- (b) raising incomes: promoting agriculture and enhancing rural livelihoods;
- (c) enhancing social justice: empowering poor farmers, pastoralists and landless labourers (Devereux, 2016).

This is important, especially for households that are food insecure and the members who are unemployed (Nino-Zarazua et al, 2012). Studies indicate that unemployed individuals join households of relatives who are grant recipients and use social benefits such as social grants as a means of livelihood (Ardington et al, 2016). Moreover, child support grant beneficiaries live with unemployed adults, with an estimated 31% of children living with an unemployed adult in 2015 (Hall & Sambu, 2017). According to Geyer, Ngidi and Mans (2018: 61) a third of households in the former homelands depend on social grants as a main source of income. Hart (2011) also observes that even in households that engage in agricultural activities, 24% of the households have a member receiving an old age grant and 59% rely on child support grants or disability grants. Sinyolo, Mudhara and Wale (2016) investigated whether reliance on social grants leads most rural households to abandon subsistence farming as a form of rural livelihood. This study revealed that, although 84% of rural households in KwaZulu-Natal relied on social grants as a main source of income, 78% of the households used these grants for farming activities.

The high incidence of unemployment among the youth also makes it difficult for households to be self-reliant; hence the increased

rate of households relying on social welfare benefits (2018 Quarterly Labour Survey Q3). In the third quarter of 2018, at least 31.6% of youth were not in employment, education or training (“NEET”). Therefore, social grants provide a profound economic pathway for the unemployed and reduce the incidence of severe deprivation (Omotoso & Koch, 2017/18: 9). Hence, the Constitutional Court in *Black Sash Trust v Minister of Social Development and Others 2017 ZACC 8* held at para 36 as follows:

The constitutional right to social assistance that for many, especially children, the elderly and the indigent, provide[s] the bare bones of a life of dignity, equality and freedom is directly involved, across the land.

This is because social grants reduce the incidence of inequality and food insecurity for the poor (Manamela, 2004:165). Old age grants and child support grants play a vital role in ensuring that children and the elderly have access to food. Households use child support grants for a variety of livelihood activities, such as school fees, purchasing food and petty trading, to enable households to access other basic amenities (Samson, 2009). These enable households to have access to food and to avoid absolute poverty (Twine, Collinson, Polzer & Kahn, 2007). In this way, social protection provides a formidable pathway for achieving Goals 1 and 2 of the SDGs, namely ending poverty in all its forms in the world by 2030; and ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

The transformative element of social protection

As a matter of principle, and to be effective in poverty reduction social protection programmes should go beyond the traditional three elements, which are protective, promotive and preventive (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). A new element of social

protection is that such programmes should be transformative. The transformative element views social protection as a pathway to providing social equity as well as protection against livelihood risks (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). Transformation is related to the need to enact policies that address the power imbalances in society that encourage, create and sustain vulnerability. The transformative element goes beyond the provision of social grants or cash transfers and seeks to address the factors that lead to social marginalisation and exclusion (Devereux, 2010).

According to Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) social protection feeds to other sectors such as agriculture and labour market regulations such as minimum wages. Social protection programmes are seen as livelihood resources that follow the safety net approach and seek to empower individuals and groups to tackle negative norms within the household (Jones & Shahrokh, 2013). For instance, in South Africa, one viable pathway out of poverty and food insecurity could be a combination of short-term and long-term food insecurity interventions (IFSS, 2002). Households could thus address imminent livelihood risks and have coping strategies for their long-term or future livelihood risks. The focus of social protection is to alleviate income poverty and manage livelihood vulnerability (Devereux, 2016). This means that households should be empowered, firstly, to enhance their incomes and, secondly, to be self-reliant (Devereux, 2016).

