

# Social Protection and a Resilient Future for Sub-Saharan Africa

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## Abstract

Countries in Africa have the lowest coverage of social protection and adequate health care despite having an enormous need for such programmes and policies (ILO, 2019). The availability of social protection services is mostly limited to workers and their families in the formal sector. Nonetheless, 85.8% of employment is informal, leaving communities, often concentrated in rural areas, vulnerable to economic and political shocks and other crises (Beri, 2018). Extending social protection to workers in the informal economy is one shared priority among many African nations (ILO, 2017). Societal benefits of social protection schemes and social welfare are well documented and range from supporting and promoting human development (e.g., healthcare and education) to building political stability and social peace. Developing effective social assistance schemes, building states' and institutional capacity, prioritizing fragile states, and integrating shock-responsive features to climate change and the increase of migrant workers can help ensure that any individual or household in need of social protection has access to it (ILO, 2017). Promoting and enforcing a rights-based approach to social protection brings the African continent several steps closer to reaching its full potential.

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## **Background to the Study**

Countries globally aim to provide social protection for their citizens or residents. Social protection schemes are not only implemented to benefit low-income countries and the poor, as all people are likely to face vulnerabilities at least once in their lifetime (Ortiz, 2018). Therefore, social protection is a global concern.

Fragile states are in desperate need of adequate social protection schemes but often possess the little capacity to provide much-needed protections (Devereux, 2000; Save the Children et al., 2005). Globally, six out of the top 10 most fragile states are in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), including the Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. Overall, among the 30 most fragile countries worldwide, 21 of them are located in Africa (The Fund for Peace, 2019).

These states face a myriad of security threats and are challenged to finance and administer programmes and policies to help improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society. Adopting social protection schemes as a tool to fight poverty and exclusion, while also strengthening state and institutional capacity to meet social security needs, are key to sustainable development in SSA.

## **Sub-Saharan countries and social protection**

Only 10% of SSA's economically active population is covered by statutory social protection programmes (ILO, n.d.). Nevertheless, findings presented by the International Labor Organization (ILO) emphasise that providing a “minimum package of social benefits and services including access to basic health care, basic income transfers in case of need, and basic education” to Africa's poorest is feasible and affordable (ILO, n.d.).

Countries in SSA encounter many different challenges. South Africa (an upper-middle-income economy) and Kenya (a lower-middle-income economy) have made considerable progress in social protection and welfare. South Africa is often recognized as a leader in social protection schemes and programmes in the global south (Patel, 2019). Building upon this momentum ultimately means addressing country-specific systemic issues beyond other long-held grievances. In this blog, we explore these two countries' main challenges and opportunities related to social protection systems.

Located in East Africa, Kenya shows a consistent need for social protection coverage, especially for access to an adequate and affordable health care system that could effectively address problems such as low life expectancy, high infant mortality, and low population growth rates. Moreover, it is crucial to combat excess mortality due to HIV/AIDS, a huge problem in the region, where 71% of SSA's population are living with HIV/AIDS (Roser and Ritchie, 2018). As of 2017, about 5.66% of Kenya's population live with HIV/AIDS compared to 0.49% of US citizens living with the same disease. Many families are forced deeper into poverty after paying out-of-pocket for their health care and about 42% of Kenya's 44 million people are already living below the poverty line.

Preventing HIV/AIDS infection through public health campaigns and education is a key issue (Roser and Ritchie, 2018). Besides the health concerns, people living with HIV/AIDS can be put in an even more vulnerable position due to marginalization associated with stigma. Moreover, it can also generate unintended consequences for family members who would be the direct carers of children who lose their parents from the disease.

Article 21 in Kenya's Constitution (2010) guarantees to all citizens their economic, social, and cultural rights. Additionally, each citizen has the right to human dignity, healthcare, reasonable working conditions, and access to justice (Shaban, 2011). However, about 36% of Kenya's population still lives on less than KES 134 (US\$1.34) per day, even though almost 80% of the population has per capita daily expenditures around KES 280 (US\$2.80) (Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030, 2012).

Some social protection programmes in Kenya have proven immensely successful thus far with considerable progress in strengthening administrative processes and systems for social assistance schemes, such as the National Safety Net Programme (NSNP), a common operating framework to consolidate and harmonize programme delivery. Furthermore, a review funded by UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) revealed: improvements in programme and national management information systems, including the introduction of the internationally renowned Single Registry. Nonetheless, the country can greatly benefit from further capacity development training and stronger local implementation structures, including taking advantage of the effectiveness and efficiency of using modern technology to boost operational systems (Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030, 2012).

### **South Africa**

South Africa is part of a small group of SSA countries (including Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Tanzania, and Cape Verde) that has achieved effective universal coverage in at least one branch of social protection (Universal Social Protection 2030, n.d.). South Africa was the first African country to introduce social pensions through the Older Persons Grant (OPG) for all individuals above 60 years old (Universal Social Protection 2030, n.d.). Today, the elderly is the most widely covered group throughout South Africa, at nearly 30% of the population. Despite persistent challenges, the OPG has been attributed for successfully reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and addressing the inter-racial disparity in the country. Mainly, South Africa's OPG illustrates that extending social protection to include older persons is feasible and affordable for middle-income countries (ILO, 2017).

When it comes to the protection of children, as many as two-thirds of South African children are living in poverty, with 2.1 million of them still unable to access the Child Support Grant (UNICEF, n.d.). Evidence shows that the Child Support Grant benefits at least 10 million South African children and has prevented children and families from sliding deeper into poverty (UNICEF, n.d.). The Child Support Grant has made a considerable difference in the lives of many South African households. Political and

legislative commitment, effective leadership, and inclusive dialogue are key contributors to success in social protection and welfare (WHO, 2017), as well as the use of technology for social protection systems. Unfortunately, in the case of South Africa, allegations of fraud, among other challenges, persist but progress has been substantial.

### **Strategies for Sustainable development**

These two countries have made noticeable progress in social protection. South Africa is providing universal old age, disability pensions, universal maternity, and child benefits, while Kenya has relied on modern technology to advance and strengthen administrative processes and systems for social assistance schemes. However, despite the region's potential, sustainable development throughout SSA has consistently lagged behind developing nations worldwide (UNU-WIDER, 2016).

The achievement of universal social protection is critical and essential for sustainable development as it protects all people throughout their lives against poverty and risks to their livelihoods. Enhancing social protection policies and schemes could profoundly change the fate of Sub-Saharan countries.

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