Conceptualising the Politics of Social Protection in Africa

Dr. Samuel Hickey

October 2007

University of Manchester

BWPI Working Paper 4

Sam.hickey@manchester.ac.uk

**University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL**

Creating and sharing knowledge to help end poverty

Abstract

Despite growing international interest with social protection, little is known about the forms of politics that tend to underpin - and emerge from - such interventions. For example, under what conditions do governments and political elites implement and sustain social protection policies? How important are the forms of politics promoted under the 'good governance' agenda, such as regular elections, civil society involvement and decentralisation? What role do donors play as political actors in poor countries? This paper starts to address these questions via a conceptual framework that is derived from synthesising an analysis of politics in Africa with a review of past social protection policies. This framework embraces four key dimensions: political institutions, political actors and agencies, socio-economic forces and the global dimension. It is argued that the notion of a 'political contract' can explain the ways in which these dimensions combine to shape the politics of social protection in Africa, and that this notion can offer a normative and theoretical framework for thinking about and promoting social protection.

Keywords: social protection, politics, Africa, political contract.

Sam Hickey is Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Development Policy and Management in the School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

In his study of the New Poor Laws in nineteenth century England, Karl Polanyi was centrally preoccupied with the forms of politics that surrounded this initiative, particularly the nature of the parliamentary process that led to Speemhamland being overturned, the new labelling of the poor that this involved, and the impact of such programmes on popular struggles and agency (Polanyi 2001). However, politics has not been accorded a significant role in thinking and policy-making around social protection in sub-Saharan Africa. The dominance of economics in this field has encouraged a more technocratic focus on social protection, thus overlooking the key role of politics and political economy in raising and shaping this agenda (Casamatta et al 2000: 342; Niles 1999: 3). Explanations for the relative paucity of social protection systems and programmes in poor countries tend to suggest that the key problem is simply a lack of financial and administrative capacity. For example, a recent World Bank study that focused on institutional issues in social protection programmes, framed the role of national politics in this process as purely contextual, to be examined only 'for the sake of completeness' (Mathauer 2004: 16). However, there is growing evidence that politics plays a more central role in shaping social protection initiatives than has hitherto been recognised. Given that there '…is no economic law that prevents societies from deciding to allocate more resources to old-age security and less to some other expenditure' (Beattie and McGillivray 1995: 68, cited in Devereux 2001: 22), the role of political decision-making regarding public expenditure is clearly central. Indeed, the greater the level of fiscal constraint on a government, the more it is likely to be influenced by the weight of political attitudes concerning who deserves support, and in what form (Graham 2002: 25). And what else apart from politics can help explain the radical expansion of the social pension schemes in South Africa and newly independent Namibia in the early 1990s? The challenge, however, is not simply to work towards a greater emphasis on the ways in which politics shapes social protection in Africa, but on a more systematic understanding of these relationships. For example, what are the political pressures or incentives that lead governments to redirect expenditure towards vulnerable and poor groups? Under what conditions might political elites support such initiatives? How important are those aspects of the political conditionality agenda, such as regular elections, multiparty politics and decentralised forms of 'good governance'? What is the role of political 'commitment'? What role do donors play as political actors shaping policy decisions in poor countries? And perhaps most importantly, are countries in Africa close to experiencing what Polanyi termed the 'double movement', whereby recognition of the problems of unregulated market forces creates an 'impulse for social protection'?

Seeking answers to these questions constitutes an ambitious project, and efforts to seek a systematic understanding of the relationship/s between politics and social protection are fraught with difficulty. For one reader of Polanyi's work on social protection, virtually any form of politics can be associated with social protection, such that,

> 'The essential point here is that the impulse for social protection experienced so deeply within society can be mobilized by any number of political tendencies or would-be aspirants to social and political power. This could be a political party of any stripe, a religious movement, a charismatic populist appealing to ethnic or caste identity, a warlord or a fascist' (Putzel 2002: 3).

