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*The September edition of the Global Cooperation Newsletter draws attention to the existing gender challenges in Africa. The feature article, written by Christopher Dapaah, addresses the situation with child marriage, and the reasons that perpetuate the prevalence of this troublesome social phenomenon in many African communities. The author also presents his vision regarding some possible policy measures that could be introduced to reduce, and eventually to end, child marriage.*

*The article written by Julie Newton illustrates the importance of a gender lens in social protection, highlighting how gender-blind social protection policies risk entrenching gender inequalities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The author demonstrates how attention to gender in the design of social protection programmes can improve their effectiveness in achieving more inclusive development. The article also presents a useful overview of key gender and social protection concepts as well as national experiences.*

*In this issue of the Newsletter we are also publishing information regarding the recent launch of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection in New York.*

Sergei Zelenev, ICSW Executive Director and Editor of the Newsletter

INSIDE

Ending child marriage in Africa – What could be done?

2

Making Social Protection Gender Sensitive for Inclusive Development in Sub Saharan Africa

8

## ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA- WHAT COULD BE DONE?

By Christopher Dapaah

In many African countries communities have increasingly recognized child marriage as a serious challenge. Child marriage disproportionately affects young girls, who are much more likely to be married as children compared to young boys. For many of these girls marriage before the age of 18 or younger is a personal, life-changing tragedy having a devastating and long-lasting impact.

Evidence exists that worldwide more than 700 million women alive today were married as children. 17% of them, or 125 million, live in Africa (UNICEF, 2016).

Approximately 39% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa are married before the age of 18, and 12% before the age of 15. All African countries are faced with the challenge of child marriage, whether they experience high child marriage prevalence, such as Niger (76%) or lower rates like Algeria (3%). Child marriage is widespread in West and Central Africa (42%), as well as in Eastern and Southern Africa. There are 17 African countries on the list of 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage (UNICEF, 2016). But it is not only an African problem—countries like Bangladesh, India and Nicaragua are also on the list, and many other developing countries are also facing this major challenge. Apart from the above mentioned countries, Brazil, Indonesia and Mexico are among the 10 countries with the highest absolute number of child brides (UNICEF, 2016).

The sheer scale of the problem has generated a range of policy interventions to address it. Many programs recognize the multitude of factors driving the persistence of child marriage, and are trying integrated



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approaches that engage communities, families and policymakers, while attempting to improve girls' education and skills, and therefore their opportunities and empowerment.

Several international human rights agreements condemn child marriage, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). All call for the designation of child marriage as a harmful practice, and protection for the rights of children from all forms of child abuse.

Early marriage leads to early childbearing, with significantly higher maternal mortality and morbidity rates, as well as higher infant mortality rates. Having many pregnancies at an early age is dangerous for both mother and child, as young mothers bodies are usually not mature enough to carry a baby. Moreover, child marriage has negative effects on girls' education and life opportunities; often such marriage virtually puts an end to a

girl's education.

Child marriage passes the cycle of poverty, poor health, and low education from one generation to the next. Girls from poor families are more likely than girls from wealthier families to become child brides. The girls who marry young are usually not empowered to make important health decisions, such as practicing modern contraception to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Lack of education limits a girl's vision and understanding of the trade-offs, and without skills, mobility, and connections, she is constrained in her ability to overcome poverty for herself, her children, or her family. Young girls married to older men with reckless sexual behavior are also at greater risk of STIs, including HIV infection, having no power to change anything for the better.

National and international indicators on maternal health, education, food security, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality are all negatively linked with high child marriage rates. In fact, child marriage undermines global targets to reduce poverty worldwide.

#### DRIVERS

The causes of child marriage are common across Africa. "Parents may marry off their daughter owing to poverty or out of fear for their safety. Tradition and the stigma of straying from traditions perpetuate child marriage in many communities. Crucially, gender inequality and the low value placed on girls underlie the practice." (See: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen>)

The specifics and the gravity of the situation often differ within the country. For example, the rate of child marriage in Upper East Region of Ghana currently stands at 38%, Upper West region recorded 39%, Northern region- 36%, Western region-37%, Brong Ahafo region recorded 32%, Volta region-

33%, Central region has 26%, and Ashanti region recorded 19%. The urban areas and major cities are in better shape: Greater Accra region and Eastern regions recorded the lowest rate of child marriage, each with 11%. This clearly shows that more sensitization and awareness needs to be carried out, most especially in the regions with the highest rate of child marriage prevalence, and solutions need to be localised. In rural areas, the situation remains worrisome—at least a third of women in Ghana villages were married as children.

Despite most African countries setting the legal age for marriage at 18 years, laws are rarely enforced, since the practice of marrying young children is upheld by tradition and social norms. As mentioned above, child marriage is deeply rooted in poverty, gender inequality, persistent gender-based violence and gender discrimination. Unfortunately, it is upheld by some traditions and culture. The practice is most common in rural areas, where prospects for girls can be limited. In many cases, parents arrange these marriages, and young girls have no choice. Consequently, some societies believe that early marriage will protect young girls from sexual attacks and violence and they see it as a way to insure that, their daughters will not become pregnant out of wedlock and bring "dishonour to the family".

Among African countries, Niger — a least developed country — presents a vivid example of the detrimental impact of child marriage, having the highest rate of child marriage in the world, where 3 in 4 girls marry before their 18th birthday. Poverty is a major driver of child marriage in Niger, when poor parents seek economic improvements and an increase in social status at the expense of their girl brides.

In some areas of the country, the rates are even higher: in the region of Diffa, 89% of girls marry as children. The link between the

lack of education and the prevalence of child marriage is particularly evident in Niger: 81% of women aged 20-24 with no education and 63% of those with only primary education were married or in union at age 18, compared to only 17% of women with secondary education or higher (UNICEF, 2016).

