

PART II

Chapter 6

## How are countries using social protection to benefit the poor?

by

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*A decade ago, the notion that social protection would promote economic growth was sometimes dismissed as fantasy. Yet today the World Bank describes social protection as investment, and economists around the world are building credible evidence that rigorously links social protection to economic growth. This chapter looks at the role of social protection in countries ranging from Bangladesh to Zambia that have made dramatic advances in reducing poverty in all its facets. It outlines what social protection encompasses, focusing on three areas of innovation: universal rights-based approaches; designing social protection so that it triggers broader development; and holistic policy frameworks that integrate social protection into national development plans. It describes mounting evidence of how social protection promotes skills development and productive investments, strengthens households' capacity to take productive risks, boosts livelihoods and employment, increases national economic resilience, builds social cohesion and allows the poor to reap the benefits of economic reforms.*

What do Nepal, Rwanda, Ghana, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Uganda and Lesotho have in common? They have all managed to reduce poverty in all its dimensions significantly over the past decade (Alkire and Roche, 2013)<sup>1</sup> and as a group made above-average progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (CDG 2013).<sup>2</sup> One of the ways in which they have done so is by using social protection to contribute to economic growth. Social protection refers to a wide range of policies designed to prevent, manage and overcome situations that negatively affect people's well-being. To be more precise, it includes policies and programmes that aim to reduce poverty and make people less vulnerable to unemployment, social exclusion, sickness, disability and old age by helping them to manage these risks and shocks.

*In Africa alone, the number of cash transfer programmes increased from 25 in 9 countries to 245 in 41 countries between 2000 and 2009*

Over the past decade, countries of the South have increasingly recognised the importance of social protection for ensuring that development reaches all members of society, especially the poor (OECD, 2009). A growing number and range of programmes – such as cash transfers (direct payments by the government to the poorest sectors of society) and health insurance – have been implemented around the world. In Africa alone, the number of cash transfer programmes increased ten-fold between 2000 and 2009 – from 25 in 9 countries to 245 in 41 countries (Garcia and Moore, 2012).

This chapter draws lessons from the nine top-performing countries identified by the Alkire and Roche study, as well as experiences from seven other countries that provide particularly interesting insights into the development impacts of social protection.<sup>3</sup> It focuses in on three major areas of innovation: universal rights-based approaches; designing social protection so that it triggers broader development; and holistic national policy frameworks that integrate social protection into their national development plans.

### **A universal approach to reaching the poor**

Over the past decade there has been a marked tendency in many Southern countries to move away from policies that attempt to target poverty – in other words, to identify who and where the poor are and design policies specifically to reach and benefit them – to more universal approaches based on concepts of human rights. This is one of the most important innovations in recent social protection policy and is a reaction to the problem of how to find and target the poor. While most social protection programmes do include administrative mechanisms for reaching the poor, increasingly policy makers recognise the high costs associated with poverty targeting, and are aware of the important trade-offs.

*Bolivia's universal pension and child benefit programmes contributed to a 15% decline in extreme poverty between 2007 and 2009*

By way of example, in 2000 South Africa found that only 10% of poor children eligible for the Child Support Grant were receiving it. Why? A study in one of the poorest districts found that only 5% of caregivers were able to navigate the bureaucratic hurdles to successfully qualify for the grant. Today, this error has been reduced by relaxing the testing system and placing greater emphasis on the grant as a right guaranteed by the country's Constitution (Samson et al., 2013).

South Africa has not been alone in making such adjustments. In March 2013, India expanded the coverage of its pension programme to ensure more universal delivery.<sup>4</sup> In the same month, Mexico introduced a new pension scheme expanding coverage to all people aged 65 years and older (US Social Security Administration, 2013). Rwanda has also made universal coverage by the health insurance scheme a top priority, valuing the national solidarity the programme fosters as much as the direct impact of improved health.<sup>5</sup> In Nepal, when a study identified families with very young children as the nation's poorest (Samson, 2008), the government implemented a benefit for all households with young children in the country's poorest districts. In this conflict-affected country, the high cost of excluding some young children from such a benefit was found to outweigh, particularly in terms of social cohesion and solidarity, the savings from targeting (Samson et al., 2013). In Bolivia, a universal pension scheme – *Renta Dignidad* – and a child benefit programme – *Bono Juancito Pinto* – contributed to a 15% decline in extreme poverty between 2007 and 2009 despite the global financial crisis (Gonzales, 2011; McCord, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

Not all countries, however, have embraced the move towards universal rights-based approaches. Many policy makers continue to perceive poverty targeting as a design feature that will improve cost-effectiveness and enable them to better reach the poor. International studies, however, contradict this intuitive assumption, finding that the high costs of targeting often outweigh the uncertain benefits, particularly when considering the interests of the excluded poorest (Mkwandawire, 2005; Coady et al., 2004; Devereux et al., 2013).