At first glance, the African experience might appear to support this position. Very different types of political regime have adopted social protection measures, including colonial regimes, the apartheid regime of South Africa and the apparently well-governed and democratic state of Botswana. However, a more systematic analysis of the linkages between politics and social protection is lacking. Most work on social protection in Africa makes little mention of political concerns, and that which does considers only a limited range of variables (eg political discourse) or makes fairly general references to 'political commitment' or 'political support' without examining how this emerged and might be sustained. Although

some studies have sought to develop frameworks of analysis aimed at capturing the influence of politics on social protection within particular country contexts (eg Graham 2002, Pritchett 2005, Rothstein 2002), these have tended to offer either partial and/or problematic readings of the forms of politics that might shape social protection, and have not been derived from experiences in Africa. Moreover, these approaches have rarely been operationalised (Haddad and Zeller 1997: 134), leaving them somewhat tentative and less refined than they might be.

Here, an effort is made to bring together the most significant insights from this literature together with a reading of politics in contemporary Africa, in order to map out the contours of a more holistic analytical framework. The aim is not to be predictive or to produce some kind of blueprint for success that can be applied across the board – politics is highly contextual and the above quote reminds us of the need to recognise the large variations at play. Taking an inductive approach to identifying the forms of politics that have historically been associated with social protection initiatives in Africa, and attempting to constitute these into an initial analytical framework, may provide the basis for debates on the forms of politics that need to be supported and worked towards if social protection initiatives are to become more widespread and embedded in Africa.

The paper is organised as follows: the next section outlines the links between social protection and politics, as a first stab at a conceptual framework; the following section discusses how politics shapes social protection in Africa, focusing on institutions, actors, and the policy environment; the section after that suggests the value of a social contract approach; before the final section draws out the main conclusions.

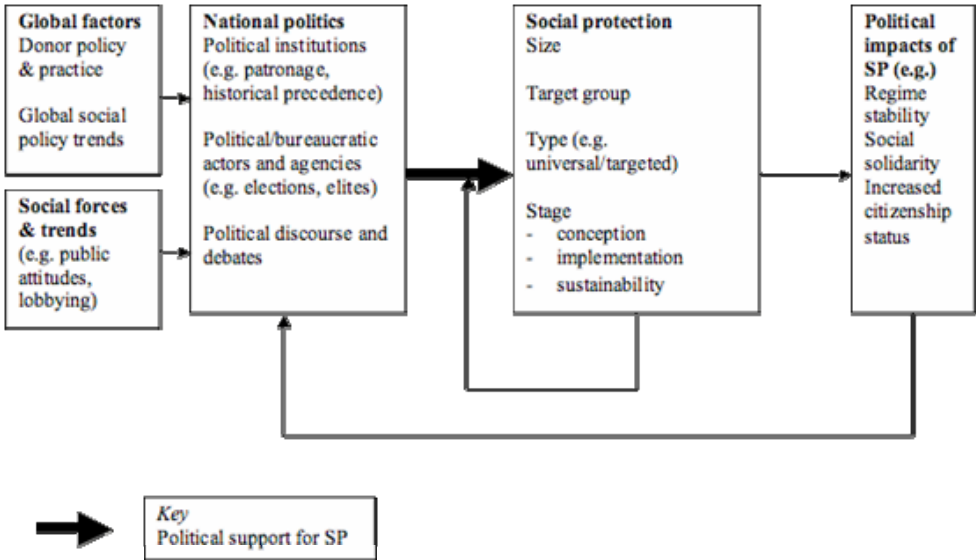## The Politics of Social Protection in Africa: making the links

The linkages between politics and social protection are multi-dimensional and multi-directional (See Figure 1). Even the simplest relationship between politics and social protection, which concerns the influence of the former on the latter, is complicated by the fact that different forms of politics shape different dimensions of social protection programmes. For example, the forms of politics that lead to conception and implementation of policies may be different to those required to sustain such policies; and different again from the politics of identifying beneficiary groups. The second type of relationship concerns the political impact of social protection itself. For example, social protection programmes may be implemented or boosted with a view to retaining regime legitimacy or might be associated with increased levels of social solidarity. Finally, and less obviously, the nature of social protection itself shapes the politics of social protection. For example, the design of a social protection programme, e.g. whether it is universal or targeted, and its perceived success might influence the level of political support. For reasons of space and also available evidence, our focus here is predominantly on the first type of relationship.