Given these exceptionally high rates, recent research from the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and the World Bank suggests that ending child marriage in Niger could save the country more than \$25 billion in the next 15 years. (See: <http://www.icrw.org/events/early-findings-economic-impacts-child-marriage-study-november-19>)

Child marriage not only increases social isolation but also traps girls into a cycle of poverty and gender inequality, apart from the severe health complications. High maternal mortality and morbidity are prevalent among child brides. Child brides have a higher risk of dying from complication of pregnancy such as haemorrhage or they may develop obstetric fistula, which, in turn, has a significant negative health, social and psychological impact on their lives.

Child brides often face a higher risk of contracting HIV, because they often marry an older man with unclear sexual history and promiscuous behaviour. Child brides often show signs symptomatic of sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress, such as feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and severe depression.

#### LEGAL STEPS

In many African countries governments recognize the detrimental consequences of existing practices and norms in this area. Child marriage is seen as a human rights violation and has been included in a number of legal instruments at the national, continental and international levels. The African Union (AU) specifically promotes policies related to young peoples' rights; for example, a recent 5th Strategic Priority of

AU's Strategic Plan 2014 -2017 has a bearing on the rights of children and youth in promoting common standards by supporting adaptation and implementation of the instruments at the regional and national levels, as well as the monitoring of implementation progress by Member States and ensuring accountability. The launch of the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa on 29 May 2014 was an important step. The campaign is focused on accelerating change across the continent by encouraging African governments to develop strategies to raise awareness of and address the harmful impact of child marriage, as well as expediting and invigorating the movement to end child marriage

#### **Laws Proscribing Early Marriage in Ghana.**

*Ghana was the first country to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which called for the abolishment of traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children. The level of the penalty is usually a jail term; a minimum of five years imprisonment without the option of a fine. In accordance with international norms, the 1992 Constitution and the Children's Act (Act 560) both define a child as a person below the age of 18. Section 14 of the Act provides that a person shall not force a child to be betrothed, to be subject of a dowry transaction or to be married.*

*The Criminal Code Amendment Act (Act 554) prohibits compulsion in marriage and the giving out of a girl in marriage without her consent. Section 100 of the Act provides that, if a female is compelled to marry another person by duress, this makes the marriage void or voidable, the marriage is of no effect. Under Section 109 it is also provided that "whoever by duress causes any person to marry against his or her will shall be guilty of a misdemeanor". The Children's Act further pegs the minimum marriage age in Ghana at*

*18 and discourages withdrawing children from school for marriage. Section 14 of the Act provides that a person shall not force a child to be betrothed, to be subject of a dowry transaction or to be married. The Criminal Code Amendment Act (Act 554) prohibits compulsion in marriage and giving a girl out in marriage without her consent. Section 92 states that a person is guilty of the abduction of a female if, with intent to cause her to be married to any person, he unlawfully takes her from lawful possession and care and detains her. Section 109 also states clearly that forcing a person to marry against their will is illegal, while the Children's Act also stipulates that forced child marriage is illegal (Sec. 13 and 14). The Domestic Violence Act, (Act 732) 2007, Section 1(b), defines domestic violence to include "the forcible confinement and detention of another person".*

#### OBSTACLES

It is a truism that the bedrock of progress in any society is the education of the citizenry. Education is important for every child, whether a boy or girl. Educated and healthy women are empowered, and are more productive, thereby contributing to greater national productivity and higher GDP. They spend more money on food, housing, education and income-generating activities, all of which reduce poverty levels. Unfortunately, many females are deprived of formal education owing to many factors. First of all, there is the cost of education -- preference in families often goes to boys if they cannot afford to educate all of their children. One way the government is alleviating the financial burden of education on families is through the social protection interventions such as school meals programmes and providing scholarships as incentives to girls to attend school.

There is also a problem with prevalent social and cultural norms, admittedly, deep-seated and particularly difficult to address. Cultural

predispositions towards gender inequality evident in some African communities represent strong hindrances to female education; these obstacles are addressed by social development practitioners and social workers at various forums and platforms, but the outcomes are not always positive. For example, traditional Ghanaian culture doesn't always have a positive view of females who advance into higher educational levels, especially those living in rural areas.

In many rural communities of Africa, girls are still not able to match up with their male counterparts owing to heavy house chores, which makes their school attendance low and is reflected in their academic performance. One way of resolving this is to emphasize the practical value of female education, so that gradually culture attitudes change to accept females as a vital part of the economy, thereby eradicating some tradition-based resistance surrounding female education.

Teenage pregnancy, early marriage and HIV/AIDS also have a detrimental effect on female education, particularly in higher levels of education. Unfortunately, many girls who get pregnant or get married early or have HIV/AIDS do not stay in school owing to stigmatization. Social workers discourage these unfortunate practices and promote girls' attendance, encouraging them to remain in school as long as boys, if possible. However, results often vary from one region to another.

Another barrier to female education in some African countries is the insecurity of the girl child in the classroom owing to the rampant sexual harassment suffered at the hands of classmates as well as teachers. Female children should feel safe and enjoy fair treatment in the classroom, but often they do

not. One of the key lessons learned is that teachers and students need to be trained to be gender sensitive.

In some cases also, parents neglect their duties towards their female children by not providing their basic needs. Many of the *de facto* abandoned children, even when they have the desire to complete school, become drop-outs owing to a combination of negative circumstances, such as moving out of town or village to make ends meet or finding different and not always legal ways to earn a livelihood, including prostitution.

#### ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Finding solutions in the quest to end child marriage requires work across all sectors, working through all levels, and making decisions that take into consideration local specifics. At the same time, there are some obvious steps that are required.

As is well known, poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Economic growth must be inclusive in order to provide sustainable jobs and promote equality. Poverty can be addressed through education to gain employment, a voice in decision-making and knowledge about human rights issues regarding child marriage.

Female education, particularly girls' education, has become a concern worldwide, and African countries are not exception. It is obvious that, when girls are properly educated, they can make immense contributions to society. Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey, a Ghanaian scholar, once noted: "If we educate a boy, we educate one person, but if we educate a girl, we educate a family and a whole society".

Education—of both parents and the girl child—remains a powerful way to prevent child marriage, facilitating schooling and literacy, and paving the road to further education. According to a study done in Egypt in 2012, educated parents were more likely to keep their daughters in school and less likely to marry them off at a young age, compared to parents who had little or no education.

In their advocacy campaigns, many civil-society organizations in Africa stress that apart from the prevention of early marriages, the advantages of sending girls to school include increased literacy to push forward economic development, the reduction of human trafficking (women are most vulnerable when they are uneducated and poor); reduction in family size owing to awareness of contemporary family planning methods, the boosting of woman's earning capabilities through their participation in business and economic activity, and many other positives for individuals and for society at large.

Nationally, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations need to collaborate more effectively with international and regional organizations to ensure efficient use of scarce resources to tackle the causes of child marriage. Understanding the complex drivers behind these practices could help in finding the most appropriate solutions.

First and foremost, enforcing the minimum legal age for marriage is necessary so as to protect girls' rights. Judges and law enforcement agencies must therefore be properly trained, and a well-functioning system of universal birth registrations should be in place so as to ensure that girls have a proper document certifying their age. Addressing religious concerns and educating religious leaders on the hazards of early marriage should be a major component of such efforts.

Families and communities must become important partners in developing curriculum and managing children's education. Parents, especially fathers, apart from providing some of the basic needs of the girl child, should desist from arranging child marriages. Parents should not hesitate to lodge a complaint to the relevant authorities when they are subjected to traditions at the community level. Establishment of girls' advisory groups in communities to raise the self-esteem of female students and decrease harassment has proved its importance.

Media could play a more effective role in educating citizens on the negative effects of early marriage, and helping to avoid these practices.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Child marriage takes a toll on individuals, families and societies, perpetuating a generational cycle of poverty, low education, early child bearing, and poor health.

A collective regional political commitment is needed in order to address this challenge, facilitating collaboration between governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations in raising community awareness about sexual and reproductive health, as well as the harmful consequences of child marriage. Ending child marriage requires collective efforts on all fronts: political, socio-economic, judicial and religious. Education is a key protective factor against child marriage. Being in school builds a girl's knowledge and skills so that she is better able to organize her own life and delay marriage until a proper age. It is vital therefore that education plans integrate raising awareness of these issues, especially the goal of ending child marriage. Universal policies and programs are needed to help all girls under age 18 attend school and stay out of the "marriage market", and the existing laws aimed at preventing guardians from

allowing underage girls to marry need to be enforced.

Ending child marriage would protect girls' rights to education and protection, save the lives of young mothers and their newborns, and improve family health and well-being. Since families have tremendous influence in their daughters' marriages, they need to be closely involved in the solutions, and they are key to ensuring a healthy transition to adulthood for all girls.

#### References:

UNICEF State of the World's Children, 2016. New York, 2016

'Girls not brides' platform—  
<http://www.girlsnotbrides.org>

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) platform-- <http://www.icrw.org/>

## Making Social Protection Gender Sensitive for Inclusive Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Julie Newton

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, social protection has climbed up the policy agenda as a major policy response to chronic poverty and vulnerability with positive impacts on food security, income and access to basic services. In Sub-Saharan Africa, persistent levels of poverty and inequality, unemployment and underemployment, and a high degree of labour market informality have encouraged governments to adopt social protection as a key instrument for achieving inclusive development. Its ability to achieve inclusive development is largely due to its catalytic role in redistribution and potential to reach the poorest. Inclusive development<sup>1</sup> here is defined as a 'pattern and pace in which the poor and most vulnerable groups participate and which is characterised by income growth, increase of productive employment as well as decreasing inequality in both income and non-income dimensions of wellbeing'.

Although cited as one of the great success stories of development reaching large groups of the poor, social protection has been critiqued as gender-blind. This is despite decades of experience showing that the feminization of poverty and gender inequality is a major driver of poverty and that women's empowerment contributes to poverty alleviation. This article will illustrate the importance of a gender lens in social protection and highlight how gender-blind social protection policies risk entrenching gender inequalities. Furthermore, it will demonstrate how attention to gender in the design of social protection programmes can



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improve its effectiveness in achieving more inclusive development.

### 2. Conceptualizing social protection and gender

'Social protection' refers to policies that protect 'poor households' from risk, reduce poverty and vulnerability, and smooth out consumption (**see Box 1**). State-provided social protection<sup>2</sup> can be grouped into three categories: 1) *social assistance* (cash/in kind transfers, subsidies and fee waivers targeting vulnerable and poor households), 2) *social insurance* (ranging from contributory or

1. The building blocks of inclusive development are economic transformation, productive employment creation and social protection ([INCLUDE platform](#)).

2. Non-state social protection includes all forms of informal community and family safety nets such as cooperatives, social welfare associations, burial associations, rotating savings and credit associations, and traditional solidarity networks. While non-state social protection is more prevalent than state provided social protection, there is growing evidence that direct, regular and more predictable transfers by the state are more effective in the long run. The state remains the main actor able to mobilize sufficient resources to enable distributive and redistributive policies (Holmes & Jones, 2013)

subsidized insurance including old-age insurance, health insurance and weather-based crop insurance) and 3) *legal and regulatory approaches* (legislation focused on improving employment opportunities and standards usually within the formal sector, such as the minimum wage).

