CTPD'S MONDAY OPINION

This is a weekly column aimed at sharing CTPD's perspective and steering public debate on various issues pertaining to Trade & Investments Law, Public Finance Managment, Extractives and Human Development.

TODAYS TOPIC

REFLECTION ON SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES IN ZAMBIA (PART 2).

IN LAST week's Monday Opinion, we explored the history of social protection and non-contributory schemes that provide a safety net for the poor and vulnerable in Zambia. In today's piece we review Zambia's National Social Protection (NSP) Policy of 2014 – 2018 in depth and provide more examples of best practices within the region to enhance social assistance schemes in the country.

The NSP policy was formulated based on four pillars – social assistance, social security, livelihood and empowerment, and social protection. These pillars guide a variety of interventions, including protective interventions, which are mostly schemes under the Social Assistance Pillar that aim to protect vulnerable populations from the effects of economic and social shocks, poverty, and destitution. Preventive interventions seek to prevent the exposure of individuals to economic and social risks under the Social Security/Social Insurance Pillar that might lead to the depreciation of their ability to sustain themselves through pensions, health insurance, sickness, and maternity benefits.

Under the Livelihood and Empowerment Pillar, promotional interventions strengthen livelihood capacities by empowering segments of the population who are poor but have productive capacity to lift them out of poverty. Under the Social Protection Pillar, transformative interventions use policy, legal, and regulatory instruments to improve the welfare of the population and conditions that promote social and economic justice for the vulnerable and poor. As a result, the policy envisions Zambia as a middle-income country by 2030, free of chronic or periodic critical levels of poverty, deprivation, and extreme vulnerability.

The NSP Policy's implementation has been reliant on securing adequate and predictable funding to ensure long-term planning and delivery of social protection services. Financial and human resources must be mobilized for social protection programs. To this end, the Ministry of Finance is in charge of mobilizing and disbursing funds as budgeted in the National Budget in order to ensure that programs are implemented on time. As a result, the government investigates the fiscal space available for social protection and identifies alternative resource mobilization strategies to improve social protection fund accountability, reporting, and tracking systems.

Despite years of efforts to improve social protection in Zambia, poverty remains high at around 54 percent, with rural rates as high as 77 percent, according to the 2015 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey (LCMS). With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, more people have fallen into poverty, food insecurity has increased, livelihoods have been lost, and human capital has been lost in the country. Furthermore, the unemployment rate was estimated to be 13.8 percent, with 19.9 percent of youth unemployed (Zambia Labor Force Survey 2020). Similarly, despite a minor decrease of nearly K90 in the Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) as reported by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) for the month of April 2022, the cost of living remains high.

Given its recent growth and poverty reduction experience over the last decade, Rwanda stands out as a good example of best practices in the region. Rwanda has prioritized children's welfare and vulnerability through child-focused initiatives as part of their National Early Childhood Development Programme (NECDP) from 2018 to 2024. As a result, their child-focused social protection budget share increased to 11.2 percent in 2020/21 from 8.5 percent in 2016/17, not only in nominal terms but also in real terms. Children's interventions in Zambia, on the other hand, have remained limited, fragmented, and less responsive to current risks and vulnerabilities.

Kenya, for example, has implemented the Social Assistance Act No. 24 of 2013. Despite challenges with effective implementation, Kenya's Act is comprehensive and defines who qualifies for social assistance, including orphans and vulnerable children, poor elderly people, unemployed people (with specific conditions), people with disabilities, and people disabled by acute chronic illnesses.

Kenya has long emphasized the Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC), one of the largest social protection programs aimed at preventing intergenerational poverty caused by HIV/AIDS by providing financial assistance to orphan caregiving families. Kenya also adopted a single registry for social protection in 2021, as well as harmonized social assistance targeting tools, to ensure that people with disabilities are identified equally across the country in social protection programs. In the same year, an unemployment insurance fund was established to expand coverage and improve vulnerable groups' inclusion in mainstream schemes (International Labour Organization).

Given these case examples, the Zambian Government and relevant line ministries may draw lessons from these countries to strengthen and harmonize the regulatory framework guiding the agenda of social protection in the country. It would be necessary for the government to also inform the public on the progress made in reviewing the NSP Policy and whether a new policy is underway. There is a need to be more deliberate in addressing the needs and vulnerabilities children face as well and clearly provide specific allocations for children within the national budget (much more, the Constituency Development Fund).

This is it for this week. Look out for next week's article as we discuss another exciting topic.

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