



**THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR
LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY
& DEVELOPMENT**
(Centre LSD)



TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

Centre LSD Policy Brief Series No. 27



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1. INTRODUCTION

Social Protection is a critical mechanism for reducing poverty and inequality, enhancing human capital and promoting inclusive growth. Social Protection has evolved in Nigeria. The early initiatives were largely adhoc and fragmented, focusing on specific groups such as civil servants or the elderly and sectors such as health and education. But over the years, there is a gradual shift towards a more comprehensive and integrated approach.

However, there are a lot of gaps. Nigeria can benefit from an inclusive and sustainable Social Protection Programme. This Policy brief makes a case for an inclusive and sustainable social protection programme in Nigeria. But first, we explicate the concept of social protection and imperative of social protection in Nigeria.

2. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

There is a proliferation of definitions and conceptualisation of social protection by scholars and organisations.¹ The revised National Social Protection Policy 2021 defines Social Protection as a mix of policies and programmes designed for individuals and households throughout the life cycle to prevent and reduce poverty and socio-economic shocks by promoting and enhancing livelihoods and a life of dignity.² A very elaborate and comprehensive definition is one that describes social protection as 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 the poor, vulnerable and marginalised

groups.³ This definition is very elaborate and overcomes the limitations of narrow conceptions of social protection as “social safety nets” to protect the poor. It's expansive nature includes the full range of social protection interventions which can be protective, preventive, promotive and transformative.

There are four levels of social protection⁴.

1. *Protective measures* provide relief from deprivations e.g. disability benefit, social pensions for the elderly poor that are publicly financed, orphanages, camps for internally displaced persons etc. The measures protect households' income and consumption, which includes social assistance programmes such as cash transfers, in-kind transfers, fee waivers to support access to basic and social services);
2. *Preventative measures* seek to avert deprivation e.g. formalised pension systems, health insurance, maternity benefit, unemployment benefits etc. The measures prevent households from falling into or further into poverty, including, for instance, health insurance programmes, subsidised risk pooling mechanisms);
3. *Promotive measures* enhance real incomes and capabilities e.g. microfinance, school feeding. The measures promote household's ability to engage in productive activities and increase incomes, for example through public works employment schemes, agricultural inputs transfers or subsidies); and
4. *Transformative measures* address concerns of social equity and exclusion by providing regulatory framework to

protect “socially vulnerable group” such as people with disability, victims of domestic violence and people living with HIV/AIDs. The measure address social inequalities and discrimination, which includes, for example, core social protection programmes which tackle gender inequality and promote child rights and linkages to awareness-raising programmes or tackling discrimination.

Despite the differences in conceptualisation of social protection, there is consensus among scholars and practitioners on the usefulness of social protection as a policy instrument in dealing with poverty, risk, vulnerability and food insecurity. It has been documented that there is increasing evidence that predictable cash transfers not only reduce poverty amongst direct beneficiaries and their households, and improve wealth distribution, but also that they generate economic growth within local communities and beyond.⁵ It has been argued that social transfers are beneficial at several levels: household, community and national levels:

At the household level, predictable social transfers provides more than just welfare and can positively improve the livelihoods of the poor. They can also increase access of household members to education and health facilities, which have long term benefits. At community level, predictable social transfers generate demand for goods and services, stimulate markets, create employment and foster growth. At national level, broad based comprehensive social transfers reduce poverty and inequality, create growth, support social and political stability and directly promote the

achievement of a range of MDG indicators. Their fiscal impact in generating economic growth means that they are ultimately more affordable than a continuous series of short term ad hoc transfers.⁶

There are experiences from several countries that have demonstrated the benefit of social protection. In South Africa, social transfers have reduced poverty gap i.e. the extent to which poor people fall below the national poverty line by 47 percent. In Mauritius, the old age pension has reduced the proportion of households living below the poverty line from thirty percent to six percent. In Tanzania, the International labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that a universal benefit for school age children (between seven and fourteen years) would reduce the number of people living below the poverty line by one third.⁷ The Government of Ethiopia introduced Social Protection programme called the Productive Safety Net Programme in 2005 to restore and maintain the livelihood of the poor by providing food and cash support to people with predictable food needs. The programme has supported about 8 million people. Consequently, rural poverty fell drastically from 42.2 percent in 2014 to 25.5 percent in 2016.⁸ Similarly, urban poverty plunged from 30.7 percent in 2014 to 3.9 percent in 2016.

Finally, it must be emphasized that for positive social protection objectives to be achieved, the package of measures actually adopted must be carefully selected, prudently designed and effectively implemented.⁹

3. THE IMPERATIVE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN NIGERIA

Social Protection Programmes are crucial mechanism for alleviating poverty, reducing inequality and promoting inclusive economic growth. Social Protection programmes are necessary in Nigeria because of high levels of poverty, inequality, poor development indices and lack of inclusive growth.

