Chapter 9

The Social Protection Agenda and the Burden of Responsibility and Sustainability: A Review of the African Dilemma

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ABSTRACT

Social protection represents part of the global agenda of the International Labour Organization in its concerted attempt to improve and promote global labour standards, labour rights as human rights, and reduce poverty. The situation of African countries is precarious given the poor state of their economies, poor national incomes, and the widespread state of poverty. In addition, most African countries south of the Sahara have poor databases on vital statistics, security insecurity, mono-cultural economies, and the failure to effectively entrench governance and democratic institutions and reforms, amongst others. How could the problem of corruption, graft, theft of public funds, and the cumbersome bureaucratic bottlenecks that are so prevalent in Africa be minimized if not eliminated? The chapter, therefore, anchors its analysis on two African countries: Nigeria and Ghana. But how can social protection be funded in a sustainable way? These are the objectives that are being pursued in this chapter.
INTRODUCTION

Defining Social Protection

Social protection has generated intense debates and gained currency within governmental and non-governmental organizations and systems at local, regional and international levels and discourses. Increase in poverty, unemployment, discrimination, deprivation and social exclusion especially in developing countries provided the necessary impetus and motivation for the global attention that is being given to social protection. More importantly, political crises and ideological conflicts e.g. religious extremism have led to a number of failed states and increased vulnerability of the populace to the afore-mentioned problems. In many of these developing countries, the majority of the citizenry falls within the informal sector, hence are uncovered by social protection which “remained a privilege of public servants” (Rohregger, 2010). She states further: “Due to the dominance of the informal sector, which employs many of the people in developing countries, only a few private sector employees have so far been included in the state systems of social protection” (ibid.). This shows that the majority of the populace in these countries is highly vulnerable to the myriads of socioeconomic and political problems which bedevil their societies. Therefore, the urgency and necessity of social protection/social security cannot be easily ignored given the vital roles it can play.

According to Rohregger (2010) social protection has social, economic and poverty-reducing functions and goals. Quoting BMZ (2009:8), Barbara Rohregger highlights the basic political function of social protection thus:

*The political function of social protection systems is to ensure social equilibrium. Social protection systems strengthen social cohesion, enhance the legitimacy of the political system and can prevent social conflict to be successful in this, social protection systems must be designed and implemented so that they particularly benefit poor and disadvantaged groups. (Rohregger, ibid.)*

Meanwhile, the failure of social protection systems and policies to capture the vast majority of the population in these developing countries has been attributed to a number of factors, ranging from “financial resources, policy design and implementation details and political economy factors” (Bastagli, 2013). The developing countries need to do more in its promotion and implementation of social protection systems and policies if they are to reduce poverty, promote equality, increase prosperity and above all bring happiness to the majority of the populace. A number of constraints are in the way of achieving these objectives especially when looking at it from global comparative perspectives in terms of developed versus developing countries’
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