

About REBA Case Study briefs

What is RHVP?

The Regional Hunger and Vulnerability Programme (RHVP) supports improvements in policy and programme approaches to hunger and vulnerability in southern Africa with particular emphasis on the role of social protection.

The Regional Evidence Building Agenda (REBA)

Evidence-building, together with capacity-building and policy change, is one of RHVP's three interlinked activities. The Regional Evidence Building Agenda (REBA) is a cohesive framework that has guided the Programme's cross-country evidence-related activities between April 2006 and September 2007. The REBA consists of individual case studies of 20 ongoing social transfer programmes together with thematic studies covering cross-cutting design and implementation issues. The studies were carried out by locally commissioned researchers, mostly working through national research and consultancy institutions, in the six southern African countries covered by RHVP (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe). All the case studies involved close collaboration with the agencies – government departments and government-appointed bodies, local and international NGOs, UN agencies and communities – that were implementing the social protection schemes under review. The research was supported and guided by a core team of international mentors which included Stephen Devereux (IDS, Sussex), Frank Ellis (ODG, University of East Anglia) and Lionel Cliffe (University of Leeds) and was coordinated and managed by Philip White (ODG).

REBA Aims

The REBA aims to support RHVP's efforts to promote improved policy and programme approaches to social transfers as a means of addressing hunger and vulnerability. REBA findings are feeding into a range of policy, advocacy and research outputs and processes, including policy briefs, best practice guidelines, national and regional learning events for policymakers, practitioners and civil society, a film series and research publications. In addition, by working through a network of national consultants, the REBA aims to increase national capacity to carry out analytical research on hunger and vulnerability within the six countries.

REBA Case Study Briefs

This series of briefs was prepared by Frank Ellis on the basis of the 20 individual case studies undertaken under the REBA. Based on these findings and those of the accompanying thematic studies, a parallel series of thematic briefs that cut across the case studies is also in preparation. The full reports of each case study will be made available in early 2008.

Regional Lesson Learning from the Case Studies

Overview

The purpose of this briefing paper is to pull together the strengths, weaknesses and lessons for future social protection practice in the southern African region arising from the 20 case studies. Each individual project or programme is typically formulated with clear intentions regarding the form of deprivation it seeks to address, as well as building what are understood to be good practices into scheme implementation. Since knowledge about best practice is widely disseminated through the donor and NGO community, as well as in partner government agencies, the implementation of social protection is in general on an improving trajectory throughout the region.

Taking the case studies as a group, it is possible to discern a set of principles that add up to desirable attributes for social protection efforts overall. Of course individual case studies do not comply with all such attributes, but most of them can clearly be seen to attempt to comply with a majority of them. These cross-cutting desirable attributes of social transfers are as follows:

- to protect recipients from hunger now, or in the future, while not enfeebling their capabilities to engage in productive livelihoods, nor relegating them socially to 'victim' status;
- to increase empowerment through enabling individual or collective choice, whenever it is feasible to do so;
- to strengthen rather than weaken community level cohesion and institutions;
- to ensure inclusion of specific deprived social categories that are in danger of being socially excluded, such as orphans and vulnerable children (OVC);
- to target intended beneficiaries successfully, and avoid as far as possible exclusion and inclusion errors;
- to ensure cost efficiency in delivery, and effectiveness in achieving sustainable long term outcomes (especially for livelihood building social protection efforts);
- to support rather than undermine local markets;
- to ensure predictability and continuity in project or programme funding and coverage;
- to establish rights to certain types of social transfer that are inviolable in law, and can be expected as a right by all citizens in the event that they find themselves in the circumstances delineated by the law.

The rising popularity of cash transfers as a social transfer method can be interpreted in the light of these desirable attributes. Cash transfers are widely thought to promote empowerment, choice, cost efficiency, support to local markets, and potential for long term livelihood building;

they also lend themselves more readily than other forms of transfer (food, inputs, assets) to predictability, continuity, and rights of receipt by specified categories of beneficiary. The type of social transfer where most of the desirable attributes seem to come together is a social pension, where subject to reaching the prescribed age threshold every individual can expect to be eligible in law to the transfer. A social pension also corresponds to the principle of 'predictable funding for predictable needs' that strongly informs the direction in which social protection in southern Africa is moving in the late-2000s.