The approach taken to defining 'politics' here is a broad one, influenced by both political sociology and political economy perspectives.[1] We identify four key aspects of politics in Africa that the literature indicates will be of particular importance in shaping social protection on the continent, namely political institutions, political actors and agencies, socio-economic forces and the global dimension. *Institutional* features constitute the historically embedded 'rules of the game' within a given society (North 1990). Formal political institutions include the rules for elections and also policy legacies which have established accepted ways of doing things, whereas informal political institutions might include patron-client relations. *Actors* include those individuals and agencies that operationalise and contest the rules of the game in ways that shape the distribution of public goods and power, such as political elites, political

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[1] From a political sociology perspective, it is important to understand the social bases of institutional and political power, and '…to relate socio-economic conditions to political constitutions and institutional arrangements, and to relate these structural considerations to policy propensities' (Almond 1990: 24).

parties or governmental departments or agencies. Such actors also forge the discursive element of politics, setting the terms of political discourse within which policy options become (im)possible. Key issues here include the ideological character and political capacity of such actors and agencies. *Socioeconomic* forces include public attitudes, levels of citizen voice, levels of urbanisation, economic inequality, and levels and forms of social fragmentation. Although these societal factors are not intrinsically political they often gain a high degree of political salience in relation to public policy influence. Finally, the particular character of governance in most African countries opens a large space for *global* actors and discourses to be influential. The following section uses case-study material to discuss the influence that political variables within each of these dimensions have on the uptake, forms and sustainability of social protection programmes in Africa. Importantly, there are strong inter-relationships between each of these dimensions. In the final section we argue that the notion of 'political contracts' offers a fuller explanation for how the different elements of this framework become aligned in ways that lead to particular outcomes for social protection in Africa.

Figure 1. The links between politics and social protection: a basic framework

How politics shapes social protection in Africa: institutions, actors, socio-economic and global factors

Institutional features: formal and informal

The role of institutions in shaping social protection in Africa encompasses a range of different and sometimes surprising relationships, many of them significant. We focus here on the role of elections and political party systems, and also the less formal world of patron-client politics. Several studies note the importance of elections in determining public expenditure (e.g. Block 2002), and particularly in relation to social policies (Niles 1999, Schady 2000, Stasavage 2003). Block (2002) reveals a strong tendency for African governments to both raise public expenditures in election years (by an average of 4.5 percent) and to reduce interest rates (by an average of 1 - 1.5 percent), as a means of appealing to different constituencies. The study also reveals a tendency for these public expenditures to be in the form of pay rises to public sector workers, and subsidies to investors. As a consequence, 'welfare programmes do not necessarily target the most needy segments of the population but, rather, the ones critical for the regime's political survival' (Feng and Gizelis 2002: 220).

In Kenya, for example, Daniel Arap Moi distributed food aid selectively in order to secure his regime in power, while denying it to some of the most vulnerable groups and areas (de Waal 1997).

Uganda demonstrates the relevance of 'political cycles' to social sector spending, with new policies and programmes marking time with the electoral calendar. For example, President Museveni's decision to abolish user fees in Uganda's health sector was timed to coincide with the 2001 elections (Holland and Yeats 2005). In Botswana, food aid through the Drought Relief Programme was particularly generous in the election years of 1974 and 1979 (de Waal 1997). The political use of welfare transfers is arguably more likely within authoritarian or semi-democratic regimes that characterised many African states over the 1980s, where the checks on such (ab)uses of power – strong legislature, opposition parties, constitutions – were not well institutionalised (Feng and Gizelis 2002: 227-8).