Important pilots around the world are seeking to strengthen the evidence base. Examples include Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme (Samson et al., 2013) and Indonesia's sequencing experience in evaluating complementary targeting approaches (Alatas et al., 2010). Zambia held a series of consultative evaluations before deciding to shift its Social Cash Transfer programme from an intensive poverty targeting scheme towards more universal coverage – including child benefits and pensions.<sup>7</sup> Recent studies by the World Bank and others have identified country conditions that make categorical targeting approaches relatively more effective and efficient in reaching poor households (Acosta et al., 2011; Samson, 2012b). Around the developing world, the growing awareness of the challenges of targeting is opening the door to more universal social protection programmes, which are more effective than targeted schemes in their design and implementation.

## Social protection can trigger broader development

*South Africa's social grants reduced the country's food poverty gap by 65%*

The first generation of social protection programmes focused on poverty reduction. South Africa's social grants, for example, reduced the country's food poverty gap by 65% (Samson et al., 2013). Many programmes in Latin America aim to break the pattern of perpetuation of poverty from one generation to the next. Mexico's *Oportunidades* programme (Box 6.1) and Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* (Chapter 7) have substantially reduced poverty while building people's skills. The same is true for other cash transfer programmes around the world (Arnold, 2011; Samson et al., 2013).

### Box 6.1. The Mexican *Oportunidades* Programme

Mexico began structural reforms in the 1990s to increase economic growth and employment. Many of those in extreme poverty, however, were not able to benefit from these reforms because of low levels of schooling, nutrition and health. In order to break this poverty cycle, the *Oportunidades* Programme was created in 1997 (under the name *Progressa*). It aimed to improve the basic capacity of children living in extreme poverty, enabling them to benefit from economic growth and future employment opportunities. The programme did so by giving mothers cash on the condition that they made sure their children had basic schooling and periodic health screenings (the grant for girls was higher than for boys to overcome cultural gender biases).

*Oportunidades* had several positive impacts in poor rural areas:

- Education: more children attended school for longer, and with higher academic achievement; the educational gap between girls and boys was also reduced (both for indigenous and non-indigenous children).
- Health: the incidence of illness – especially diarrhoea – among children was reduced; the use of contraceptives by women also increased, as did the use of health services by poor people in general.
- Nutrition: the nutritional status of children was improved in terms of weight, height and anaemia.

Nonetheless, the programme also faced several problems. Because poor families in Mexico – and especially the indigenous population – receive lower quality health and educational services, the health status of the indigenous children did not improve at the same pace as others; anaemia, reduced height and maternal mortality are continuing problems for these children. Furthermore, evaluations show that the impact in urban areas has been negligible.

The pace of poverty reduction in Mexico has also been slow; in fact, poverty increased in the country on the whole between 2006 and 2010. *Oportunidades'* cash transfers helped to alleviate income poverty among its target families, but the main driver for the reduction of poverty in Mexico is still linked to employment and income from labour. This indicates that programmes such as *Oportunidades* need to be implemented in tandem with better programmes or strategies for job creation and economic growth. In this way, poor children in rural and urban areas are more likely to overcome the obstacles they face in trying to build healthier and better futures.

Source: Contributed by Gonzalo Hernández Licona, Executive Secretary, National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy (CONEVAL).

The next generation of social protection programmes exemplifies how challenges such as those outlined in Box 6.1 have been overcome by moving beyond income and incentives to design social protection policies that contribute to overall development. This is the second major innovation in social protection. Among countries of the South, Bangladesh has taken a lead in this approach. Government schemes like the Rural Employment Opportunities for Productive Assets,<sup>8</sup> as well as non-governmental programmes such as BRAC's<sup>9</sup> Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction (CFPR) and the *Chars* Livelihood Programme (Box 6.2),<sup>10</sup> have shown how social protection instruments can give the boost households need to escape the poverty trap. Often the immediate income gains

### Box 6.2. Tackling vulnerability in Bangladesh: The Chars Livelihood Programme

The *Chars* of north-western Bangladesh – riverine islands created and destroyed by floods and erosion – provide a precarious home for some of the country's poorest people. Near-annual monsoon floods deposit fertile silt that supports the agriculture on which the majority of residents depend. The floods and associated erosion, however, can also leave families homeless and contribute to disease and lack of employment; they often force *Char* dwellers to migrate, rendering them even more vulnerable. It is estimated that *Char* households relocate between five and seven times each generation. One of the main objectives of the *Chars* Livelihood Programme (CLP) is to reduce vulnerabilities to external shocks such as floods. By providing an integrated package of support, the CLP targets the greatest challenges faced by *Char* dwellers.