Here, we argue that social protection that includes design features that tackle the structural causes of poverty and vulnerability resonates with gender and development approaches that look at these in the context of unequal gender power relations. Attention to gender recognizes how socially constituted roles, relations and relative power assigned by a particular society to men and women influence their ability to access and benefit from social protection (**see Box 2**). Gender-aware programming involves looking at the conditions and position of women relative to men in the context of social protection and highlights inequalities in gender relations within the household and how they interrelate with power relations at the community, market and state levels. A gender lens helps illustrate how some social protection programming, although addressing women's practical gender needs, can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes (i.e. women as mothers and care givers). A gender lens can support the design of gender transformative social protection that tackles strategic gender interests from the very beginning. For example, social protection can include training initiatives for women that challenge stereotypical ideas of 'traditional forms' of work.

To discuss this in more detail, we need to take a closer look at social protection in relation to inclusive development and its potentially transformative agenda. For this, it is useful to look at the conceptual framework for social protection, which distinguishes between the *protective*, *preventative*, *promotive* and *transformative* agenda of social protection (**Box 3**). This classification

illustrates a spectrum of different objectives, including traditional forms of social protection, which focus on risk management and social assistance (safety nets), towards more development trajectory schemes, which tackle the root causes of vulnerability so that households graduate from poverty into 'sustainable livelihoods'.

In practice, different social protection programmes have multiple overlapping objectives that combine different instruments. As a result, they have different impacts on women and men, which can be simultaneously preventive as well as promotive depending on the design and objectives of the programme. Many programmes use multiple instruments as well as linkages to complementary social services, such as to Ghana's Livelihoods Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, which combines social health insurance with cash transfers.

### 3. Applying a gender lens to social protection: why 'gender matters'?

The argument for a gender lens in the design, implementation, monitoring and governance of social protection can be made on both instrumental and ethical grounds. Not only does it enhance the overall impact of a programme and reduce unintended negative impacts, it is important ethically from a rights perspective. If social protection is to have a transformative impact at a more systemic level that begins to address the structures of inequality, it needs to be supported by interventions that improve women's access and control over resources in relation to men; enhance their capabilities, voice, productive roles beyond traditional ideas of 'appropriate work', decision making and agency (e.g. through education and building their entrepreneurial skills, voice and confidence); and support them to move beyond their normative roles as mothers and caretakers.

**Box 3. Conceptual framework for social protection**

Objectives of social protection	Examples of instruments
<p><b>PROTECTIVE (risk coping):</b> Ex-post social assistance instruments to assist with existing socioeconomic problems</p> <p><i>Immediate protection and relief from poverty and deprivation</i></p>	<p><b>Cash transfers:</b> Child support grants, foster care grants, social pensions, unconditional cash transfers</p> <p><b>Food transfers:</b> Supplementary feeding, therapeutic feeding</p> <p><b>Services:</b> Health fee waivers, home-based care</p> <p><b>Humanitarian:</b> Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) reception centres, internally displaced persons (IDPs)/refugee camps</p> <p><b>Typical examples:</b> Cash/in kind transfers, school feeding, emergency relief</p>
<p><b>PREVENTATIVE (risk mitigation):</b> Ex-ante social insurance instruments to build the ability to respond to future shocks and encourage moderate risk taking through innovative insurance instruments for the poor</p> <p><i>Prevents deprivation and damage to coping strategies</i></p>	<p><b>Government:</b> Social security systems, strategic grain reserves, pan-seasonal food prices</p> <p><b>Livelihood diversification:</b> Programmes that include skill training on alternative livelihood options</p> <p><b>Private:</b> Weather-indexed insurance, commercial property insurance, remittances</p> <p><b>Community:</b> Rotating savings and credit groups, burial/funeral societies, village grain banks, community-based health insurance schemes</p>
<p><b>PROMOTIVE (risk reduction):</b> Moves beyond the traditional safety net agenda to mechanisms for reducing poverty and vulnerability, reducing dependency and enabling productive poor to achieve sustainable livelihoods</p> <p><i>Promotes resilience through livelihood diversification and improves security</i></p> <p><i>Recognizes that you need more than a transfer of resources or particular forms of social support to respond to problems</i></p> <p><i>Has stronger emphasis on pro-poor access to education and health services; emphasizes long-term investment in human capital formation</i></p>	<p><b>Agriculture:</b> Agricultural input subsidies, seed fairs, inputs-for-work, starter packs, public works programmes</p> <p><b>Access to credit transfers/protection</b></p> <p><b>Common property resources</b></p> <p><b>Education:</b> Educational material fairs, school fee waivers, school feeding programmes, conditional cash transfers</p> <p><b>Infrastructure:</b> Public works programme</p>
<p><b>TRANSFORMATIVE (risk reduction):</b> Reverses social exclusion and economic marginalization and focuses on addressing underlying causes of social vulnerability</p> <p><i>Transforms social relations to address concerns about social and gender equity, social justice and exclusion</i></p>	<p><b>Legal:</b> Legislation on economic, social and cultural rights; anti-corruption measures; citizen juries; sensitization/anti-discrimination campaigns; living wage legislation and decent work legislation; worker's rights (e.g. maternity leave); child rights, eradication of child labour</p> <p>Cash transfers on their own are not transformative without linkages to programme components that reinforce legislation on equal rights, raise awareness on social issues or promote social mobilization. Efforts would be needed to reinforce awareness raising on equal rights among all members of households and the wider community.</p> <p><b>Typical examples:</b> Other social protection instruments, such as cash transfers, which combine awareness raising on equal rights and address stigmatization.</p>