According to the NDP 2030 (NDP, 2012), social protection is a measure designed to lift recipients out of poverty; support the poor to develop the capacity to address environmental, economic and social risks and causes of poverty; cushion individuals and families from household-level and economy-wide shocks; and assist and support individuals to develop their own ability to

respond to shocks. According to the Taylor Commission Report (Taylor Report, 2002), an effective social protection policy must focus on capability poverty (health and education deprivations), income poverty (lack of earnings and other sources of income) and asset poverty (lack of access to resources). This entails an all-encompassing policy that attempts to improve livelihoods and encourage self-sufficiency by both individuals and households. According to UNICEF 2008 Report, social protection is not intended to create dependency but to empower those in dire need of basic necessities to participate in and contribute to growth and development. This is the rationale behind the adoption of regional instruments by SADC governments.

The purpose of the SADC Declaration on Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development of 2008 (the Mauritius Declaration) is to achieve food security through concerted efforts to increase food production and food flows across the SADC region (paras 1 and 2). The Mauritius Declaration recognises the need to adopt short-term measures to address immediate food needs. Paragraph 1(v) of the Mauritius Declaration provides that a priority area that needs to be addressed is developing and sustaining human capabilities through the increased access of the population to quality and appropriate education, training, welfare, social development, nutrition and sporting activities, as well as information. Accordingly, the Mauritius Declaration 2008 aims to support the SADC Code on Social Security of 2007 (the SADC Code). A major purpose of the SADC Code is to provide member states with strategic direction and guidelines in the development and improvement of social security schemes, in order to enhance the welfare of the people of the SADC region (art 3.1). Article 5 of the SADC Code provides that everyone in SADC who is unable to support themselves and their dependants should be entitled to social assistance, in accordance with the level of socio-economic development of the particular member state.

The above provision complements the Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights in SADC of 2003 (the SADC Charter), which provides for social protection. Article 10(1) of the SADC Charter provides that every worker has a right to adequate social protection regardless of status and type of employment. Article 10(2) of the SADC Charter provides that persons who are unable to enter or re-enter the labour market and have no means of subsistence shall be entitled to receive sufficient resources and social assistance. It is important to note that short-term measures play a critical role in supplying immediate food needs, especially for the chronically poor, as such measures provide for the minimum enjoyment of the right to food. However, the framing of these instruments suggests that social protection in the form of social assistance should only be part of a broader developmental strategy by state parties in curbing poverty and improving lives. Article 20.1 of the SADC Code provides that member states should recognise the links between social and economic development and should accordingly seek to ensure that social security policies and economic development policies are formulated in a complementary, integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that social assistance programmes benefit poor households in a variety of ways. The beneficial value of social grants includes:

- (a) *securing basic subsistence where family illness or death reduces income;*
- (b) *preventing children from leaving school because of an inability to pay fees or because their labour is needed at home;*
- (c) *preventing the sale of animals to pay for consumption; and*
- (d) *enabling investment in small livestock for food and income*

generation and increasing women's status and child nutrition by giving cash benefits directly to women (Adato & Bassett, 2009: 61).

The above benefits clearly address poverty immediately by ensuring that households achieve food security in its basic form.

Lessons for South Africa: The United States and Brazilian social welfare models

In order to shed light on the role of social security in alleviating poverty and enhancing food security the United States and Brazilian social welfare models will be discussed, using existing literature. The United States and Brazilian social welfare models were chosen because they have some distinct features that can benefit the South African welfare model. The US and Brazilian systems present a better model of social welfare that dissuades beneficiaries from using social benefits as a crutch and becoming long-term beneficiaries.

The American social welfare model

In the United States of America, the social security programme is the largest single benefits programme aimed at providing relief to retirees and the disabled and, as a result, ending retirement-generated impoverishment for a vast segment of the population (Kashin, King & Soneji, 2015). Social security income has its roots in the Social Security Act of 1935, which provided for unemployment insurance, old-age insurance, and means-tested welfare programmes (Martin & Weaver, 2005). The Social Security Act provided for two categories of benefits, namely social insurance (in the form of unemployment insurance and old-age insurance) and welfare programmes (Moffitt, 2015; Moore, 2008). Accordingly, the social insurance envisaged in the Social

Security Act of 1935 is underlined by five principles, namely: work-related; no means test; contributory; universal compulsory coverage; and rights defined in the law(Moore, 2008: 1063-1064).

