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ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR EDWELL KASEKE
AND DR MATHIAS NYENTI

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CHAPTER 10

Protecting the Vulnerable through Social Protection: Options for the Vulnerable

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Abstract

The question of social protection in post-colonial Zimbabwe is one that has been of interest to scholars of social development. First amongst such post-colonial scholars is Kaseke¹ who notes that social security was, before independence, a preserve of the whites. From the period of colonialism until the attainment of independence in 1980, there was virtually no formal social security that was extended to the indigenous African and black majority. The understanding was that the blacks were in the urban areas temporarily, only there to work and would return to their rural homes upon retirement where the indigenous social security systems would cater to them. Because of this, the blacks created mechanisms to cope with retirement and economic hardships and these are evident even after independence. Post-colonial economic hardships have prevailed, and this has required the ingenuity of Zimbabweans to develop coping strategies, many of which rely on informal networks. As such, the notion of informal social security is not new in Zimbabwe. These systems have always been and remain important for blacks because of the prevailing economic hardships. Based on the literature review, this chapter discusses social protection options for the marginalised Zimbabweans, many of whom are found in the informal sector.

Keywords: Informal social security systems, social protection, social security

1 Kaseke, E. 2003. "Social exclusion and social security: The case of Zimbabwe." *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, pp. 33-48.

10.1

Introduction

Zimbabwe has over the past decade been bedevilled with a socio-economic meltdown, increasing levels of poverty and unemployment. This has led to unprecedented suffering amongst the general populace. Typical of the situation has been the loss of formal employment and an increase in the number of people who require support to survive. The most immediate kind of support that should be readily accessible is social protection. According to Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler:² “Social protection describes all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups.” The World Bank³ notes that social protection grew in the early 80s and 90s in response to the increased impoverishment of people especially in Africa which was mainly the result of economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAP). Zimbabwe was also not spared the draconian ESAP as it implemented this programme from 1990 and, as in many other countries, contrary to economic growth and prosperity promises, the programme resulted in losses of employment and increased poverty levels. The government launched the unorthodox neo-liberal programme ESAP in October 1990 with the mantra of prosperity which would be preceded by austerity measures.⁴ When the ESAP programme was launched, the country was already facing a perennial shortage of foreign currency, a shortage of skilled human-power, not to mention transport and related bottlenecks.

The first casualties of ESAP were state-funded social services, including health, education, housing and social welfare.⁵ Cuts in public spending coupled with the introduction of cost-recovery measures meant living standards dropped dramatically. The limited availability of foreign currency harmed investment, and this triggered mass-retrenchment of employees – its impact cascaded to and affected family welfare and well-being. Poverty began to set in with many children, especially orphaned ones, failing to proceed with their schooling.⁶ In the face of such hardships, the government instituted poverty alleviation social protection

2 Devereux, S. & Sabates-Wheeler, R. 2004. *Transformative Social Protection*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies Working Paper No. 232 University of Sussex.

3 World Bank. 2009. *Social Safety Nets: Lessons from Rich and Poor Countries*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/34rGSCI> [accessed on 26 August 2019].

4 Mupedziswa, R. 1997. *Empowerment or Repression? Economic Structural Adjustment Programme & Children in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press.

5 Mupedziswa, R. & Mushunje, M. 2012. “‘Between a rock and a hard place’: Care of orphaned children in Zimbabwe and social work roles.” In: J.D. Bailey (ed.). *Orphan Care: The Social Work Role*. Boulder: Kumarian Press, pp. 123-154.

6 See Mushunje and Mupedziswa, 2012, p. 125.

programmes which were designed to assist the poor. Such programmes included the Social Dimensions Fund (SDF). The impact of the SDF was extremely limited. Challenges included limited financial and related resources, corruption and poor targeting. The SDF thus had limited impact in terms of mitigating the impact of the deleterious effects of the ESAP initiative.⁷ The failure of the SDF also meant that the goals of social protection, i.e. to address persistent poverty were not met.