Sources: Adapted from Davies & McGregor (2009); Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler (2004); Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux (2008)

### Key dimensions of a gender lens

Those working in the field of gender and social protection have distilled the following key features as integral to adopting a gender lens in the design, implementation, monitoring, governance and evaluation of social protection

**Lifecycle approach:** Many social protection schemes are gender unaware and tend to focus on economic risk. To address the underlying causes of exclusion, social protection schemes must address how different risks affect women and men differently at different points in their life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age) (Stuckelberger, 2010; Tessier et al., 2013; Sabates-Wheeler & Kabeer, 2003; Holmes & Slater, 2012) (**see Figure 1**). For social protection to achieve its transformative potential and address inequality, it has to take account of all forms of discrimination and how they intersect with other social dimensions, apart from gender, which prevent women from achieving the same level of socioeconomic rights as men across their lifecycle. For instance, women's role in unpaid care and domestic work is well acknowledged as an obstacle to their ability to enjoy rights to work, rest, leisure, education and health. A wealthier woman living in a polygamous household may be vulnerable to different types of risk than an older widow or a woman living with HIV/AIDS. Therefore, it is important that the design of social protection recognizes the differences between women (heterogeneity) and the fact that individuals have different social relations that affect their vulnerability to different types of risk, particularly to stereotypes, stigma and violence at different stages of their lifecycle. Hence, a thorough situation analysis at the programme design stage is needed to understand the underlying causes of exclusion or marginalization so as to better inform the design. Regular gender-

sensitive monitoring and evaluation and strong accountability mechanisms can ensure that the social protection programme remains responsive and adaptive to these risks. The broad shift within the social protection discourse towards lifecycle approaches (for example, in work on child-sensitive and nutrition-sensitive social protection) is promising.

### Understanding of the gender dynamics within the household and community:

Attention must be paid to gender roles and relations between women and men, in particular, how they affect intra-household decision making and bargaining, time poverty and women's reproductive unpaid care work. Households are not homogenous units, but are sites of 'bargaining', in which women and men have different abilities to decide and control how the transfers are pooled back into the household. Understanding gender as 'relational' is key, as women and men negotiate how social protection resources are used for consumption, production and investment.

**Recognition of the structures:** The structures (e.g. norms, values and institutions) underpinning the imbalance of power between men and women must be recognized and taken into account. For social protection to address the strategic interests of men and women as citizens it is crucial to frame social protection as a socioeconomic right.

### Centrality of a gender lens

The centrality of a gender lens to social protection is illustrated in discussions about **targeting, conditionality, unintended impacts** and **empowerment**, which are briefly summarized here:

**Targeting:** Women are often targeted because they are more likely to spend the resources to benefit their children. Latin

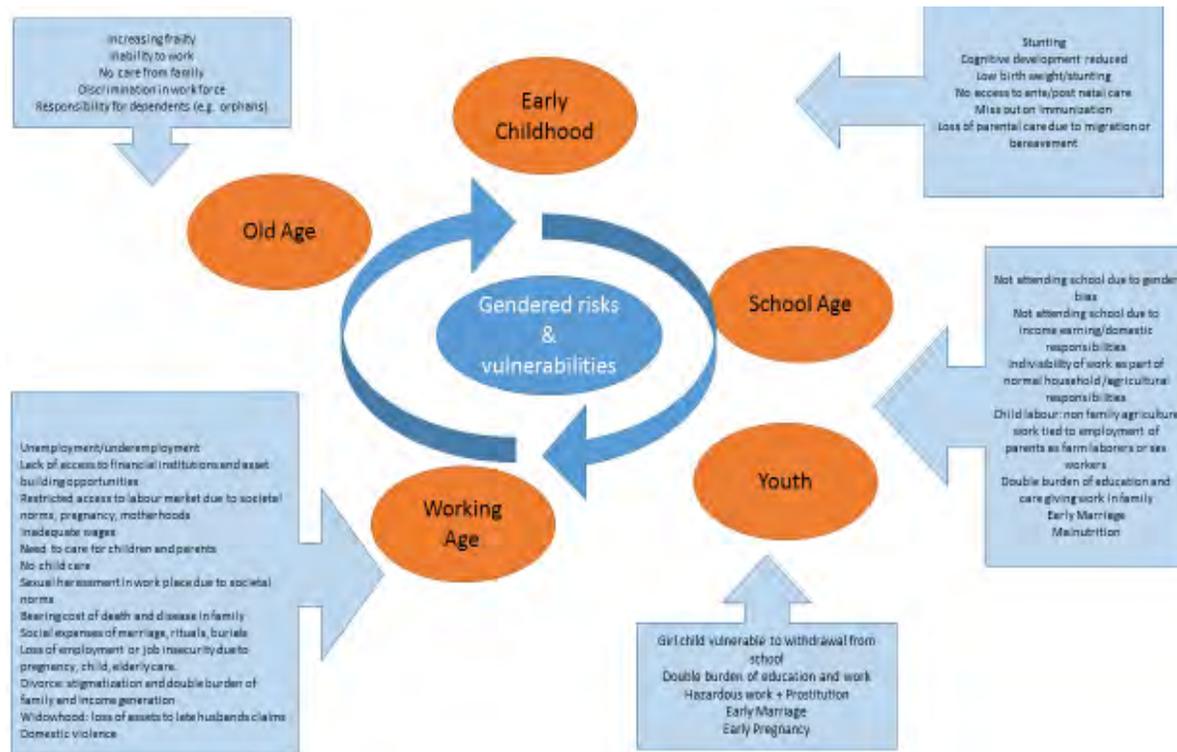


Figure 1. Gendered risks across the lifecycle

Source: Luttrell & Moser (2004); Sabates-Wheeler & Kabeer (2003)