Elections, then, can act as a strong incentive towards the initiation of social protection and/or increased expenditure in this area. However, their influence is in turn mediated through other political institutions, most notably political party systems, such that:

> 'Even limited electoral competition during periods of austerity will create incentives for politicians to broaden their support base, but politicians will only try to take advantage of this opportunity if the party structure helps to reduce the information costs and credibility problems which normally prevent the extension of social programs to the poor' (Niles 1999: 11)

For Niles (1999), certain forms of party system are more effective than others at creating incentives for regimes to deliver on social protection. Democracies with stable party systems and elected authoritarian systems are likely to be the most progressive here, followed by semi-authoritarian regimes with dominant parties. Those least likely to be associated with social protection policies are non-elected systems and democracies with fragmented party systems. This approach does appear to have a degree of explanatory power, and Feng and Gizelis (2002: 228) note that 'autocratic and semidemocratic governments have much better leverage than their democratic counterparts in using (welfare) transfers to retain office'. In Uganda, the pattern of electorally-driven public expenditure on vulnerable groups by a regime characterised by a 'hegemonic' party system (Carbone 2003) can be likened to Niles' 'elected authoritarian' system. In addition, none of the main countries to introduce food security measures in the 1970s were liberal democracies (Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia), but all were committed to a notion of social welfare, to be mobilized through technocratic zeal, and driven by political parties with revolutionary fervour in the latter two countries (de Waal 1997: 35). On the other hand, while Botswana is usually lauded as the most successful of sub-Saharan Africa's multiparty democracies, the political sociology of the ruling party (dominated by cattle barons and traders) has ensured that very little effort has gone towards protecting the most destitute groups. For example, the Drought Relief Programme (DRP) increasingly came to serve the interests of large-land holders and cattle owners, ignoring the fact that the pressing problem for destitute and the Sans was their lack of any formal land rights (de Waal 1997, Good 1999).

Much has been written concerning the *informal* character of politics in Africa, characterising the rules of the political game, norms governing the management and distribution of public resources, and the politics of representation (eg Chabal and Daloz 1999) In discussing the links between politics and poverty reduction in poor countries more broadly, David Booth (2005: 3-4) notes that 'Many or most of the key decisions are made informally, by small groups of politicians linked together by networks of clientelism and patronage', so that 'formal decision-making processes … are … largely "theatre"'. Patron-client politics are cited as a particularly characteristic feature of politics in Africa and can be linked to social protection programmes in Africa in a number of ways. Patron-client politics can shape the design and targeting of social protection programmes during the planning and implementation phases. For example, the coverage of programmes might be extended to include areas favoured by associated patrons, as with the recent social action fund for Northern Uganda (Brock *et al*

2002: 14-15). Where there are strong concerns that funds will be diverted into patronage networks, pressure will arise for arrangements to be put in place to avoid this. These include the establishment of parallel delivery agencies, autonomous project offices within ministries, and a reliance on incentives to ensure that funds reach their intended goal. This was typical during the 1980s and 1990s with the move towards social funds, an approach that arguably undermined the development of more accountable structures of governance. However, this is not to dismiss the progressive role that informal political institutions do and can play. In particular, patron-client relationships provide some of the poorest people with a critical safety net (Wood 2003).

Political actors and agencies

The key political actors and agencies that might be associated with social protection in Africa are arguably the political elites who set the terms of political and policy debates, and the administrative/bureaucratic agencies that will either lobby for, and/or implement social protection initiatives (more popular actors are considered below). Whether or not political elites consider certain groups to be 'deserving' of social assistance is likely to be a significant factor in the establishment, targeting and size of social protection programmes. Their role in shaping the emphasis on poverty reduction and the terms of engagement has come under particular scrutiny of late (Hossain and Moore 2001), and also in the context of chronic poverty (Hossain 2005, Hickey 2005). What has been striking here is the extent to which political elites tend to distinguish between groups of the poor, demonstrating a bias towards the productive or economically active poor, who are therefore 'deserving' in ways that are likely to leave some of the chronic poor groups bereft of state-support. The experience of social protection in Uganda and Botswana bear this out. The official policy in Botswana is that 'rewards should go to those who make the biggest contribution to Botswana's growth economy' (Good 1999: 199).

