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Felix Fofana N'Zue, Enrique Delamonica (Eds.)

**Child Poverty and Social Protection
in Central and Western Africa**

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**CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL
PROTECTION IN CENTRAL AND
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INTRODUCTION

Gustave Nébié, Chinyere Emeka-Anuna, Felix Fofana N'Zue, and Enrique Delamonica

BACKGROUND

According to a path-breaking study commissioned by UNICEF in 2003, child poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa (in particular, Central and Western Africa) was extremely high (Gordon et al., 2003). Fortunately, the situation has improved in many countries since then. This is in part due to the expansion of social protection. However, given the rate of population growth, the decline in the incidence of child poverty is too low to make a dent in the total number of children living in poverty. It also seems that the reduction in child poverty has occurred in areas and among groups that are relatively close to those who are better off. Thus, inequalities, social exclusion, and the depth of poverty might have increased. Moreover, this takes place in a context where social protection is still limited and fragmented in most countries.

Thus, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Equity for Children, the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP) of the International Science Council, and UNICEF, all collaborated to organize a workshop inviting scholars, civil society representatives, and practitioners to discuss these issues and pathways forward. This workshop intended to further understand the trends of child poverty, its distribution, and how social protection has contributed, or not, to its decline in Central and Western Africa during the last 10-15 years. The organizers asked participants to explore the types and limitations of social protection in the region, as well as its accomplishments. Other policies that can help to reduce child poverty, improve well-being, promote child protection, and address inequities were also to be investigated.

Consequently, a three-day Conference on child poverty and social protection in Central and Western Africa was held at the ECOWAS Commission, Abuja, Nigeria, from 23 to 25 May 2016. A total of 21 papers (addressing a given country or comparing across countries) were

presented by participants from 14 countries (mostly from the region but also from other African countries, Asia, Europe, and the Americas). The presentations addressed questions about the trends, distribution, and depth of child poverty. They also dealt with social protection policies, and their role to mitigate and eliminate child poverty. Experiences from other regions were shared, as well as different analyses of the impact of social protection policies in emergencies and economic crises. There was also substantive discussion about the potential role of social protection to help prevent the abuse, exploitation and neglect of children. The presentations relied on a mixture of methodologies and a truly inter-disciplinary discussion ensued.

The workshop succeeded in engendering dialogue among academics, activists and policy makers. Thus, it was agreed that the papers with the most salient points and that generated the most debate (roughly half of them) were worth collecting in this volume. These papers, now chapters, cover 15 countries, maintaining roughly the three-to-one ratio between Francophone and Anglophone countries that exists in the region. At the end of the conference a communiqué was prepared, and it is reproduced in the Annex.

DEFINITION OF CENTRAL AND WESTERN AFRICA

The title of the conference, and of this book, explicitly mentions “Central and Western Africa”. However, there is no clear definitive list of which countries are or should be included. Is this a purely arbitrary (colonial/neo-colonial) construct?

According to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), its 15 member states “have both cultural and geopolitical ties and shared common interests”.¹ However, it also recognizes that contemporary boundaries partly reflect the ones imposed in colonial times². Consequently, they cut across ethnic and cultural lines, separating groups and communities between two or more states.

Moreover, ECOWAS is not the only regional body. There is also the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and regional central banks (Bank of Central African States, BEAC, and, Central Bank of

¹ www.ecowas.int, last accessed October 25, 2018.

² Emanating from the 1884 conference held in Berlin.

West African States, BCEAO). Table 1 shows that there is no one-to-one correspondence between countries belonging to one or another organization. These regional entities overlap. Table 1 also displays the way countries are classified by international organizations. Again, there is overlap, but no unanimity about the contours of the region.

Table 1: Countries in Central and Western Africa: classification by international agencies and participation in regional bodies

	ILO	ECOWAS	ECCAS	UNICEF	BEAC	BCEAO
Benin	1	1		1		1
Burkina Faso	1	1		1		1
Cabo Verde	1	1		1		
Cameroon	1		1	1	1	
Central African Republic	1		1	1	1	
Chad	1		1	1	1	
Congo, Dem. Rep.	1		1	1		
Congo, Rep.	1		1	1	1	
Côte d'Ivoire	1	1		1		1
Equatorial Guinea	1		1	1	1	
Gabon	1		1	1	1	
Gambia, The	1	1		1		
Ghana	1	1		1		
Guinea	1	1		1		
Guinea-Bissau	1	1		1		1
Liberia	1	1		1		
Mali	1	1		1		1
Mauritania	1			1		
Niger	1	1		1		1
Nigeria	1	1		1		
São Tomé & Príncipe	1		1	1		
Senegal	1	1		1		1
Sierra Leone	1	1		1		
Togo	1	1		1		1

Source: Website of each organization

Note: ECCAS also includes Angola, Burundi, and Rwanda, which are not included as part of Central and Western Africa by any other entities.