The CLP recognises that women in the *Chars* are more vulnerable than men in a number of ways. By placing women at the centre of its interventions, the CLP seeks to reduce their vulnerability in two key ways. First, the transfer of assets to women builds their negotiating power, both within the household and in the community. Second, the programme attempts to change damaging gender attitudes through its social development activities.

Take the example of Nurun Nahar, a 23 year-old pregnant woman. Nurun and her husband Sohail used to be extremely poor. She had no land, work opportunities were limited, food was hard to find and she lacked access to basic services. Joining the CLP has radically changed her life. With the CLP's support, the base of Nurun's house was raised in 2011, keeping her family and her assets safe all year round. As part of the CLP's social development training, Nurun has also learned how to keep her family safe from disease. Her well – made from a piece of tubing – has been fitted with a concrete platform and she also has a sanitary latrine which she shares with her neighbours. "I understand the importance of clean water and sanitation and the positive impact they have on health" she explains.

By accumulating income generating assets using the CLP asset transfer grant, Nurun has begun to develop a more sustainable livelihood. When her pregnant cow gives birth she plans to sell the milk produced, for example. "Before, I felt vulnerable", says Nurun. "I did not have any land and my husband did not work. I was used to only eating twice a day and drinking water from the river."

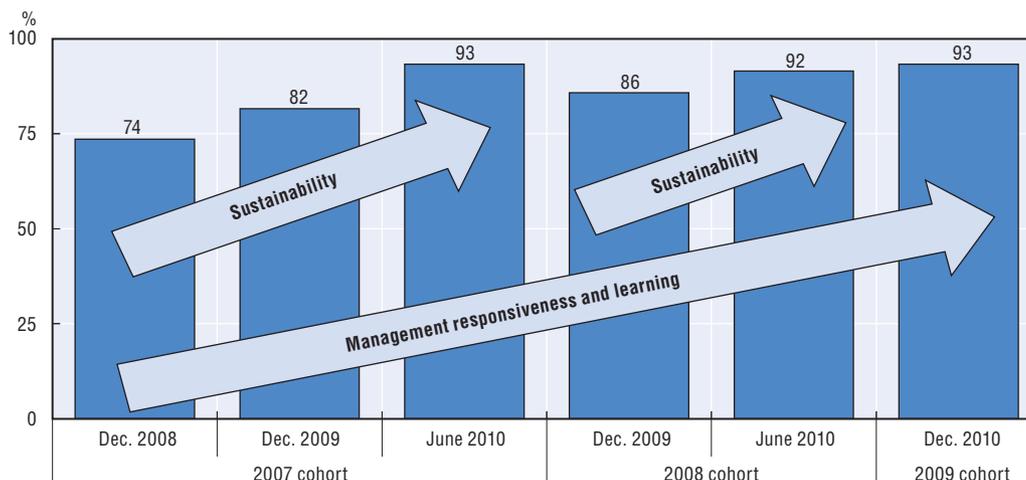
The remoteness of these islands makes it difficult for the government to provide basic services, especially schools and health care. The CLP is lobbying the government and relevant agencies to bring essential services to the *Chars*. With this support, Nurun will receive care during and after her pregnancy. "I am confident that I will give birth to a healthy child", she says.

Source: Adapted from: The Chars Livelihoods Programme website, [www.clp-bangladesh.org/newsdetails.php?id=62](http://www.clp-bangladesh.org/newsdetails.php?id=62) (accessed 20 June 2013).

are small, but other important impacts include continuous and sustained improvement across many areas, including in people's attitudes and economic opportunities.