This briefing paper is structured as follows. First, it considers examples and patterns of strength in social protection practice that are identified from the case studies. These strengths are of course quite closely associated with the 'desirable attributes' that have just been identified. Second, this is followed by a synthesis of the flaws and weaknesses that stand out from the case studies, since as much can be learned from mistakes and ineffective experiences as from the examples of good practice. Third, a number of points are collected together concerning social side-effects of social transfers, an area of social protection that is seldom brought to the fore, but an important dimension that may help to clarify ideas around scaled up social protection in the future. Finally, key lessons learnt from this set of case studies are drawn out, and some provisional conclusions about future social protection in the region are put forward.

Selected Strengths

Most social protection efforts in the region do accomplish most of what they set out to do, and examples of only partial success or outright failure are the exception rather than the rule. There are instances where the relationship between resources provided and transfers realised might not stand up to too much detailed scrutiny, but in the absence of proper evidence these cases remain as hearsay rather than properly documented occurrences. The NGO sector in particular can be singled out not only for usually achieving what it sets out to do, but also often doing so in an innovative and forward looking way that builds on past experience and actively pursues future improvements in implementation. The case studies in this series reveal patterns of strength that are useful for lesson learning, and these are examined under the following headings:

- A. Organisation and coordination.** The case studies contain many instances of thoughtful organisation and good coordination between stakeholders, occurring even in very difficult circumstances. This applies, albeit with some caveats mentioned elsewhere, at the national level in the case of the Malawi input subsidies programme, in which significant logistical challenges – procurement, coupon distribution, fertilizer distribution – have been effectively handled on the big scale (Case Study No.5). The DFID Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) in Zimbabwe offers an interesting model of effective coordination, in which international and local NGOs conduct a variety of different social transfers with feedback and lesson-learning occurring through a Technical Learning and Coordination committee (Case Studies No.8, 18 and 20). Social transfers to orphans and vulnerable children in Swaziland are since 2006 coordinated under the umbrella of a National Plan of Action for OVC (Case Studies No.14-17). In Mozambique, input trade fairs display effective coordination between FAO, the Ministry of Agriculture, provincial and district public agricultural institutions and community leaders (Case Study No.4).
- It is notable that much of this coordination occurs at a 'meso' level below the strategic level of central government, but above the detailed organisational capability that is needed to deliver a single transfer to a defined group of beneficiaries. Effective central strategic coordination, guidance and monitoring remains lacking in most countries, although two countries (Malawi and Zambia) have the frameworks in place that may enable this to evolve in the future.
- B. Choice and empowerment.** It is widely acknowledged that cash transfers provide recipients with choice over the use they make of the transfer, and are relatively empowering in comparison, say, to being given a food ration the composition of which is ordained by an external agency (Case Studies No.1 and 2). The same holds true for social pensions (Case Studies No.3 and 6). The design of the trade fair projects (ITFs and EMFs) also incorporate the notion of empowerment through choice, since vouchers represent a cash value that can be exchanged for a wide variety of different items within the parameters of the fair (Case Studies No.4 and 12). Burial societies represent choice due to the typical local presence of many different societies, so that individuals or families can join the particular society that suits them best in terms of subscription levels and payout benefits (Case Study No.13).
- C. Building community cohesion.** The interaction of social transfers with social life in communities is potentially more problematic than many practitioners are prepared to accede (see 'Social Side-Effects' below). Several case studies set out to support or build community cohesion (sometimes referred to as 'social capital') as a subsidiary goal to the main transfer. This applies to the trade fairs approach to delivering scheme benefits (Case Studies No.4, 12, and 18), in which the fairs are social gatherings that are attended not just by beneficiaries, and potentially enable other

worthwhile social goals to be pursued at the same time, such as dissemination of information on HIV and AIDS in local communities. Involvement of communities in selecting social transfer beneficiaries is now common in many projects, although exactly how this is achieved (through key informants, committees, local leaders, group meetings) varies considerably from one case to another. Burial societies are seen by their members as an important expression of social reciprocity in the community (Case Study No.13). However, some attempts to invoke traditional norms of community solidarity and reciprocity have not worked so well, either because the purported traditional practice was somewhat over-idealised (Case Study No.16), or because contemporary stresses on everyone's livelihoods do not leave families with the scope to engage in former types of social reciprocity.