These principles can be described in more detail as follows:

(a) *Work-related*: this means that for a person to qualify for social security, such a person should have contributed towards employment benefits. According to Moore (2008: 1066-1067) work-related benefits is an earned right in that there is a relationship between one's standard of living while working and the benefit level to earn income security on retirement.

(b) *No means test*: as indicated above, social insurance is an earned right and is not needs-based. Social insurance programmes provide universal cover against the risk of unemployment, disability, old age, and the inability to work (Ben-Shalom, Moffitt & Scholz, 2011: 6-11).

(c) *Contributory*: Workers must have contributed financially to the programme in order to obtain cover. Social insurance benefits are based on cumulative wages by the beneficiary.

In other words, this programme is financed by mandatory taxes levied on wages and self-employment incomes (Nuschler & Siskin, 2005).

(d) *Universal compulsory coverage*: this means that all workers within certain sectors are covered by social insurance. Nuschler and Siskin (2005) observe that, in 2004, the social security programme covered employers and employees for up 6.2% of their earnings amounting to \$87 900 on retirement. Furthermore, such compulsory coverage offers economic security to all workers without discrimination.

(e) *Rights defined in law*: this simply means that a person's rights relating to social security benefits are set out in law (Schwartz et al, 1991). This relates to the contributions that a person makes and the benefits derived. Social insurance programmes base eligibility on having worked a sufficient amount of time and having had a sufficient level of earnings (Moffitt, 2015). In other words, social insurance mostly caters for those who have worked previously and have contributed towards the programme. Unlike social welfare, social insurance is not based on need (Moore, 2008).

On the other hand, social welfare programmes are a form of social assistance aimed at food security for low-income individuals and families. One such programme was the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (the AFDC). The primary aim of the AFDC was to provide financial support in cash to families with “dependent” children, who are defined as those children who were deprived of the support or care of one natural parent as a result of death, disability, or absence from the home, and were under the care of the other parent or another relative (Moffitt, 2003). The AFDC programme later incorporated food stamps and recipients of AFDC were automatically eligible for benefits from both programmes. The aim of the AFDC programme was clearly to alleviate poverty at household level and to ensure that families enjoyed the minimum level of food security.

In 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (the TANF) replaced the AFDC. The TANF programme provides a cumulative lifetime limit of five years of cash support to needy recipients and requires them to acquire work at the expiry of the said period (Hildebrandt & Kelber, 2012). The goals of TANF were to reduce the number of people dependent on welfare and to increase the numbers of those who were employable. This meant that if people

acquired work skills they would be able to support themselves and their households. In other words, the aim of TANF was not to only alleviate poverty but also to promote self-sufficiency. Huang and Vikse (2014) state that although social assistance programmes do not necessarily have significant effects on poverty rates, they have had other important impacts on poverty, such as successfully combating food insecurity and hunger, and improving related outcomes for low-income families.

Despite Huang and Vikse's sentiments on the effectiveness of social welfare programmes such as TANF in alleviating household poverty and food insecurity, authors such as Trisi & Pavetti, (2012) view the TANF's role as a safety net measure as minimal compared to its predecessor, the AFDC. According to Trisi and Pavetti (2012) TANF's effectiveness in alleviating poverty declined due to the condition that recipient families should obtain employment within a stipulated period. This results in individual states in the USA selecting families according to their potential eligibility to secure employment. As a result, some families in dire need of social assistance are neglected (Hildebrandt & Kelber, 2012).