This is a classic statement of a model of economic citizenship rather than social citizenship, with people only fully permitted citizenship status to the extent that they can fully attend to their own economic needs (Fraser and Gordon 1994), and which is taken up in the later debate on 'contracts'. Pre-colonial influences may also be of relevance here. Iliffe (1987, cited in Good 1999: 199) noted an historical lack of concern towards the poor among Tswana elites, dating back to the nineteenth century.

Once in place, social protection measures themselves become the subject of heated debates between elites. In South Africa, struggles to extend the social pension to black South Africans were played out through the same form of public discourse over several decades, with criticisms of the system's 'inadequacy and discrimination' ranged against arguments that extending the system would create 'dependency' (Devereux 2001: 6, Box 3). Despite evidence that these transfers have been put to very productive purposes (Devereux 2002, 2004), the schemes are often criticised by politicians for allegedly creating dependency, fuelling wasteful expenditures such as on alcohol, and helping only those who choose to loaf off the recipients (Devereux 2001: 27). This suggests the need for more engagement with political elites by donors, and for linking pro-poor policies to progressive elements of elite political discourse. It is also critical that more resources are put into carrying out and disseminating the results research into the effects of social protection, including through monitoring and evaluation systems.

A more functional but very important set of actors and agencies are the *bureaucrats and bureaucratic agencies* with responsibility for social protection. The argument often forwarded here is that, in order for social protection to be a viable policy option, countries must already have high levels of institutional capacity and bureaucratic integrity (Besley et al 2003, Mathauer 2004, de Neubourg 2002). Indeed, it has been argued that where bureaucratic integrity cannot be guaranteed it may be better to avoid social safety nets (Besley *et al* 2003, Iglesias and Palacios 2000). However, the mere presence of financial and administrative

capacity does not determine the success of social protection in Africa. Moreover, what might be more important is the organisational culture, political commitment and political capacity of bureaucratic actors within government to advocate for, and implement, social protection initiatives. The importance of implementing agency's organizational culture concerns issues of 'fitness for purpose': for example, the involvement of public works ministries in employment generation schemes, when their *raison d'etre* is to 'build stuff' rather than work with people, may be problematic, and suggests that agencies that have a mission to work with the most vulnerable are better-placed here (Pritchett 2005). However, even here the inherent universalism of such agencies may clash with a targeted approach that requires them to take a more punitive, disciplinary line. Such departments and ministries tend to be amongst the weakest in government. Mathauer (2004: 12) underlines the marginality of social sector ministries, stressing that these ministries suffer from a 'lack of appropriate staff who would be able to make the case for safety net interventions from an economic point of view'. So, beyond a concern for ensuring a good 'fit' between public agencies and specific types of social protection (Pritchett 2005), efforts to enhance not only the institutional but also the political capacity of social sector ministries might be critical to ensuring strong levels of political support for social protection.

Socio-economic influences on the domestic policy environment

Political institutions and actors, and the policy decisions that emerge from them, are shaped by and respond to a wide range of socio-economic processes and factors. This is well-recognised within political sociology research, and here we draw on such insights to consider the influence that public attitudes, social fragmentation and inequality, and urbanisation may have on the implementation of social protection initiatives in Africa.

The extent of *public support* for social protection in Africa is difficult to gauge, although recent attitudinal surveys into the views of citizens concerning economic and political change suggest that public attitudes on the causes of poverty, the role of the state, and of the procedural justice of public programmes, are important. In terms of how people perceive causes of poverty, the key issue seems to be whether the causes are linked to a perceived 'lack of effort' by the poor or 'wider forces' (Gelbach and Pritchett 1997, Pritchett 2005). Where it is the former, support is likely to be lower than in the latter. This relates, again, to debates around the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. While evidence on this is rather thin, many citizens in Africa do see a significant role for the state to provide against vulnerability. Attitudinal surveys in southern Africa support Polanyi's thesis in finding that citizens '…are more likely to countenance economic reforms if an effective developmental state provides a safety net against the failure of markets' (Bratton and Mattes 2003: 318). Here, there may be a distinction between broad-based support for services such as education and health, and assistance to those unable to provide for themselves, especially those who are able-bodied, which are more controversial (Bratton and Mattes 2003, also see Graham 2002: 23). A majority of southern Africans approves of the state playing a strong role in terms of education, health, water and electricity (Bratton and Mattes 2003: 309), a finding that seems to augur well for states who are seeking popular support for increased levels of social spending.