D. Innovation. Many of the case studies contain examples of innovative thinking about modes of delivery of social transfers, making the best use of limited transfer resources, and building in incentives to longer term social goals in addition to short term protection against hunger. The DECT project in Malawi (Case Study No.1) was risk-taking and innovative on at least four fronts: the smartcard/ATM method for making cash transfers, the designation of women as cardholders, the use of wealth ranking as a targeting device, and linking monthly transfers to the price of food. In the DECT project, the speed of acceptance of smartcards by mainly illiterate and innumerate beneficiaries suggests considerable potential for using new technologies (smartcards, mobile phones) for social transfers in the future. The Chipata SCT scheme (Case Study No.2) incorporated the innovative idea of a special cash incentive to school attendance for households with school age children. The small livestock transfer scheme (Case Study No.18) trialled the concept of 'pass on' whereby initial beneficiaries were required to pass on a proportion of the growth in their herds or flocks to second-round beneficiaries. A similar idea for the building of seed banks was included in the Zambia food security pack scheme (Case Study No.10).

E. Pensions. Social pensions have many strengths, and are therefore worth considering separately for these strong points. The pension is a right in law, or an entitlement, not a privilege that can be arbitrarily withdrawn. Pension incomes have been shown in numerous studies to reduce vulnerability in recipient households because payments tend to be treated by recipients as household income, and are spent to the benefit of all household members. For this reason, pensions are shown to increase the nutritional status

and school attendance of children, and the food security and medical access of all members in pensioner households, not just the welfare of the pensioners themselves. Pensions have the significant strength of a single targeting criterion, eligibility being easily understood in all social settings. Pensions are also observed to have positive social impacts on the status, independence and dignity of older people.

F. Food Transfers. The case studies contain several examples of social transfers where food may be more appropriate than cash as a way of ensuring the desired impact of the transfer. This applies to the food assistance programme in Mozambique (Case Study No.9), which although flawed in some respects (continuity problems) demonstrated significant beneficial impacts of a balanced nutritional package in the context of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for AIDS. School feeding (Case Study No.19) may also be a social transfer where the benefits of physical delivery outweigh its disadvantages, and cash transfers may result in more complicated and costly implementation due to the frequent need to adjust cash levels to changing food prices.

Selected Weaknesses

Just as the case studies reveal patterns of strengths that are useful for learning lessons about best practice in social protection, so also they reveal patterns of weakness that are equally revealing in terms of the pitfalls to be avoided in social protection approach, design and implementation. A special category of weaknesses derive from social side-effects of social transfers that are sufficiently distinctive and underestimated in social protection discussion to be considered in a separate section below. The following comprise the main individual or grouped weaknesses that are observable across numerous case studies:

A. Unstable funding and lack of continuity. This is a critical flaw that is nevertheless widely prevalent. The most severe instance of it is the Food Security Pack in Zambia that has had highly unstable annual funding, and over its 7-year duration (2000-07) has only received 30 per cent of the amount allocated to it in annual budget statements. A similar fate at a smaller scale, but directly involving destitute people rather than inputs, is the Public Assistance Grant in Swaziland. Both funding instability and lack of continuity may occur due to poor decision making by donors, or, in one case, due to a shortfall in food supplies required to make up food rations for AIDS patients (Case Study No.9). Quite a few smaller projects have limited duration that severely limits their claim to having long run beneficial impacts.

B. Limited scope and imprint. Many social protection schemes are tiny projects, part of a mosaic of NGO efforts to address the many different facets of chronic poverty and vulnerability in the region, but with scarcely any evidence regarding cumulative or sustainable impacts. The recognised beneficial impacts of such projects are personal to the few beneficiaries concerned, and may or may not produce longer term results for improving the future well-being of those beneficiaries, their families or the communities in which they live. Common problems are 'spreading too thin' – covering more communities but at the cost of reaching a smaller proportion of potential beneficiaries according to targeting criteria – and short duration with lack of follow-up so that real impacts are not assessed. A separate problem for one-off trade fairs (Case Studies No.4 and 12) is that their goal of stimulating increased market activity in rural areas is compromised by their 'only one day in each place' character.