Figure 6.1 illustrates continuing increases in a multiple indicator index of developmental outcomes<sup>11</sup> for three groups of participants in the BRAC's CFPR programme from 2007 to 2009. Beneficiary groups consistently improved outcomes year after year across a range of areas, including food security, livelihoods diversity, productive assets, human capital and others. Even after BRAC's provision of developmental benefits ended, programme participants increased their productive assets, improved their livelihoods and strengthened their households' social development (measured through education, health and gender empowerment indicators) and economic opportunities (Das and Misha, 2010; Akhter et al., 2009; Samson, 2012a). The increases in the developmental index year after year for each of the 2007 and 2008 groups highlight the sustainability of the programme's impact. The increases over time across groups reflect improvements in the programme's design and implementation as time goes on.

**Figure 6.1. Dynamic deepening of development impact: BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction Programme**



Source: Samson, M. (2012a), "Exit or Developmental Impact? The Role of 'Graduation' in Social Protection Programs", Research Report commissioned by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), AusAid, Canberra. StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932895691>

How can the lessons from these kinds of programmes be taken elsewhere? The Ford Foundation and Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) are working on ten pilots in Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Pakistan, Peru and Yemen to do just this. This global effort aims to understand how various forms of support and development initiatives – e.g. support for food consumption, savings plans, skills training and microfinance – can be sequenced to enable people to “graduate” out of extreme poverty, adapting a methodology developed by BRAC in Bangladesh. The initial results of this Graduation Program are encouraging, including a 50% decline in food insecurity in Haiti, and a 25% increase in food consumption in India; other outcomes include more diverse incomes, higher savings and improved health (CGAP-Ford Foundation, 2012).

The government of South Africa, also with Ford Foundation support, is implementing a similar pilot in two provinces to address the challenges of high HIV prevalence, unemployment, an under-resourced education system and the legacy of apartheid. The pilot adopts an evidence-building approach which combines a robust evaluation methodology

with a dynamic flexible design, integrating financial inclusion, education and career development initiatives with South Africa's successful social protection programmes to strengthen economic opportunities for the country's youth (Samson, 2011).

These second generation social protection programmes tackle the complex drivers of chronic poverty in order to trigger and accelerate development – creating a virtuous cycle that enables poor people to lift themselves to more sustaining livelihoods, build assets and access economic opportunities. The challenges vary from country to country, however, and to adapt these approaches to each context requires complex evaluation and a better evidence base than single-country studies can provide. Development partners are supporting global networks that share experiences and build capacity through exchanges of experience and knowledge among partner countries, with promising initial results. More rapid progress demands better integrated cross-country evaluation frameworks that can effectively identify the strategies with the greatest impact.

### Making development planning more holistic

*A national co-ordinating mechanism integrating social protection improves impact and value for money*

The third innovation reflects the changing policy environment for social protection. More and more ministries in charge of socio-economic planning are integrating comprehensive social protection into national development plans. This holistic approach recognises that policies to promote livelihoods and inclusive economic growth and development yield the greatest impact when co-ordinated within a broader planning framework.

In Ghana, for instance, the Livelihoods Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme integrates social health insurance with cash transfers. Mozambique's new cash transfer instrument links diverse ministries to promote livelihoods by “considering broader macro-economic areas for social investments [and] raise overall living standards (such as in agriculture, food security and employment-generating activities)” (UNICEF Mozambique, 2012). Countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda are, in varying ways, employing the development planning approach to improve cross-cutting social and economic impacts (Samson, 2012a; Samson et al., 2013).

Within this framework, governments balance national policies and spending to maximise the linkages between social protection and other development sectors. This involves strengthening relationships within government, and between government and other partners, in an on-going process of policy co-ordination that embeds social protection within broader social and economic policy planning. Figure 6.2, adapted from Uganda's successful approach to integrating social protection within its development planning process, illustrates the process.

The framework defines “inputs” as government policies, programmes and instruments that enable the achievement of national policy objectives (“outputs”), emphasising the importance of linkages within and between sectors. For example, the shaded box depicts a potential area for intra-sectoral linkages. In the social protection sector, when cash transfers finance otherwise destitute households' contributions for social health insurance, these two areas are mutually reinforcing, protecting household members from catastrophic health shocks for which social cash transfers are inadequate. Social protection instruments can also

Figure 6.2. **The development planning approach to social protection**

Policy instruments (INPUTS)				Development planning matrix		
Social protection		Other sectors				
Cash transfers	Health insurance	Education	Livelihoods support			
				Poverty reduction		
				Social risk management		
				Social inclusion		
				Human capital development		
				Livelihoods development		
				Economic growth		
				Other sectors		

improve the impact of other policy sectors and vice versa, for instance by promoting inclusive economic growth (Figure 6.2).