This is not to say that the region is conceived as such only since (recent) colonial times. Several kingdoms and empires as well as trading routes³ and peoples have ebbed and flowed for centuries, such as the Akan, Benin, Dagomba, Dyula, Fulani, Ghana, Hausa-Bakwari, Kanem, Kongo, Kuba, Songhai, and Wolof (to name a few). These kingdoms covered large swathes of the territory now labelled West and Central Africa. This variety gives the region a shared common past and a unique blend of cultures.

In addition, there is a linguistic distinctiveness. Despite the hundreds of languages (actual ones, not dialects), spoken in the region, they mostly share a common ancestry and syntactical structure. They belong to the group known as Niger-Congo languages (Greenberg, 1970, Sebeok, 1971, and Bendor-Samuel and Hartell, 1989).

Although these languages span all the way from Dakar – the westernmost point of the African continent – to Cape Horn in South Africa, a natural border with what is usually considered Eastern Africa exists, the Great Rift Valley⁴. However, as with all borders, this too is permeable. Thus, throughout history, similarly to the situation now, there have been links across this border and beyond. Nevertheless, geographically, culturally, linguistically, and historically, it is possible to speak of a Central and Western Africa region. Chapter 2 by Nébié further explores institutional and political commonalities and differences across the countries in the region in order to elucidate the policy context for social protection expansion and child poverty reduction.

SOCIAL PROTECTION: BRIEF HISTORICAL EVOLUTION, CHARACTERISTICS AND THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AND WESTERN AFRICA

Origins of Social Protection

Social protection has origins at least as far back as the Guilds in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages and Zakat in Islam. Guilds were linked to work trades, and usually provided at least disability and widowhood support. They functioned almost as a pension or insurance. Zakat instructs the contribution of a percentage of income to support the needy, similar to a tax to finance welfare interventions.

³ Some even mentioned by Herodotus.

⁴ Although in Central Africa it splits into two branches.

As the European feudal system was disintegrating, several Poor Laws were enacted during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England. The one from 1601 capped a succession of Poor Laws, which had begun in 1563. These laws attempted to deal with increasing poverty due to structural social and economic changes. The relevance of the 1601 Poor Law resides in setting up a national system of “poor relief” as opposed to one based on local governments.⁵

By the 1800s, with the Second Industrial Revolution in full swing, additional developments took place. In the United States, an approach aimed at avoiding destitution among the “deserving” poor was adopted to support orphans, widows, and disabled veterans in the aftermath of the Civil War of the 1860s (Skocpol, 1992).

In contrast, in Western Europe, with German Chancellor Bismarck in the lead, a more generous approach was put in place, although it was limited to formal workers. It provided compensation to workers during illness, accident insurance and pensions.⁶

In the 1930s, with the western world in the grip of the Great Depression, social security interventions were put in place in many countries, in particular unemployment insurance. After World War II, and with economic recovery, these programmes were expanded, providing social protection “from the cradle to the grave”.⁷ In the Scandinavian countries, which had also started the inception of social protection (including housing subsidies) before World War II, the welfare state reached its most advanced development and coverage.⁸

It is not surprising, then, that social protection was enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Arts 22, 23, and 25). Since then, it has been included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, Arts. 9 and 10); the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC, Arts. 26 and 27); the Convention on the

⁵ The relief depended on the “type of poor” (e.g. idle poor, deserving poor, etc). For the “non-deserving”, the relief consisted of prison-like forced labor or forced removal to their town of origin (in particular after the Law of Settlement and Removal of 1662).

⁶ This is a divergence in social policy models among the rich countries that continues to this day (Esping Andersen, 1990).

⁷ Partly guided by the 1942 Beveridge report in the UK as reported by Marshall (1950).

⁸ This fact, however, does not mean there are no limits or challenges in their implementation or impact (Therborn, 1987).

Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, Arts. 11 and 14); the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (CRPD, Art. 28); and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP, Arts. 21).⁹

More recently, in 2012, the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation Number 202 established a Tripartite (governments, private sector, and labour unions) agreement for a minimum set of social protection interventions to be provided to all citizens in all countries. The set includes pensions, essential health care (including maternity care), basic income security for families with children, and minimum income for adults in case of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability.¹⁰

Social Protection Floors (SPFs) are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees, which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion.¹¹ As part of the efforts to pull the world out of the financial crisis of 2007-09, the Social Protection Floor was taken up as a core element of the United Nations response.

Thus, social protection has evolved into a human right. It aims to prevent and eliminate poverty throughout the life cycle. Social protection includes preventive, protective, promotive, and transformative interventions (Mkandawire, 2004), such as child and family benefits, unemployment insurance, employment injury benefits, health insurance (including for maternity), benefits for orphans and widow(er)s and for people with disability, and, old-age pensions. This, clearly, does not mean that social protection can or should solve all problems faced by families and children. Nevertheless, particularly in contexts with high and very high poverty, it is important to explore the contours and the connections between social protection and other actions required to protect children. This is examined in Chapter 10 by Derby et al. for Ghana, and in Chapter 9 by Skelton and Plaisir, for Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, and Democratic Republic of Congo.

⁹ All these Conventions can be found at the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (www.ohchr.org). There are also regional human rights instruments that include Social Protection (e.g. Arab Charter on Human Rights, Art 36).