C. Motivation and incentives. Much social protection is implemented by international NGOs in partnership with local NGOs, and personnel from government departments. In the case of NGOs and partners, a high level of commitment to accuracy in targeting and success at delivery is typically apparent. This does not only derive from the altruism of individuals attracted to work for NGOs (although that no doubt plays a part), it is also because failure is likely to lead to diminishing future funding from donors or governments. In some government-led schemes, and among government staff involved in implementing schemes led by international agencies, the motivation for effective implementation is less apparent. Most civil servants or local government officers are on the state payroll irrespective of the changing duties that they may be asked to perform: at lower levels of government or local authorities their remuneration is low and the incentive structures of their jobs is weak. This area is one of the least discussed aspects of social transfers, and possibly the most prone to become unworkable under scaling up:

- 'siphoning off' is a routine characteristic of how public service works in practice, and understandable given the poor incentive and remuneration structure at lower echelons of government;
- such problems are mainly avoided in small, intensively-managed and monitored NGO schemes, but the systems deployed cannot realistically be duplicated to scale;
- with the exception of pensions in Lesotho and Swaziland, cash transfers are untried to scale;

however, there have been signs of irritation in pilots that 'remuneration' is not available for functions undertaken: for example, District Social Welfare Officers in Zambia (Case Study No.2), and group and village headmen in Malawi (Case Study No.1);

- some 'incentives' are already built into pilot schemes e.g. bicycles for members of Community Welfare Assistance Committees in Zambia (Case Study No.2);
- donors have not grappled with the cost implications of dealing with these incentive and remuneration issues, nor where to draw the line between legitimate remuneration for work performed and unstated recompense for inadequate government salaries.

D. Other flaws encountered. A variety of other weaknesses are identified in the case-studies, typically associated with just one or a few projects rather than occurring across many of them. These are summarised briefly here as follows:

- undue complexity: the FSP in Zambia (Case Study No.10) was from the outset too ambitious in almost all respects - its coverage (all districts), its pack size and composition (grain, pulses, roots and fertilizer), and its multiple goals (10 goals covering such disparate aims as new cultivation methods, livelihood diversification and entrepreneurship);
- poor cost effectiveness: it is probable that fairs (Case Studies No.4 and 12) are a rather costly way of delivering a certain type and level of transfer to beneficiaries, due to the high gearing up costs around a series of one-off large events, the logistical costs of holding such events in remote rural areas, and the time and effort required to inform and persuade distributors and traders to turn up at the fairs;
- input timing problems: where farm inputs are the social transfer focus timing is critical – any slippage in organization and delivery means that inputs reach farmers too late to make a valuable contribution to the next season crop, and this has occurred in several of the case study input projects;
- lack of downstream monitoring: most schemes fall short when it comes to monitoring downstream impacts, as opposed to activities and outputs; for example several input schemes fail to monitor harvests and yields in the seasons following the input transfer, and are thus unable to verify that they have made a measurable difference to livelihood outcomes.

Social Side-Effects

While most social transfer schemes examined in these briefing papers are acutely conscious of the social dimensions of their activities, and try their best to anticipate and incorporate, or work round, known pitfalls or sensitivities, nevertheless they are not always successful at doing this.

Sometimes this is due to outsiders' misinterpretations of customs and cultural understandings around gifts and transfers, sometimes it is due to a certain amount of naivety about people's altruism, and sometimes it is due to underestimating the similarity of material circumstances that characterises the majority of people in rural communities.

The term 'social side-effects' is used here to describe social and individual behaviours that result from the advent of social transfers at community level, as revealed by the case studies. Some of these behaviours are plainly economic in character – social transfers represent an incentive to certain kinds of action or reaction – however, the emphasis here is on social processes and outcomes, for example, reconfiguring household demographics in order to qualify for a targeted transfer. Social side-effects evidently overlap with approaches to selecting beneficiaries, as well as political and institutional dimensions of social protection.