Poverty rate in Nigeria increased from 15 percent in 1960 to 28.1 percent in 1980 to 69.2 percent in 1997 to about 40 percent currently hosting the largest number of poor people in the world. It is instructive to note that by 2014, Nigeria ranked third in hosting the largest number of poor people in the world after India (first position) and China (second position).¹⁰ But by 2018, Nigeria was declared as the world poverty capital with around 87 million people living in extreme poverty compared with India's 73 million according to the World Poverty Clock. It is important to note that the population of Nigeria in 2018 was estimated to be about 195.9 million which is about 15 percent of the population of India (1.353 billion) and 14 percent of China (1.393 billion), yet it hosts the largest number of poor people in the world. The change was partly as a result of social protection policies implemented by China and India combined with enlightened leadership and pressure from below. According to the McKinsey Global Report, 2018, China lifted 713 million people and India 170 million people out of poverty between 1990 and 2013. They achieved this feat through inclusive, pro- poor growth; fiscal policies for wealth redistribution; employment generation; public service provision and social protection.¹¹

Nigeria has poor development indices. Nigeria is ranked 163rd in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) out of 191 countries in 2021. Nigeria ranks among the worst seven performers in the World Bank Human Capital Index. Nigeria has the highest prevalence of severe malnutrition in Africa with about two million children affected. In 2022, Nigeria ranked 103rd out of 121 countries on the Global Hunger Index.¹² Nigeria life expectancy is 52.7 years in 2021 (compare with 64.38 years in South Africa, 72.22 years in Egypt and 87.57 years in Japan). According to UNICEF, Nigeria has 18.5 million out of school children, the highest in the world.¹³ In 2022, Nigeria ranked 16th out of 179 countries on the global fragile index. The World's Economist Intelligence Unit report which ranks the best and worst cities to live in the world indicated that Lagos in Nigeria is the third worst city to live in the World.¹⁴ The other cities are Damascus, Syria (1); Tripoli, Libya (2); Dhaka, Bangladesh (4); Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (5); Algiers, Algeria (6); Karachi, Pakistan (6); Harare, Zimbabwe (8) and Doula, Cameroun (9).

One of the key development challenges in Nigeria is lack of inclusive growth. Rapid growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the past did not translate into sufficient poverty reduction. From 2004 to 2014, Nigeria grew at an average rate of 8 percent annually.¹⁵ That is about 80 percent growth in one decade but poverty rates declined by only 10 percent points between 2004 and 2013.¹⁶ This position was re-echoed by Muhammadu Buhari in his foreword to the Revised National Social Protection Policy in 2021 when he stated that “Nigeria has not recorded significant progress in translating the impressive economic performance into

improved well being for the generality of Nigerians during the period of growth.” The reality was that inequality widened as the economic growth benefitted the rich more than it benefitted the poor.

Social protection has been acknowledged across the world as a veritable way to reduce poverty.¹⁷ Social Protection can help provide financial assistance and lift poor people out of poverty. Cash Transfer programmes such as Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) can offer direct financial support to the poorest of the poor and enable them to meet basic needs and invest in their children's education and health. Social Protection schemes can help to bridge the inequality gap by ensuring that marginalised communities have access to resources and opportunities such as grants, loans, credit and market. In addition Social Protection programmes can help improve the human development indices by improving health outcomes and educational attainment. Programmes like the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) aim to provide affordable health care. Education focused initiatives such as school feeding programmes encourage school attendance and improve children's nutrition and learning outcomes. Finally, Social Protection increases purchasing power of the poor and stimulates demand for goods and services thereby contributing to inclusive economic growth.

In Nigeria, there are several intervention programmes in the past that can be categorised as social protection programmes including Vitamin A supplementation programme, National Programme on Immunisation, Universal Basic education (UBE),

National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Pension scheme, Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF), National Emergency Agency (NEMA) and National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), the MDG/Debt Relief Gain (DRG) that implemented direct cash transfers and conditional grants, Community and Social Development Programme (CSDP), Public Workforce (PWF), the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO) and Child Development Programme (CDGP).

From 2015, the Federal Government of Nigeria embarked on an ambitious Social Investment Programme (SIP) implementing the largest Social Investment Programme in Africa. The programme was organized around five clearly defined programmes:

1. **N-Power:** Job provision to train unemployed graduates as volunteers, and non-graduates as artisans. The target is 500,000 graduates & 100,000 trainees
2. **Home Grown School Feeding Programme:** School feeding for primary school children from foods locally sourced from within the country. The target is 5.5 million pupils
3. **Cash Transfer:** Direct cash transfers of N5,000 monthly to targeted poor & vulnerable households. The target is 1 million beneficiaries
4. **Enterprise and Empowerment Programme:** Financial inclusion & access to credit for market women, artisans, women coops, youth & farmers. The target is 1.66 million beneficiaries.