The extent to which citizens trust the administrative system that delivers social protection to work fairly and effectively and deliver the goods in an impartial way, reflects on notions of procedural justice. Where social protection programmes are associated with elite capture and clientelistic patterns of distribution they may lose support (Graham 2002: 15; Rothstein 2002: 911-2). According to Pritchett (2005), the key points are: is there a mechanism of appeal beyond the local administration of the project? And, do the criteria for access change dynamically over time? The effectiveness criterion refers mainly to the 'demonstration effect' of programmes, thus highlighting the importance of effective monitoring and evaluations systems in building virtuous circles between the effects of social protection and the (re)generation of political support for such initiatives (see Figure 1).

Levels of inequality and fragmentation, or the political sociology of 'democratic' politics, are likely to be an influential factor concerning social protection, although there are two opposing views on how this might work. Research in Latin America tends to suggest that wide gaps between the middle strata and the poor, both in terms of income gap and social proximity (employment, residence), may reduce the scope for introducing social protection (Graham 2002). Nelson (2003) also argues that social protection policies require the support of the 'middle-poor', which is itself contingent on there being a large 'range of vulnerability'. Here, the middle/middle-poor strata move in and out of poverty on a regular basis, and feel the need for protective measures to be in place. One implication from this approach would be that as the gap between poor and wealthy blacks in South Africa grows (Bratton and Mattes 2003); political support for social protection there may decline.

However, an alternative possibility here is that extreme economic inequality may actually be a driving force behind social protection policies in Africa. One observer notes that such inequalities are a 'pre-condition' for the social pension system in South Africa and Namibia, both in terms of creating the need, and also making it much more feasible in terms of avoiding leakage to the non-poor (Devereux 2001: 22). The fact that Botswana – another of sub-Saharan Africa's unusually unequal societies – is one of the few other countries to have introduced a pension system adds further weight to this argument, and may suggest that many African countries have simply not reached the point of economic development and inequality whereby the impulse for social protection becomes pervasive. High levels of income inequality may also indicate the presence of a more viable tax-base for redistributive social policies via the higher-earners in society.

However, this issue may hinge on the particular forms of inequality that gain political salience in particular contexts. In Southern Africa, there is a tendency to undertake intra-group comparisons rather than in relation to the whole population (Bratton and Mattes 2003), suggesting a focus on horizontal rather than vertical inequalities (Stewart 2002) The issue of relative deprivation is stressed here as a key determinate of political behaviour. What counts here are popular perceptions of how 'people like them' will fare under a given programme. Where the boundaries of these types of 'in-group' identification overlap closely with poverty rankings, then the potential for clashes over social protection are clear. Where poverty is associated with a particular group, then this may prove to be more intractable, especially where such groups are notably different to either elites or the middle strata (on whom elites rely).

The final socio-economic force that appears to shape the politics of social protection concerns *the level of urbanisation*. Although this is closely related to overall levels of development and industrialization in particular, there also appear to be a set of more specific political relationships that are worth highlighting. For some, the fact that urbanisation tends to have a positive effect on welfare transfers 'reveals that the welfare system serves the urban areas more than the countryside…rural residents tend to fall outside welfare transfers in poor countries', not least because urban dwellers are considered more politically valuable by governments (Feng and Gizelis 2002: 228). It is notable that many of the efforts to mitigate the social costs of adjustment were focused on urban areas, such as the GAPVU project in Mozambique (Datt *et al* 1997). So, while rural voters are more willing to accept a role for the state in development matters than urbanites (Bratton and Mattes 2003); urbanites are cited as disengaged from rural poverty issues, and unwilling to extend their social rights to rural areas (de Waal 1997: 35).