A. 'We are all poor here'

A considerable proportion of social behaviour in relation to social transfers in southern African countries can be explained by reference to the perception of community members that 'we are all poor here'. This phrase recurs as a reaction to targeted beneficiary selection in numerous social protection contexts across all countries in the region. Several points arise in relation to this perception:

- the perception that 'we are all poor here' is rooted in the reality of minor differences in income and wealth status for most community members;
- the rural income distribution in most countries is such that the genuinely 'better off' or rich are a tiny proportion of the population in most communities (if present at all), while most community members are struggling to keep their heads above water;
- in these social contexts, targeted transfers are potentially socially divisive especially if they involve multiple complex criteria to make refined distinctions between poor and ultra-poor households;
- outsiders' perceptions about the most deserving poor may not correspond to community perceptions, or social norms and customs;
- reactions can vary from community solidarity (sharing of targeted farm inputs, as occurred in Malawi under the TIP scheme), to individual family strategies for inclusion (altering household demographic structure to fit the criteria), to connivance between selector and beneficiary to share transfers (as has occurred in some CWACs in Zambia);

- inclusion in a social transfer scheme may result in withdrawal of previous reciprocal support provided by family or community (cited in relation to the livestock transfer project in Zimbabwe), thus causing lower additionality of the scheme to the livelihood security status of the recipient.

B. Elite capture

Another social behaviour that is rife around social transfers is so-called 'elite capture'. Elite capture appears in many different guises:

- beneficiary lists being stuffed with relatives and friends of chiefs or village leaders (alluded to in several case-studies);
- leaders requiring a 'cut' of the transfers in order to include beneficiaries on the list;
- substantial quantities of fertilizer coupons ending up in the hands of district officials, traditional leaders, police and the military (ISP Malawi);
- political interference in beneficiary lists to ensure that opposition voters do not stay on the list (mentioned for cash transfers in Zambia).

Over the past decade or so, social protection has evolved from top-down selection (by officials or NGO personnel), to stakeholder committees (often dominated by officials and traditional leaders), to community participatory selection (involving community-level verification of beneficiary lists). The stakeholder committee route has been particularly prone to elite capture with local chiefs and other traditional leaders prone to orient lists to their own advantage. Community verification of beneficiary lists can successfully overcome elite capture, but require elaborate stages of verification to achieve this (see Case Study No.1).

Elite capture exacerbates social tensions arising from 'we are all poor here': community members are aware of what is going on, and deserving poor get left out when a proportion of limited transfers are made to the better off or well-connected. Nevertheless, social responses can be counter-intuitive and surprising. In some instances elite capture is regarded as socially acceptable, especially if it is widely thought that it was the leadership that brought the social transfer to the community in the first place.

C. Community reciprocity

Some social protection sets out purposely to build on community reciprocity. Examples are neighbourhood care points for OVC (Swaziland); Chiefs' Fields and farm inputs for child-headed households (Swaziland); and school farms for school feeding (Lesotho).

Alas, the community reciprocity that is appealed to in such schemes is often a somewhat idealised representation of a past custom that has vanished or become vestigial due to the enormous pressures on people's livelihoods over the past decade, or as a result of the long-term inroads of market relations. Perhaps the archetypal example of this is indlunkhulu (Chiefs' Fields, Swaziland – Case-Studies 16 and 17). However, NCPs are also a case in point, and are reliant in practice on the goodwill of particular individuals in the community ('caregivers') rather than the community as a whole.

Undue reliance on exaggerated notions of community solidarity can result in policy mistakes. It is possible that the various attempts to feed OVC from communal or assisted farming in Swaziland are amongst the least successful examples of social protection contained in this set of case studies. In Lesotho, communal school farms make negligible contributions to school feeding. This should not be found surprising since school farms have been tried in numerous countries over many decades and there is no substantive evidence that they provide a reliable means of supplying school children with meals. Nevertheless, scarce resources have been allocated to them (the Lesotho School Self-Reliance Project), and this emphasis has watered down a previously solid commitment to providing all primary school children with good school meals.

D. Summary on social side-effects

Social transfers set out to protect the poorest and most vulnerable people from inadequate nutrition and basic needs. Clearly in a prospering society where people's standards of living are generally on an upward path, this objective can be met by targeting those left behind while the majority move forward. Moreover, in such a scenario, those moving forward are unlikely to feel resentful of those receiving help, since the level of such help will be significantly below their own material situation, or what they are able to aspire to in the foreseeable future.