Social assistance programmes in America clearly have both positive and negative effects, depending on the manner in which governments approach the distribution of socio-economic benefits aimed at food security. A further conclusion that can be drawn is that funding for social assistance programmes should not be distributed indiscriminately with conditions that make it difficult or impossible for the potential recipients to access such assistance and as a result remain in perpetual poverty. On the other hand, social insurance seems to thrive because it covers employees and benefits are guaranteed. This enables those who are employed to avoid the poverty trap by saving for the future. At the same time, both social assistance and social insurance programmes in the US

system provide much-needed economic security for households and assist in reducing poverty.

The Brazilian social welfare model

The conditioned cash transfer programmes in Brazil were created in the 1990s (Brooks, 2015; Schmidt et al, 2017). The most prominent cash transfer programme is the Bolsa Familia. The Bolsa Familia has three main aims:

- (a) to provide income transfer to promote immediate poverty relief;
- (b) to impose conditions that reinforce access to basic social rights in education, health and social care; and
- (c) to provide complementary programmes aimed at families' development, so that they can overcome vulnerability (Martins & Monteiro, 2016).

Bolsa Familia aims to ensure a minimum monetary income for indigent families by imposing conditions for staying in the programme, namely:

- (a) families are required to comply with certain health-related conditions (regular visits to health clinics, especially for breastfeeding women, children under five years, and pregnant women);
- (b) children must go to school: there is a minimum of 75% school attendance for children aged 6 to 17, to discourage dropping out of school (Lavinias, 2015: 145).

The conditions are intended to contribute to human development by enabling beneficiaries to escape poverty, increase income, gain employment, and reduce inequality in the longer term (Touchton, Wampler & Sugiyama, 2016: 14-15). The beneficiary family also

undergoes periodic reviews and the relevant municipality registry is updated to ensure that the family is still eligible. If a beneficiary's situation improves due to the employment of any other social security benefit, the benefit in terms of the BFP is cancelled and the family is removed from the registry of beneficiaries (Soares, 2012). The same applies if a condition is breached by the beneficiaries: at first the benefit is blocked and, if non-compliance continues for a period of one year, the benefit is cancelled (Soares, 2012; Mourão & De Jesus, 2012).

Conclusion

The above discussion reveals that South Africa has been very successful in implementing short-term food security interventions in the form of social grants. The poorest households depend on social grants as their main source of income and this extends to households that engage in subsistence agriculture. As a result, social grants, although constituting a meagre income, prevent poor households from falling below the poverty line. Chronic food insecurity is thus minimised, as households can access their very basic food requirements. This paper also indicated that social grants also assist recipients to live dignified lives. Therefore, it appears that the government's short-term food security strategy is viable and beneficial to poor households. However, using the United States of America and Brazil examples the government must ensure that social protection measures are properly targeted. At the same time, adults in the households should be encouraged to enter the job market to prevent over dependence on social grants.

It is therefore recommended that the government should revamp the social assistance programme and include conditions for families that are still economically active, especially in respect of child support grants. Furthermore, complementary programmes such as agricultural support packages and skills development

should be part of social assistance programmes .This is important because social grants should also have a transformative role where they not only combat exclusion at a societal level, but also positively shape inter-household and intra-household resource allocation and dynamics. Social grants prevent individuals and households from being plunged into destitution, and thus assist households to pursue opportunities that increase their livelihood resources, such as entering the job market, and engaging in other socio-economic activities. The rapid increase in social protection programmes, including social grants, is a result of the humanitarian concern for people suffering from chronic food insecurity and the global commitment to achieving the SDGs. It is crucial that protective social protection should be used as a stepping stone in empowering individuals to be self-sufficient and to curb the inequality brought by poverty.

Finally, compared to the US and Brazilian welfare systems, the South African system has fewer stringent conditions for accessing social grants. This allows a wide variety of people to qualify for social protection and means that more households have access to food. The disadvantage of this is that the social welfare system creates a dependency syndrome, with recipients of social grants sometimes not attempting to find gainful employment and/or other livelihood activities. This results in a burdensome social protection system that fails to move beyond the ambit of being a safety net, and never achieves the transformative element of social protection.

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