A national co-ordinating mechanism that plans, prioritises and integrates social protection policies and practices improves impact and value for money by maximising the likelihood of achieving critical policy objectives while minimising the associated risks and costs.

### Conclusions

Only a decade ago, the notion that social protection would promote economic growth was sometimes dismissed as fantasy, as it contradicted the conventional wisdom of a trade-off between equity and growth.<sup>12</sup> Today, the World Bank describes social protection as investment,<sup>13</sup> and economists around the world are building credible evidence that rigorously links economic growth to social protection (OECD, 2009). Others have corroborated this view: social protection promotes human capital and other productive investment, strengthens households’ capacity to take productive risks, boosts livelihoods and employment, increases national economic resilience, and builds social cohesion and opportunities for economic reforms that benefit the poor.

Social protection is not a discretionary option for governments, but rather an essential element of a policy framework to effectively tackle poverty and promote inclusive growth. Evidence from countries that have successfully achieved the Millennium Development Goals demonstrates that rights-based approaches reach poor households more effectively while minimising administrative, social, political and particularly economic costs, enabling social protection to generate maximum growth and development.

In addition, social protection programmes that are based on evidence of what works can effectively draw from global lessons of success while carefully rooting programmes within the country’s specific context. This focus not only sustains poverty reduction but also strengthens growth processes at the local level.

At a national policy level, planning social protection policies and instruments within a cross-cutting development framework maximises linkages, enabling such programmes to reach beyond their core objectives of tackling poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion to strengthen other development sectors. This is how social protection can stimulate the kind of inclusive growth required for ending poverty (Chapter 1).

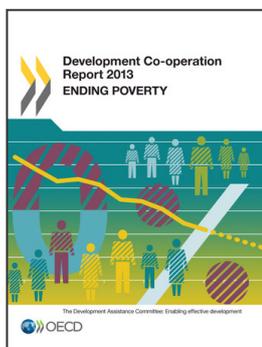
### Notes

1. These nine countries were identified in a study by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), listed here in the order of absolute change according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI – see Chapter 3). The Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) and the author have worked in all nine of these countries supporting relevant social protection programmes. However, neither the EPRI nor the author was involved in the Oxford study.
2. The Center for Global Development has constructed performance indicators for all developing countries and ranked progress towards MDG achievement. Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Ghana, Nepal and Uganda all rank among the top 20 low-income countries in terms of overall progress.
3. Brazil, India, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia.
4. Minister for Rural Development Jairam Ramesh, speech outside of parliament on 7 March 2013, reported by *The Hindu* newspaper, 8 March 2013, see [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com).
5. From a speech made by Rwandan Prime Minister Bernard Makuza (2008), at the International Social Security Association (ISSA) Regional Social Security Forum for Africa, 18-20 November, Kigali (ISSA, 2008).
6. For example, the World Bank has estimated that an increase of four percentage points in Mexico's poverty rate from 2008 to 2010 can be attributed to the global financial crisis (Habib et al., 2010).
7. See Samson et al. (2013) for a review of studies documenting evidence of social protection's growth impacts in Zambia since 2008.
8. Supported by the UNDP.
9. BRAC started in rural Bangladesh as a small-scale relief and rehabilitation project called the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee; this name was later changed to Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee. Since then, BRAC has expanded across the country into rural as well as urban areas, and has also recently expanded to other countries in Asia and Africa. With this, the name of the organisation has been changed to BRAC, which is no longer an acronym.
10. Both supported financially by AusAID and DFID.
11. Including socio-economic indicators related to food security, robustness and diversification of livelihoods, access to quality housing, water and sanitation, savings, school attendance for children, etc.
12. For example, international economists criticised evidence of the economic growth impact of South Africa's system of social cash transfers at a conference organised by the government of South Africa's Committee of Inquiry for Comprehensive Social Security held in Cape Town in 2000 ("Towards a Sustainable and Comprehensive Social Security System"). Specifically, the evidence that cash transfers had a greater impact on reducing liquidity constraints to labour market participation and strengthening risk management barriers to investment in job search contradicted the conventional wisdom that reducing the personal costs of unemployment would undermine incentives to work and create dependency.
13. "Social protection is a powerful way to fight poverty and promote growth." First key message in the World Bank's Africa Social Protection Strategy 2012-22 (World Bank, 2012).

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