However, especially in rural areas of the southern African region, such distinctions are hard to draw. Most community members consider (essentially correctly) that 'we are all poor here'. Moreover, opportunity is not rising at a rate (nor has it been doing so historically) for fractionally better-off individuals to see an improvement in their circumstances coming into view round the corner. For this reason, social protection in southern Africa often involves seeking tiny variations in circumstance that ordinary people do not perceive as real differences in order to select a lucky few people as transfer recipients. This inevitably creates social tension and division, as well as personal strategies to work around the selection criteria that are proposed, or the organisational means of implementing them.

Lesson Learning for the Future

It is unlikely that the 'messiness' of social protection in southern Africa (i.e. the mosaic of numerous organisations pursuing many different social transfer objectives in relation to many different types of beneficiary) will ever be more than partially resolved by the advent of national social protection strategies and frameworks. This is because this 'messiness' is found in all countries and reflects the enormous diversity of people in need due to a multiplicity of different causes, therefore giving moral legitimacy to the many different organisations with different mandates seeking to do what they can to help. Lesson learning in relation to this diversity is as fragmented and contingent as the sector itself, and ideas that improve practice in one set of circumstances may be irrelevant in another. Nevertheless, the 'desirable attributes' identified in the introduction to this briefing paper can be considered a useful checklist applicable to most types of social protection.

However, putting this diversity to one side, much recent debate in the region concerns the 'bigger picture' of how to achieve protection from hunger for large numbers of vulnerable people, and how best to move away from perpetual crisis management towards consistent and predictable delivery of such protection. It is this big picture that is addressed by the lesson learning points made here. The context is one of an upsurge of enthusiasm for cash transfers as a means for achieving the required consistency and predictability; the problem of scaling up to national level from successful cash transfer pilots; and many unresolved issues concerning funding, beneficiary selection, delivery methods and cost efficient implementation overall. These case studies do offer important lessons for this large scale dimension of social protection, and these are set out as follows:

1. Cash not the only instrument

While cash transfers can be seen to elicit powerful reasons in their favour (set out earlier in this briefing paper), it would be a mistake to neglect thereby the potential role of other transfers for achieving hunger reduction aims. This set of case studies contains examples that demonstrate that both subsidised farm inputs and food transfers have their own places and strengths for tackling vulnerability to hunger. The Malawi input subsidy programme has surprised with both its political strength of purpose and its beneficial impact to date on food production and food access by the vulnerable due to low prices and less seasonal price instability. On the food transfer side, it is evident that certain social transfer types and goals (e.g. school feeding or nutritional support to AIDS patients) are more efficiently and effectively accomplished by food than by cash, if for no other reason than that frequent adjustments

to cash amounts to compensate for food price changes are administratively onerous, clumsy and costly in those cases.

2. Defects of multiple criteria targeting

The use of proxy indicators and multiple criteria as means to target beneficiaries in social protection schemes is shown by these case studies to possess several intrinsic weaknesses that even the best designed schemes struggle to overcome. The more complex the criteria, the more difficult it is for community members to grasp what it is that differentiates beneficiaries from all the other poor people in the community. This problem, alluded to above as the 'we are all poor here' reaction to social transfers, causes social divisiveness and friction in the process of selecting beneficiaries. It also causes social behaviours that seek to circumvent the criteria established, such as altering the demographic structure of the household to fit the criteria and side deals between selectors and selected to share the benefits of being on the beneficiary list. While lengthy participatory processes of 'triangulation' at community level can go some way to resolving these problems, these are typically associated with small projects implemented by enthusiastic NGOs, and it is unproven and perhaps doubtful that they would work at national scale.

3. Categorical targeting the way forward

The foregoing suggests that categorical targeting may offer a superior way forward for scaled up social transfers in the region. In categorical targeting, beneficiaries belong to a social category defined by simple and easily understood criteria, such as people above 65 years of age, or children under 5, or pregnant women, or orphans (where an orphan is defined by just one or two clear criteria, though these criteria are often less clear-cut than they might appear). Categorical targeting has several advantages at scale i.e. where coverage is intended to be the entire country. The number of potential beneficiaries can be estimated fairly accurately from demographic data. The transfer can be incorporated in the budgetary process and become a predictable annual government expenditure. The transfer can be legislated as a right, so that all recipients that fall into that category know that they are entitled to receive the benefit. It is less socially divisive than multiple criteria targeting. For example, a social pension that everyone knows they will be entitled to receive in due course, does not stir up the resentment that microscopic differentiation between families according to multiple proxy indicators causes.