10.2

Social protection in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a reasonably progressive country in terms of its commitment to signing up on regional and international conventions including those related to social protection. These include International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Forced Labour (1930)⁸, ILO Convention on Equal Remuneration (1951)⁹ and ILO Convention on Equality of Treatment (1925)¹⁰ among others. Chirisa¹¹ classifies the social protection system in Zimbabwe into three broad categories, namely social security, income security and social safety nets. Social security is a form of social protection that seeks to protect the vulnerable against poverty. Kaseke¹² notes that there has not been consensus on how to define social security. He notes that most definitions of social security place emphasis on the protection of the employed which assumes that there is a state of full employment in any particular country. Other definitions focus on the provision of some sort of relief to the vulnerable. This can be in the form of cash and in-kind social transfers that are organised by state or parastatal organisations or are agreed upon through collective bargaining processes. Social security is concerned with addressing risks and according to Holzmann and Jorgensen,¹³ it consists of public interventions that seek to assist individuals, households and communities and the poor to address risk.

7 See Mupedziswa, 1997.

8 Forced Labour Convention. 1930 (No. 29). International Labour Organisation.

9 Equal Remuneration Convention. 1951 (No. 100). International Labour Organisation.

10 Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention. 1925 (No. 19). International Labour Organisation.

11 Chirisa, I. 2013. "Social protection amid increasing instability in Zimbabwe: Scope, institutions and policy options." In: S. Devereux & M. Getu (eds.). *Informal and Formal Social Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers OSSREA.

12 Kaseke, E. 1993. *Rural Social Security Needs: The Case of Zimbabwe*. Harare: School of Social Work.

13 Holzmann, R. & Jorgensen, S. 2001. "Social risk management: A new conceptual framework for social protection, and beyond." *International Tax and Public Finance* 8, 4:529-556.

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The ILO¹⁴ defines “social security as a human right and all people, regardless of where they live, should be guaranteed at least a floor of basic social protection”. Social protection is regarded by the ILO as one of the means to address and combat poverty. Social safety nets comprise basic programmes that protect the vulnerable and these include education and health fee waiver schemes, drought relief and food distribution schemes. Income security initiatives include mitigation measures like seed packs, the heifer scheme, price subsidies, public works programmes, drought relief and food distribution.¹⁵ From a colonial past which had laws such as Old Age Pensions Act of 1936 which provided old-age pensions to non-Africans over 60 years to a system that seeks to be more inclusive, the government has made attempts to provide social protection coverage which is more comprehensive and not based on racial grounds.¹⁶ The Constitution fully recognises and upholds the need to provide social protection to its citizens as articulated by Section 30, which states that “the state must take all practical measures, within the limits of the resources available to it, to provide social security and social care to those who are in need”.

The country also has a progressive 2016 national social protection framework (NSPF).¹⁷ The NSPF is anchored on 4 pillars, namely social insurance, labour market interventions, social safety nets and social care services. Social insurance includes the government public service insurance scheme and the Local Authority Pension Scheme, whilst social safety nets and social care services are concerned with the most vulnerable members of the society to strengthen households’ economy and enhance the provision of childcare and protection services. The labour market interventions are aimed at promoting a conducive labour market environment for higher productivity and provision of decent work.¹⁸

In line with the NSPF, the government, under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare runs several social protection programmes. The major programmes include Harmonised Social Cash Transfers (HSCT), Food Deficit Mitigation, Public Assistance (PA) and Assisted Medical Treatment Order (Programme) (AMTO). These programmes have also provided for social protection for orphaned and vulnerable

14 International Labour Organization (ILO). 2012. *Social Security for All: Building Social Protection Floors and Comprehensive Social Security Systems. The strategy of the International Labour Organization*. International Labour Organization. Available online: <https://bit.ly/3d0QPKV> [accessed on 26 August 2019].

15 See Chirisa, 2013, p. 16.

16 Mushunje, M.T. & Kaseke, E. 2018. “Indigenous Social Security Systems in Zimbabwe: Strengths, challenges and prospects in Zimbabwe.” In: N. Noyoo & E. Boon (eds.). *Indigenous Social Security Systems in Southern and West Africa*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, pp. 105-122.

17 Government of Zimbabwe. 2016. *National Social Protection Framework*. Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.

18 UNICEF. 2018. *Social Protection 2018 Budget Brief*. Available online: <https://uni.cf/30ETe91> [accessed on 27 August 2019].

children.¹⁹ Despite these initiatives, poverty and vulnerability continue to be major challenges confronting Zimbabwe with insufficient programmes reaching the most in need. The economic situation in Zimbabwe is such that more and more people need social protection as the majority are not gainfully employed or are in informal employment which is a very unpredictable and unstable source of income. Social protection is therefore critical as it plays a key role in building the resilience of households.²⁰ Its relevance for Zimbabwe is heightened by the harsh economic climate characterised by unemployment and rising levels of poverty.