American experiences with conditional cash transfers (CCTs) from Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* and Mexico's *Progresa/Oportunidades* have reinforced instrumental arguments for targeting women and attaching 'conditionalities', by demonstrating how this can improve other development outcomes, such as those related to education and health (**Box 5**). However, the extent to which targeting women translates into equal decision making within the household about how these transfers are invested is less clear and varies according to the context (World Bank, 2014a). Gender and development advocates have challenged simplistic assumptions that merely targeting women equates to empowerment as it ignores the complex bargaining process within the household (Holmes & Jones, 2013, 2010a, 2010b; de la O Campos, 2015). Recent

research in Burkina Faso demonstrates that, as long as a transfer is 'conditional', giving it to the father or the mother makes no difference to the impact on the demand for preventative health care services (Akresh et al., 2012). However, there is consensus that, within Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a need for more research, particularly on whether targeting mothers or fathers, conditionality or other factors influence impact.

**Conditionality:** The extent to which conditionalities have benefited women and whether they are necessary is much debated (Samson, 2013). Conditionalities related to school attendance for girls can change parent's behaviour in sending and keeping girls in school. In Malawi, the *Zomba* cash transfer programme led

to greater school attendance by girls as well as reduced rates of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy (Baird et al., 2009). Recent research in Burkina Faso found that conditionality did increase the enrolment of more marginalized children (e.g. girls, less abled children, younger children), who are rarely prioritized by parents when allocating resources to education (Akresh et al., 2013). While conditional cash transfers can improve health seeking behaviour and the uptake of health services, particularly those related to antenatal and postnatal care, as in the Latin American experience, there is concern within Sub-Saharan Africa about service quality.

Conditionalities have been criticized for the burden they place on women regarding compliance. The imposition of conditions overlooks the fact that women and girls might not be able to comply because social services are too distant, there are gender-based risks involved in accessing services, or transport costs are too high. Mothers may not want to attend certain social care services because of discriminatory attitudes by service providers or may not be able to if consent from their husband is required. Conditionality has also been criticized for its paternalistic view of welfare, particularly how it reinforces the role of mothers as 'agents of the state' responsible for securing important goals for the next generation without any support for their own life options. More importantly, conditionality marginalizes men from care responsibilities and ignores women's potential productive roles.

**Unintended negative impacts:** Many social protection programmes assume a homogenous household, ignoring intra-household relations and the often unequal bargaining position of women in the household. As recipients, not all women are

able to control how income is distributed within the household. At worst, without appropriate complementary measures in a social protection programme (e.g. awareness raising sessions with men), there can be a backlash from men and other community members against women as social protection recipients. For example, there were reports of violence in some beneficiary households in Mexico's Oportunidades programme (Bell, 2015). Similarly, in public works schemes there is the danger of reinforcing gender bias and stigmas about 'women's work', as illustrated in early experiences in South Africa's *Expanded Public Works Programme*, where women's wages were set below the minimum wage and varied across the region. Social protection interventions that target women also run the risk of men withdrawing from household responsibilities, as demonstrated in some cases in South Africa's *Pension* and *Child Grants* programmes. It is recognized that there is a need for more research on the effect of cash transfers targeting women on domestic violence (World Bank, 2015).

**Empowerment:** While the many positive impacts of social protection on women are undisputed, the extent to which it is 'empowering' is debatable, particularly if it does not address the unequal gender relations underpinning women's disadvantage (de la O Campos, 2015; World Bank, 2014a). Empowerment can be defined as 'the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 2). It includes the 'ability to make strategic life choices in the context where this ability has previously been denied' (Kabeer, 2001, p. 19). Central to this, is the recognition that exercising choice is dependent on *resources* (material and immaterial), *agency* (ability to define ones' own goals and act upon them) and *achievements* (actual outcomes). This refers to the ability of women to achieve autonomy over decisions that affect their

lives, control over resources and assets, mobility, and self-esteem and confidence (Fultz & Francis, 2013).

This interpretation of empowerment illustrates how access to resources (in this case, cash or food transfers) alone and targeting does not equate to empowerment. For example, while conditional cash transfers can bring positive benefits ranging from immediate relief to families and particularly children (school and health care, increased enrolment of girls), there are also costs, namely, the time burden in fulfilling the conditionalities and the reinforcement of women's reproductive role as guardians of children and 'channels for child-centred policies'. In public works programmes, such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme, women recipients reported that the requirements of work interfered with childcare and domestic responsibilities, adding an extra burden to their busy lives (Molyneux & Thomson, 2011). In more extreme instances, there were damaging knock-on effects on other household activities, resulting in older children being withdrawn from school to fulfil the role of carer while their mothers were engaged in public works programmes (Sabates-Wheeler & Roelen, 2011). Some critics also say that public works programmes invoke self-targeting due to heavy workloads, meaning that only those who are most in need choose to participate. In practice, many of these programmes 'empower' women in their practical gender roles (as caretakers of children) rather than fulfilling their strategic gender interests in roles that enhance and develop their productive capacity. In terms of women's control over decision making, evidence shows that it tends to be restricted to certain domains of expenditure (e.g. family health, food purchases, clothing, contraception) (De Brauw et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014a).