The global politics of social protection

The global politics of social protection cuts across and closely informs the ways in which these predominantly national forms of politics shape social protection. This is especially pertinent in highly-indebted poor countries where donor agencies play a significant role in influencing domestic policy agenda.[2] The ways in which donor agencies conceptualise social

protection and prioritise it in relation to other policies in their lending portfolios and policy advice, are all influential. Here we briefly explore the extent to which there is now a Polanyian impulse for social protection at the global level.

The degree of importance that donor agencies currently place on social protection remains debatable, although there have been significant advances since the rather half-hearted attempt to introduce safety nets via the 'social dimensions of adjustment' initiatives of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This effort was heavily compromised both by the piecemeal and half-hearted efforts of donors, and their concurrent dedication to rolling back of the state, the only institution capable of delivering widespread forms of social protection in Africa (Putzel 2002: 3). Such programmes tended to use and even establish parallel structures of governance rather than become embedded within the political system (de Haan *et al* 2002; Parker and Serrano 2000), and were thus unlikely to form part of a general commitment by states to offer systematic forms of social protection to citizens.

The emphasis on social protection has advanced since the late 1990s with the emergence of the 'Post-Washington Consensus' in the aftermath of the economic crisis in East Asia.[3] This revealed the danger of relying on unregulated markets and unfettered growth, seemed to usher in a more genuine 'impulse' for social protection amongst donor agencies. A series of new aid modalities have been introduced – particularly moves towards direct budgetary support and 'poverty reduction strategies' – which promise to offer a more politically-attuned and integrated approach to issues of growth, good governance, and social protection.

However, for Craig and Porter (2005) the Polanyian 'double movement' within international development policy remains unpersuasive, as evidenced by the lowly status of social protection on donor agendas. Social protection effectively constitutes the last and lowliest arrival to an already crowded poverty policy agenda, behind growth, good governance and a broader focus on poverty reduction. This lowly status is reflected in the relative priority given to social protection in the donor-influenced poverty reduction strategy papers (Marcus and Wilkinson 2002). To the extent that donors shape the politics of what is possible in poor countries through their funding levels and agenda-setting powers, this does not augur well. Moreover, the specific conceptualisation of social protection is also significant here. To the extent that the global discourse on social protection is conceptualised in terms of 'risk management' (eg Holzmann and Jørgensen 2000), the relevance for the destitute and chronic poor is likely to remain minimal (Barrientos et al 2005, McKinnon 2004). As such, the global impulse for social protection remains ambiguous.

From analysis to explanations: a political contract for social protection?

It would be wrong to claim that the foregoing analysis suggests a clear picture regarding the forms of politics that are likely to underpin moves towards social protection in Africa. The discussion suggests that very different regimes may promote social protection for different reasons at different times, or even within the same polity. However, what does seem to be common across these cases is that social protection initiatives have been closely shaped by the existence and particular form of what might be termed a political contract between states and citizens. For example, the social pension programmes in both South Africa and Namibia were transformed into a progressive form of social protection aimed at reversing previous discrimination as the terms of the broader social contract altered. The erosion of apartheid brought more citizens within the contract, a process accelerated and institutionalised in South Africa through the instalment of the ANC. In Namibia, the SWAPO government pledged their commitment to this policy and have significantly increased its coverage.

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[2] Elsewhere in this volume, Britto notes that the influence of donors on flagship social protection policies in Chile and Brazil has been minimal, although they have played a role in disseminating lessons learned across Latin America.

[3] The chapter on Indonesia elsewhere in this volume discusses the development of social protection in that country after the financial crisis.

Elsewhere in Africa, it is the lack of a political contract for social protection between states and citizens around issues of social protection that constitutes arguably the largest barrier. In the absence of a binding contract, social protection policies are liable to become instigated for other reasons, for example political risk assessments, and ultimately distorted by other prevailing forms of politics such as patrimonialism. An example here is the Drought Relief Programme in Botswana, whereby 'The duty to prevent famine was closer to an administrative ethic than a directive. Above all, there was never an intention to nurture a corresponding right to relief' (de Waal 1997: 30). In Uganda, the absence of a contract between the ruling regime and citizens in Northern Uganda arguably informs the tendency to deal with the high levels of chronic poverty in that region through piecemeal social funds that are further diluted by the politics of patronage.