¹⁰ It is recognized that implementing all these elements may take time. Thus, progressive realization, which requires plans and milestones, is needed in accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Limburg Principles.

¹¹ ILO (2011)

In summary, social protection programmes guarantee access to necessary goods and services, such as essential health care, maternity care, nutrition, education, and childcare. These programmes can also provide income security throughout the life cycle. Social protection can be financed via contributory schemes such as social insurance, or non-contributory social assistance, where taxes are the source of the funding. There are also important linkages between social protection and the prevention of, and response to, crises and emergencies. Chapter 7 by Abdu investigates this issue in the context of the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone.

What about Africa?

Formal African relief systems date back to ancient Egypt under the Pharaohs (World Bank 1990). In general, though, there were few formal institutions for social protection outside of Ethiopia and Islamic West Africa. In the savannah kingdoms of central Africa, the level of institutional care was higher than anywhere on the continent. There appears to have been no tradition of begging, but there is evidence that secret societies cared for struggling individuals. People turned to chiefs for assistance. Kuba kings kept huge storehouses, while Bemba chiefs “were expected to maintain food reserves against scarcity and to support those too old or young to provide for themselves” (Iliffe 1987:58-9).

In most areas, vulnerability was addressed through family networks. Most communities and families draw on a range of social protection mechanisms based on extended family and community ties in the face of shocks and chronic poverty. Kinship-based support systems provide access to economic assistance, reproductive care and psychosocial support. Long-standing socio-cultural practices often create a moral responsibility to help less-fortunate family members through cash and/or in-kind transfers.

Traditional community-based systems of risk pooling are based on the rule of “generalized reciprocity,” which has been often formulated in anthropological literature: “in a community where everyone is likely to find himself in difficulties from time to time (...) he who is in need today receives help from him who may be in like need tomorrow” (Evans-Pritchard, 1940: 85). The basic logic underlying these schemes is that of “a collective disaster-avoidance strategy whereby the participants form a

long-term 'partnership reservoir' which can be tapped in times of stress" (Platteau, 1991: 143).

Community-based and family-based social protection systems still play a crucial role in mitigating social risks and human vulnerability in Africa. These informal social protection systems are not confined only to rural areas but reach out into peri-urban and urban areas as well, partly by maintained urban-rural linkages (Von Braun, 1991). However, these traditional solidarity mechanisms and safety nets appear to be eroding in recent years, underscoring the importance of strengthening the formal social protection system.

Characteristics of Social Protection Implementation

Social protection has several complementary objectives. It provides care for children, including those who survive neglect and exploitation, orphans, and children whose parents are monetary-poor. Social protection also provides insurance against external shocks (e.g. disability pension). It also levels the playing field, for example by establishing education grants for children in monetary-poor families. In addition, it reduces monetary poverty, addressing the right to a minimum standard of living, particularly through the use of cash transfers. Moreover, it promotes social integration and inclusion by lowering inequalities in terms of both income and access to basic social services.

The above description also portrays social protection as a system that covers individuals throughout their life cycle. For babies there is free health care, for slightly older children there is nutrition support. For even older children and youth, there is support to access education and for working adults there is unemployment insurance. For elderly persons there are pensions and for everyone, there is health insurance. In a nutshell, a social protection system is universal, not just for the poor.

Thus, it is important to think of social protection as an integrated system of interventions and programmes. It can be envisaged as consisting of four pillars: 1) monetary and in-kind social transfers; 2) programmes to ensure access to services; 3) social support and care services; and 4) legislation and regulation for equity.¹²

¹² Several authors and agencies provide different, but very similar, classifications. A summary was provided in Minujin et al. (2007). This text follows the one

In implementing social protection schemes and benefits, different approaches are often used. They include universal benefit schemes, social insurance schemes, social assistance schemes, negative income tax schemes, public employment schemes, and employment support schemes. With a combination of interventions, maximum impact can be achieved.

Monetary and in-kind social transfers, can include, among others: birth grants; universal child allowances; employment of last resort programmes; disability benefits; sick leave; maternal or parental benefits; climate-related insurance; unemployment benefits; and cash- or food-for-work schemes, particularly in emergency settings. With this diversity of approaches, it is important to realize what the objectives of these interventions are. For instance, in Figure 1, (where the vertical line represents income and the poverty line is shown for reference), the light part of each bar signifies the pre-intervention income and the dark portion at the top of the bar indicates the supplement provided by the social protection programme. Thus, if the objective is to eliminate monetary poverty (first column), the intervention has to ensure that the post-intervention income surpasses the poverty line. This is not the case for the second column, which represents a programme intending to (only) reduce monetary poverty or reduce the depth of poverty. Other interventions (e.g. a universal child grant) are not associated with the poverty line (third column). In the fourth column, there are no light and dark parts. It is all shaded. This could be the case when the social protection interventions provide income, which would not have been there otherwise (e.g. unemployment insurance). This could (or not) surpass the poverty line.

presented in UNICEF (2012), which is currently being updated but not radically changed.