Those in formal employment usually constitute not more than 25% of the total labour force.²¹ This means that less than 20% of the labour force is protected by a social security scheme.²² Chikova²³ notes that the Zimbabwe Statistical Agency carried out a Labour Force and Child Labour Survey in 2011 – the results show that the employed population aged 15 years and above was estimated to be 5.4 million and of these 4.6 million (84%) were considered to be in informal employment with females being 53% of the population in informal employment. Above half (58%) of the population in informal employment is aged between 15 and 34 years. Nearly eight out of ten in informal employment are in the agriculture sector (communal, resettlement and peri-urban farmer). According to Poverty, Income, Consumption and Expenditure Survey,²⁴ 62.6% of households are deemed poor, whilst 16.2% are deemed extremely poor. In 2011, about 72.3% of the population was poor and living below the Total Consumption Poverty Line (TCPL) while 22.5% were extremely poor, living below the Food Poverty Line (FPL). Of the 6.3 million Zimbabwean children, 78% live in consumption poverty and 26% live in extreme. The Poverty, Income, Consumption and Expenditure Survey²⁵ indicates that 92% of the extremely poor population and 91% of extremely poor households reside in rural areas. The 2014 Labour Force Survey from the Zimbabwe Statistics Authority estimates the unemployment rates to be 11% which is the proportion of people over the age of 15 who are available to work but are not working. This figure is however considered to be fairly low compared to neighbouring South Africa which was at 24.9% in 2014. What is also important to note is that the Zimbabwe unemployment figures include those who are in the informal sector, subsistence farmers, informal traders

19 Mushunje, M.T. & Mafico, M. 2010. "Social protection for orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe: The case of cash transfers." *International Social Work*, 53(2):261-275.

20 UNICEF, 2018, p. 4.

21 See Chikova, 2013, p. 6.

22 Government of Zimbabwe. 2012. *National Social Security Authority*. Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.

23 See Chikova, 2013, p. 6.

24 Government of Zimbabwe. 2014. *Poverty Income, Consumption and Expenditure Survey 20/2012 Report*. Harare: ZIMSTATS.

25 *Ibid*.

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and anyone engaged in any form of income generation²⁶ yet the same cannot be accounted for in formal social security.

Whilst the government has put in place the policy framework necessary for social protection, this has not been matched with budgetary allocations even though there have been efforts to increase the expenditure on social protection. Total social protection spending grew by 15% in nominal terms from 2010 and 2014. The marked 17% drop in 2015 in total social protection expenditures from 2014 was driven by government fiscal challenges and decreased support from development partners for certain social protection programs, such as Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) which is a programmes that assists school-going age, vulnerable children, with school fees.²⁷ Expenditure on social protection was driven by social insurance obligations, which grew from 2% of GDP in 2010 to 4.4% in 2015. UNICEF²⁸ notes that spending on social insurance is unsustainable. The World Bank and Government of Zimbabwe²⁹ noted that expenditure on social safety nets dropped from an average of 1.9% from 2010 to 2014 to 0.7% in 2015, mainly due to declining development partner commitments and a shift in resources towards emergency assistance. A major concern with this is that social protection programmes are hinged on donor support which without their contributions, the programmes run the risk of failure.

The available evidence suggests that most social protection expenditure in Zimbabwe is not directed towards the poor.³⁰ A Public Expenditure Review (PER) conducted by the World Bank 2016,³¹ shows that a substantial 67.0% of social protection expenditure is devoted to civil service pensions, which covers just 1.3% of the population. There have been criticisms about how social protection systems are applied. As Chirisa³² notes, many clients that should otherwise benefit from these systems have not been able to do so for several reasons including insufficient funding for such programmes which limits coverage to a few even when more would qualify. As Kaseke³³ noted, the vulnerable groups who are eligible for social assistance include persons over the age of 60 years, persons with disabilities, chronically ill persons and dependents of

26 International Labour Organization (ILO). 2012. *Social Security for All: Building Social Protection Floors and Comprehensive Social Security Systems*. Geneva: International Labour Organization. Available online: <https://bit.ly/3d0QPKV> [accessed on 26 August 2019].

27 Government of Zimbabwe. 2015. *BEAM Operational Manual*. Harare: Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

28 UNICEF, 2018, p. 2.

29 Government of Zimbabwe. 2014. *Crafting a Coherent Social Protection System*. Harare: Labour and Social Services & World Bank.