Other dimensions of inclusion and exclusion regarding these contracts are also apparent. Before the 1990s, and with few exceptions, social security schemes in Africa were limited to wage earners, and often only civil servants (Gruat 1990: 409). Certain forms of labour have nearly always been excluded, particularly seasonal or casual labour. De Waal notes that government employees and townspeople were generally the only ones in Africa to be targeted for food relief during the colonial era (1997: 29). The strongest political contract to emerge was around the right of urbanites to food (de Waal 1997: 31). This again suggests that certain categories of people are seen as citizens as opposed to others.

So, the notion of a political contract for social protection offers genuine and critical insights into the historical development of social protection in Africa. It also offers a normative purchase. Within current social policy debates, there is an increasing focus on 'contractualism' as a conceptual means of establishing the state's long-term rationale for challenging inequality and injustice (Jayausuriya 2002), including social protection (Ramia 2002). This has increasingly been reflected in international development debates concerning social protection. As such, and in addition to offering an analytical tool for understanding the links between politics and poverty reduction, the notion of a social contract can relocate social protection within a project of redistributive justice (Ramia 2002) that is arguably required to underpin a long-term challenge to chronic poverty (Hickey and Bracking 2005). Undertaking social protection within the broader remit of social contractualism involves retaining the reciprocity embedded within informal political relations while raising the status of passive beneficiary to that of claimant. As originally understood by Rousseau (1968), the very basis of contractualism is citizenship, and it is along these lines that Jayusiraya (2002: 316) argues that contractualism 'must be conceived as a political relationship that places a premium on the political capacity of the individual to bargain within an adequate range of available choices and options'. In framing the recipient as an actor rather than a passive recipient, the empowering potential of social protection remains in tact and transcends the 'hand-out' culture with which it is currently associated in many countries in Africa.

Conclusion

It has been argued here that politics is central to the ways in which social protection is emerging in Africa. Political institutions provide significant incentives for, and barriers to, action; while the ways in which key political actors and agencies engage with those in poverty is also critical. Issues of elite discourses and organisational culture and 'fit' require as much attention as the more technocratic agendas of capacity-building. More broadly, political institutions and actors operate in a policy environment that is clearly shaped by socio-economic forces, particularly concerning public attitudes, levels and forms of inequality and also processes of change such as urbanisation. Donor agencies are critical policy actors in many African countries, and need to give social protection a higher priority and ensure its fuller integration with other elements of their policy agendas.

The focus on social contracts can give a broader purpose to the politics of social protection as it reflects existing commitments and responsibilities towards protecting vulnerable

members of society, but also offers a normative policy framework through which to promote social protection. In this context, the nexus of politics and social protection in Africa appears to be entering an important transitional phase. For nationally-driven social protection initiatives, such as the social pension schemes in Namibia and South Africa, the challenge is one of sustaining the political contract that has developed for continued (or expanded) spending and provision in this area. In countries with more imperfect but still nationally-driven efforts to protect people against vulnerability, the issue is one of extending this contract to include the poorest people. The overarching aim for donor agencies should be to strengthen and extend political contracts for social protection where they exist, and to work towards their establishment where they do not, in part through a policy of 'doing no harm'. This means avoiding the temptation to regulate activities where institutional arrangements exist, but rather add material support and political advocacy (de Waal 1997). A key challenge is to identify and support 'politically progressive constituencies' or drivers of change, that might begin to provide the forms of mobilisation required to secure political contracts for social protection.

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The University of Manchester
**Brooks World
Poverty Institute**

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Executive Director
Professor Tony Addison

Research Director
Professor Michael Woolcock

Associate Director
Professor David Hulme

Contact:

Brooks World Poverty Institute
The University of Manchester
Humanities Bridgeford Street
Building
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL
United Kingdom

Email: **bwpi@manchester.ac.uk**

www.manchester.ac.uk/bwpi

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