This is not to disregard the positive reports

about greater knowledge/awareness (e.g. nutrition, maternal health), optimism, self-esteem and confidence arising from social recognition from communities of women's reproductive roles (Fultz & Francis, 2013). Rather, it highlights the need to explore and experiment with the design of transformative social protection to push these boundaries from the start so that programmes can lead to more meaningful empowerment, including the dimensions identified by Kabeer (1999) regarding resources, agency and achievements.

Initial learning from the piloting of conditional cash transfers in Egypt is an example of how this can be done (**Box 6**). This pilot was co-created by policy-makers, women activists and academics and explicitly sought to challenge traditional gender dynamics that emphasize women's roles as mothers, while ignoring their productive roles and agency.

#### **4. Gender lens in practice: examples of social protection across the lifecycle**

To illustrate the importance of a gender lens in practice, this section looks at different social protection instruments that can be used across the lifecycle, e.g. cash transfers, public works programmes and social assistance (pensions).

##### **Transfers for families with children and adolescents**

Positive analyses of social transfers highlight the multiple benefits of social protection for women, such as reduced poverty, improved nutrition for women and their families, improved girls' education, improved access to health care, and better nutrition outcomes for pregnant and lactating mothers. Newer cash transfers are framed around improving the capacity of children living in extreme poverty, in recognition of the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The impact of transfers on

household and children's food security and nutrition is well documented (Kaplan & Jones, 2013; Adato & Basset, 2008).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, there are a range of different cash transfers framed around the wellbeing of children, particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS, such as South Africa's *Child Grant* and Kenya's *Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)*. A recent evaluation of the latter showed that the programme had a positive impact on children's education and the local economy (i.e. increased diversification) and increased female decision making in recipient households, but it did not challenge gender norms rooted in patriarchal structures. Of great concern was early indications that it might be undermining informal social protection mechanisms (e.g. informal fostering, kinship and community care) due to jealousy from non-recipients (Ward et al., 2010; FAO, 2014).

Ghana's *Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)* programme is an example of a scheme that has combined economic strengthening with child protection objectives with conditionalities attached to birth registration and the avoidance of child labour and trafficking. LEAP takes a lifecycle approach that recognizes the different gendered risks across the lifecycle and displays the value of linking health insurance to cash transfers (**Box 7**). However, the transformative potential of this programme was restricted due to weak implementation. The programme also reinforced the gender division of labour and women's care responsibilities.

Analysis of the social impact of social protection (mainly cash transfers) on HIV/AIDS prevention has shown positive impacts on women and girls' autonomy and agency including: a reduction in harmful coping strategies (having sex with older

partners and having sex in exchange for food, shelter, transport or money) (Adato & Basset, 2012). Instruments that have linkages to increasing girls' school enrolment and attendance rates and the utilization of health and counselling services have supported HIV/AIDS prevention.

Social transfers are often discussed in the context of securing girls' right to education and reducing the enrolment gap between girls and boys, such as in Bangladesh's *Female Secondary School Assistance Programme* (Gaia, 2015). Conditionalities attached to girls' education emphasize to parents the importance of investing in girls. However the extent to which transfers are used within households to benefit girls requires further research, as will be explored in trials of an adolescent-focused component of Bangladesh's *Vulnerable Group Feeding Programme* (Save the Children, 2015). In the long run, investment in transfers linked to girls' education can have tremendous impacts on inclusive development with a greater chance of breaking the cycle of poverty through improved women and girls' access to labour markets (UNICEF, 2015). A recent World Bank evaluation (2014a) shows that the impact of transfers on child labour and schooling is greatly influenced by the different ways girls and boys are involved in productive activities, highlighting the need for further research.

Complementary interventions that combine parenting support services and parental advocacy can play an important role in tackling the gender biases that prevent girls from going to school. Social protection that combines linkages to counselling and peer support have proved vital in detecting situations of vulnerability and abuse within households. In some cases, there have been reports that the alleviation of household budgets by cash transfers can reduce parental stress and, therefore, domestic violence (Barrientos et al., 2013). In

addition, dedicated awareness-raising sessions with husbands to discuss the participation of their wives (e.g. Peru's *Juntos Programme*) and regular monitoring to avoid unwanted negative impacts are important to avoid a backlash from men. This highlights the importance of engaging men and boys to support the more equal division of labour, reduce tensions and violence, and increase women's role in decision making (Holmes & Jones, 2013).

Another gendered risk faced by adolescent girls is continued pressure to support mothers with unpaid household work and care giving roles. Rwanda's *Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme* is a novel example of efforts to provide childcare services (e.g. mobile crèches) and Mexico's *Progama de Estancias Infantiles* has raised awareness of the importance of parental leave, actively encouraged men to participate in household and care work, and provided a small childcare allowance (Roelen & Shelmerdine, 2014).

### Transfers for working age

The gendered impact of public works programmes (PWPs) is mixed and they are often criticized for depriving women and men of time that could have been invested in more productive endeavours. Common critiques include:

1. Low wages, limiting involvement of the most vulnerable, poor and able bodied.
2. Limited attention to women's dual role, resulting in the unintended impact of women leaving children alone in the house or taking girls out of school to maintain the household while they participate in PWPs.
3. Reinforcement of gender norms of 'appropriate work', as women are allocated 'light' work in return for low wages (e.g. India's *Mahatma Ghandhi*

*National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme*) or paid the same rate as men for heavy physical labour causing them to subcontract work to men in exchange for 50% of the wages (e.g. Zambia's *Micro Project Unity Programme*).

Nevertheless, there are positive examples of where design features have promoted more *gender-aware* programming to minimize harm. Although currently discontinued, Ghana's former *National Youth Employment Program* is an example of a public works programme that sought to extend the types of interventions to include social service components, such as community teaching assistants for health workers. South Africa's *Expanded Public Works Programme* also included public works related to home-based care for people living with HIV and care for young people.