30 See UNICEF, 2018.

31 See World Bank.

32 See Chirisa, 2013, p. 14.

33 Kaseke, E. 2003. "Social exclusion and social security: The case of Zimbabwe." *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 18:33-48.

indigent persons.³⁴ However, these are not comprehensively catered for. Kaseke³⁵ argues that the main reason for limited coverage of social protection for older farmers is that formal social insurance has been used as the means for achieving social protection coverage yet the majority of Zimbabweans are in the informal sector. This has failed to recognise that the majority of the people in developing countries are engaged in atypical forms of employment and are therefore excluded from participating in social insurance schemes.³⁶ In similar criticisms, Kaseke³⁷ asserts that many of the government programmes fail to reach the neediest and “the problem of social exclusion in formal social security forces excluded groupings to turn to non-formal social security systems. Whilst these are more inclusive than formal social security systems, they offer only the most rudimentary social protection, but they are also considered to be more adaptive and responsive to the need at hand”. Efforts to better serve the poor are impaired by weak targeting mechanisms and insufficient information on the efficacy of most programs.

10.3

Transformative social protection options: looking into the future

The structure of formal social protection is not sustainable and calls for a reconsideration of the way social protection is delivered. Whilst the formal social security programmes appear to be comprehensive on paper, the extent of coverage remains limited especially with the economic hardships that the country is experiencing.³⁸ Chikova³⁹ argues that the country does not have the financial capacity to provide social security to those in the informal sector. As Oliver, Kaseke and Mpedi⁴⁰ note, most of the poor in the SADC are side-lined and marginalised by the formal social security system which, in most instances, and as is the case in Zimbabwe, is state-operated and urban biased. Since the bulk of Zimbabweans are agricultural farmers in rural areas, this bias is a major barrier for them to access formal social security.

³⁴ Social Welfare Assistance Act 1988.

³⁵ Kaseke, E. 2015. “National Social Protection Floors and Income Security for Older Persons: Prospects for Zimbabwe.” *Academic Journal Article Social Development Issues*, 37:25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Kaseke, 2003.

³⁸ Government of Zimbabwe. 2008. *Ministry of Public Service, Labour & Social Welfare*.

³⁹ Chikova, 2013, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Olivier, M.P., Kaseke, E. & Mpedi, L.G. 2008. “Informal Social Security in Southern Africa: Developing a Framework for Policy Intervention.” Paper prepared for presentation at the International Conference on Social Security organised by the National Department of Social Development, South Africa, 10-14 March 2008, Cape Town.

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In the absence of comprehensive social security, and to deal with the various challenges brought on by the deterioration of the economy, households have been forced to look beyond the state for support and engage in other forms of coping mechanisms. This means other forms of social protection outside of the state provisions must be considered and the most common are the informal systems. As the informal social security systems expand, recommendations on how to strengthen these should be noted. Building on the works of social security scholars such as Kaseke, it is also important to continue to interrogate how vulnerable members of society can be protected, especially in the absence of formal employment and formal social protection systems. The most common has been the informal systems of social protection.

With a clear passion for social justice through social security, the works of Kaseke can be used as a basis upon which more comprehensive systems can be developed. One of the means of social protection Kaseke advocated for was informal social security systems. According to Patel, Kaseke and Midgley,⁴¹ these informal systems have also evolved and changed into new systems of mutual aid and they now play a greater role in the community welfare system. Olivier *et al.*⁴² note that there are two such systems namely those that are family or kinship-based and those that are anchored on mutual aid arrangements, are community or neighbourhood-based and are driven by the principle of solidarity.

According to Dekker and Olivier:⁴³ “Informal social security is (a) the provision of support (in the form of monetary transfers, benefits in kind, services and facilities) to members of society, households and individuals (b) through collective means (including non-governmental, semi-formal, community and traditional arrangements) with or without public intervention (c) to maintain a living standard of human dignity by meeting basic needs (d) and to protect against low or declining living standards (e) arising from a number of basic risks, contingencies and needs.”⁴⁴ In addition, Chirisa,⁴⁵ contends that informal [indigenous] social security is depicted by social insurance which includes support from friends, relatives, voluntary schemes, kinship networks and rotating schemes as well as people’s own resources such as the use of savings, working children and sale of assets. Adding their voices to the discussion, Mushunje and Kaseke⁴⁶ note that informal social security schemes are “traditional support systems that meet human needs at the individual, family

41 Patel, L., Kaseke, E., & Midgley, J. 2012. “Indigenous Welfare and Community-Based Social Development: Lessons from African Innovation.” *Journal of Community Practice*, 20:12-31.