4. Innovation in delivery

Where cash transfers are concerned there lies plenty of scope afforded by new technologies for delivering transfers

efficiently to beneficiaries, and avoiding risks of leakage or loss of funds when cash is on the move. The DECT project in Malawi suggested one approach using smartcards and mobile ATMs, and smartcards are also being trialled in the urban Chipata SCT in Zambia. Cell phone technology also offers a potential route to cash delivery. Partnerships between public bodies or NGOs and the private sector (commercial banking and cell phone companies) are required in order to implement innovative forms of delivery. Aside from cost and security reasons for taking such methods seriously, there are potentially positive rural financial market side-effects that can arise, especially for smartcards that can provide an entry point to savings and credit in addition to the drawing down of regular transfers.

5. The role of NGOs

Scaled up social protection will undoubtedly alter the roles and spaces currently occupied by NGOs in the delivery of social protection in southern Africa. A considerable proportion of current NGO activity is focused on delivering transfers to destitute people using the multiple criteria approach to beneficiary selection. NGOs take their social protection activities seriously and these case studies demonstrate they are often at the forefront of socially sensitive, innovative, and cost efficient delivery of social transfers. Useful partnerships between states and NGOs in scaled up social protection can be envisaged, going beyond the short duration, project oriented, activities that are currently at the centre of such partnerships. As suggested at the beginning of this lesson-learning discussion, even in the advent of scaled up categorical-based social protection there will be numerous gaps in coverage of particular needs that will continue indefinitely to merit the types of social protection that NGOs have an excellent track record in providing.

6. The role of politics

The focus of international aid agencies in social protection tends to revolve either around evidence about their ability to contribute to MDG achievement (often from pilot programmes which they initiate and support), or around moral principles concerning rights to social protection and freedom from extreme poverty and hunger, especially for vulnerable population groups such as children, mothers, those with chronic illness and disabilities, or older people. Politics tends to be viewed as a constraining or distorting force, driving patronage networks and elite capture, and preventing evidence from being heeded or benefits from reaching the most needy. Yet the case studies reveal that the programmes most likely to succeed in terms of government buy-in, implementation at scale, and fiscal sustainability are those that have electoral appeal. The

vote-winning potential of programmes such as the Lesotho Old Age Pension, initiated by the Prime Minister through the Ministry of Finance (not the Social Welfare Ministry) in the run-up to the 2004 elections and increased in value as a 2007 election pledge, or Malawi's Input Subsidy Programme which featured strongly in that country's 2004 electoral campaign, is not to be underestimated. Both programmes are government-led, and in terms of scaled up delivery with national coverage they are arguably the most successful of our case studies.

Arising from these lessons, one provisional conclusion is the power of pensions to act as a major vehicle for addressing vulnerability to hunger in the region. Pensions correspond to all the positive attributes of categorical targeting noted above: entitlement as a right, a single simple criterion for eligibility (an age threshold), 'predictable funding for predictable needs', and potential to utilise innovative forms of delivery. Other positive points about pensions were made in the section on Selected Strengths above, and do not need to be repeated here. In large very poor countries where documented evidence on age is scarce, the initial registration of those eligible represents a substantial challenge, but this challenge is probably less onerous than attempting at scale to identify 'the destitute' through multiple proxy indicators. Once initial registration has occurred, and tested rules established for verification of eligibility, subsequent updating of beneficiary lists should be relatively low maintenance.

Pensions do not, of course, provide a panacea for hunger and vulnerability in the region, and their livelihood promotion impacts are likely to be quite limited. The same is true, however, for efforts to reach 'the most destitute 10 per cent', the majority of whom turn out to be older people anyway. Moreover, as emerges clearly from the case studies, reaching the destitute as a category is prone to complex identification difficulties as well as negative social side effects, and does not provide the political leverage that governments need in order to move forward with the required authority and enthusiasm. As suggested in the last of the lessons listed above, programmes that emerge out of domestic political agendas and respond to local conceptualisations and prioritisations of need are likely to have a greater overall impact than those based on imported projectised interventions.

More Information

REBA material, including these briefs and fuller case study reports, as well as information regarding the REBA process can be viewed and downloaded from: http://www.wahenga.net/index.php/core_activities/building_evidence

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