Over time, PWPs have evolved to include new design features, seeking to acknowledge women's unpaid productive work, and include types of public assets that benefit women by reducing time poverty. For example, Ethiopia's *Productive Safety Net Programme* (PSNP) includes gender design features such as flexible working hours, childcare facilities and public assets, which reduce time poverty (e.g. through water pumps and more accessible fuelwood sources). However, ultimately, this programme has reinforced women's practical gender needs with little impact on unequal decision making or on social perceptions of what is appropriate work for women (**see Box 8**). The opportunity to link up with complementary services, such as the government's Women Development Package on women's rights, which includes 'community conversations' on gender-based violence, were missed due to the poor capacity of implementing staff (Holmes & Jones, 2013).

### Transfers for older people

Ageing poses new risks for women, because as they live longer they generally have less access to land and other assets to maintain their standard of living. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is high contributing to high numbers of orphans and absent middle-aged adults, older women are relied on to take up childcare responsibilities. South Africa's *Old Age Pension* is one of its flagship social protection programmes. The majority of recipients of the Old Age Pension are female and the transfer has been shown to have positive impacts on overall household food security, child health, children's anthropometric status, school attendance and child labour (Barrientos et al., 2013). The Old Age Pension also provides a financial and emotional buffer against the impact of an adult child's death (related to HIV/AIDS) and the burden of looking after grandchildren. It has also encouraged higher levels of female labour migration, because the pension overcomes the resource constraints and grandmothers can take on the childcare. Research shows that, although the pension has given older women more access to, and control over, economic resources, with time, the stress of care giving tends to impact on older women's physical health and the increasing expectation to take on more dependents creates tension. This also reconfirms the gender division of labour by reinforcing women's responsibility to take care of young and ill members of the household, adding to the workload of elderly women. It also allows male household members to avoid fulfilling their household family responsibilities towards their spouses.

### Some conclusions:

- Strengthening women's agency, voice and participation in social protection design and

delivery will enhance state responsiveness to women's needs, as well as accountability for gender equality.

- Social protection is not a panacea for poverty alleviation, but it can effectively address gender inequality by integrating traditional social protection instruments (e.g. cash transfers, insurance, public works programmes) with complementary interventions, such as awareness raising about the social norms that underpin inequality, and by ensuring better linkages to other government services (e.g. for education and health).
- For effective transformative social protection, all stakeholders, including civil society, government policy-makers and implementers, women activists and donors, should think more strategically about working multi-sectorally and being more proactive at addressing institutional power dynamics and blockages.

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<http://includeplatform.net/dossier/dossier-women-and-inclusive-development/>. For more information on social protection research linked to INCLUDE, see <http://includeplatform.net/theme/social-protection/>. For more information contact the author at [j.newton@kit.nl](mailto:j.newton@kit.nl).

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***The opinions expressed in the preceding articles are those of the authors and should not be equated with the opinions of the ICSW Management Committee.***

## Launch of the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection

At this year's UN General Assembly, world leaders launched an unprecedented effort to roll out universal social protection in countries all around the world. Heads of state, the World Bank Group and the International Labour Organization convened on Wednesday 21 September to launch the **Global Partnership for**

**Universal Social Protection**, which aims to make pensions, maternity, disability and child benefits, among others, available to all persons, closing the gap for hundreds of millions currently unprotected worldwide.

The **Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection** brings together the African Union, FAO, the European Commission, Helpage, IADB, OECD, Save the Children, UNDP-IPC, UNICEF and others, along with Belgian, Finnish, French and German cooperation. ICSW fully support this initiative; our organization has a particular focus on promoting social protection, seeing it as a human right and an investment in people.

A series of [23 case studies](#) were released at the event that document how many developing countries have achieved universality, such as Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Cabo Verde, China, Georgia, Kosovo, Lesotho, the Maldives, Mongolia, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Thailand, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago and Ukraine. The case studies show that universal social protection is feasible in developing countries.

This announcement is part of the Virtual Conference on [Universal Social Protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals](#).

This September we moved from the South-South high level event in Beijing after the G20 to the UN General Assembly in New York, where world leaders launched **the partnership**.

SDG 1.3, calls for implementing "nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors," based on the [ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 \(No. 202\)](#).

## The useful resources and links – the find of the month

### Growth and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Edited by Channing Arndt, Andy McKay and Finn Tarp

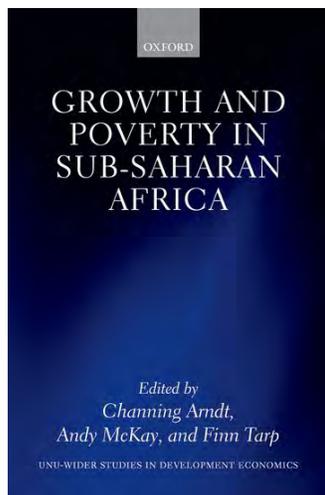
Oxford University Press, 2016

While the economic growth renaissance in sub-Saharan Africa is widely recognized, much less is known about progress in living conditions. This

book comprehensively evaluates trends in living conditions in 16 major sub-Saharan African countries, corresponding to nearly 75% of the total population.

For more information:

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/growth-and-poverty-in-sub-saharan-africa-9780198744795?cc=us&lang=en&>



### The Governance of Inclusive Growth. An Overview of Country Initiatives

OECD, Paris, 2016

This publication presents an overview of country initiatives concerning inclusive growth in 39 OECD member and partner countries.



For more Information:

<https://www.oecd.org/publications/the-governance-of-inclusive-growth-9789264265189-en.htm>

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