42 See Olivier *et al.*

43 Dekker, A.H. & Olivier, M. 2003. “Informal Social Security.” In M.P. Olivier, N. Smit & E.R. Kalula (eds.). *Social Security: A Legal Analysis*. Durban: LexisNexis Butterworths.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 573.

45 See Chirisa, 2013, p. 8.

46 See Mushunje & Kaseke, 2018, p. 113.

and community levels". These have also been expounded by them,⁴⁷ confirming the importance of these in the provision of social security to the informal economy.

Though ideal especially for the informal economy, informal social security schemes also have their challenges. They are known to have low coverage and the mobility of those in the informal sector also poses a problem in terms of collecting contributions hence a high default rate is likely to be experienced.⁴⁸ Mushunje,⁴⁹ whilst acknowledging the importance of kinship-based systems, cautions against over-reliance on these as these systems can also be overstretched and usurp the role of government in the provision of social protection.

Bearing in mind the challenges associated with the informal social protection systems, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)⁵⁰ advocates for transformative livelihoods based social protection system in crafting the informal systems. Livelihoods describe how people access resources, the challenges, how resources are used to build assets and how assets reduce people's vulnerability to risks and shocks. Once a livelihoods component is included in the social protection equation, this will build the resilience of those targeted with social protection to a level that social protection becomes transformative. As long as social protection maintains the socio-economic status quo of the target group, they will continue to require support. Transformative measures seek to address concerns of social equity and exclusion, such as collective action for workers' rights, or upholding human rights for minority ethnic groups. The livelihood-based social protection approach aims to build interventions based on people's existing capabilities and assets rather than relying on external expertise and inputs. The evidence from Zimbabwe shows that once donor funding is limited, the continuation of such programmes also becomes compromised hence the importance of alternate systems.

Livelihoods approaches take a holistic view of human development and give priority attention to the sustainability of livelihoods, with less emphasis on short-term outcomes. Given that most people in Zimbabwe live in rural areas, livelihoods based social protection would also focus on building their resilience against hazards such as droughts and livestock disease outbreak. In the provision of transformative social protection, care and consideration need to be made towards the sustainability of the intervention. Transformative examples include those proposed by Mushunje and Kaseke⁵¹ which include linking informal community support systems with formal systems, income generation enterprises in the community, budgetary support to

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴⁸ Chirisa, 2013, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Mushunje, M.T. 2014. "Interrogating the relevance of the extended family as a social safety net for vulnerable children in Zimbabwe." *African Journal of Social Work*, 4:101-133.

⁵⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2013. *Impacts of the Harmonised Social Cash Transfer Programme on Community Dynamics in Zimbabwe*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization.

⁵¹ See Mushunje & Kaseke, 2018, p. 117.

community safety net programmes and availing micro-finance to communities for start-up enterprises. Microfinance can be used to enhance access to health care by groups that are not covered by any scheme. A celebrated example is the UMASIDA which was established to benefit those operating in the informal economy in Dar es Salaam.⁵² The informal workers are organised into groups for administrative efficiency. The ILO⁵³ observes that: “The great advantage of the scheme is that it provides access to quality health care at an affordable cost. This is achieved through negotiation with carefully screened private-sector health care providers on price and quality, the result of which is then reflected in contracts”.

10.4

Conclusion

As Olivier *et al.*⁵⁴ also note, there is increasing evidence that in the SADC region informal arrangements are not merely an expression of African cultural values, but for the reasons advanced above, serve as gap fillers for the formal arrangements. Hence, there is a need for in-depth research which would create enough evidence to influence policy on livelihoods based and transformative social protection systems. The existence of informal social protection systems can no longer be ignored. A deeper understanding of how this function is critical to ensure that those in the informal sector or who cannot access formal social protection are not prejudiced without at the same time making the provision of informal social protection burdensome on kinship-based systems. With weakening economies, loss of employment and increased poverty the role of informal transformative social protection will be more apparent and for this reason, there is the urgent need to fully understand the way these systems function.

⁵² International Labour Organization (ILO). 2000. *World Labour Report 2000: Income Security and Social Protection in a Changing World*. Geneva: Committee on Employment and Social Policy.

⁵³ See International Labour Organization (ILO), 2000, p. 89.

⁵⁴ See Olivier *et al.*

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