5. **STEM Bursary Programme:** Financial support for tertiary students studying courses in Education, Science & Technology, Engineering & Maths. The target is 100 thousand students.

In 2016, a National Social Protection Policy was adopted to address poverty, unemployment, social and economic vulnerability, inequality, exclusion and other threats to sustainable development. But scholars have documented that “since the adoption of the policy in 2016 and a significant increase in social protection budget from N261.65 billion in 2010 to N1.26 trillion in 2021, more Nigerians have been plunged into poverty and the number increases daily.”¹⁸ It is clear that Nigeria has not enjoyed the full benefits from the programmes like other countries because of misconception, poor implementation and corruption. However, there are several examples of successful social protection programmes implemented by development partners in Nigeria. For instance, the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) implemented three programmes with social protection content namely:

1. **Sustainable Mechanism for Improving Livelihoods and Household Empowerment (SMILE)** – A five-year program (2013-2018) funded by United States Agency of International Development (USAID) and targeting 600,000 orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and 150,000 caregivers in four states – Benue, Edo, Nasarawa, Kogi – and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).
2. **Feed the Future Nigeria Livelihoods Project** (hereafter the 'Nigeria Livelihoods Project') – A five-year program

(2013-2018), with funding support from USAID and cost share from CRS, that targets 42,000 households (HHs) on agricultural-led growth in the states of Kebbi and Sokoto, and the FCT.

3. Food for Peace Emergency Food Security Program (hereafter the 'Emergency Food Security Program') – A USAID-funded project in northern Yobe state that targets over 3,400 households (31,000+ individuals) who have been displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency with cash-based food vouchers.

The measures articulated in Nigeria's revised National Social Protection Policy (2021) are comprehensive including free school meals, scholarship, learning materials, uniforms, cash transfers for children in poor households and children living with disabilities, access to free health care for persons with disabilities, free health care for pregnant women, lactating mothers, children under-5, the aged (people over 60 years old) and people living with disabilities, labour based cash transfer for youth, PWD and the unemployed, cash transfers, food transfers, food vouchers, cash for work schemes, non-contributory pensions for all citizens above 60 years of age as well as cash and food grants for poor families, orphans, street children and others vulnerable to harmful cultural practices, user fees removal for selected basic social services including education, health for poor and vulnerable citizens, support for distressed family, provision of health services, psychological support and counselling to survivors of violence against persons, child labour, child abuse, child rape and

human trafficking, social insurance for the poorest and most vulnerable against risks and shocks, universal access to Health Insurance Scheme and or other social health insurance schemes, provision of child grant for children in poor and vulnerable households, insurance for crops/livestock providing compensatory support in the event of contingencies to be activated during economic shocks, job search services including job training, upgrading and adapting job seekers skill, unemployment insurance and non-cash unemployment benefits to job seekers, availability of quality schools especially in poorest areas, availability of functional health infrastructures accessible to the poor and vulnerable, availability of other services including accessible markets and strengthening of the Social Protection System.

We have documented elsewhere that civil society organisations can play a lot of roles in the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of Social Protection Programmes.¹⁹ The roles include:

1. **Representation:** Organisations that aggregate voice
2. **Advocacy and Campaigns:** Organisations that lobby, advocate and campaign on particular issues.
3. **Technical Inputs:** Organisations that provide information and advice.
4. **Capacity Building:** Organisations that provide support for other CSOs and government.
5. **Service Delivery:** Organisations that implement

development projects or provide services.

6. **Social Functions:** Organisations that foster collective recreational activities.
7. **Monitoring Function:** Organisations that monitor government and act as watchdogs.
8. **Livelihood Training:** CSOs can provide livelihood trainings (on how to use and invest cash; health, nutrition and hygiene) to complement other social protection interventions.
9. **Identification of beneficiaries:** CSOs/CBOs can participate in identifying beneficiaries for the social protection programme. It will be suicidal to leave the determination of beneficiaries to politicians and bureaucrats. Correct identification of beneficiaries is critical to the success of the programme.
10. **Grievance Mechanism:** CSOs can participate in the grievance mechanism to redress complaints emanating from the implementation of the social protection programme.

4. ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

As noted above, there has been several social protection programmes in Nigeria since independence. But in 2015, social intervention programmes in Nigeria were scaled up. But poverty and inequality continues to increase in Nigeria. Despite its efforts,

Nigeria has one of the least Social Protection coverage rates in Africa and globally. As of 2015, Social Protection Programmes (of all forms) could only cover less than 5 percent of Nigerians (compared to 48 percent in South Africa, 45.2 percent globally and 17.8 percent in Africa.²⁰ As of April, 2023, the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning estimated that the National Social register has about 50 million beneficiaries representing only 38 percent of the 133 million Nigerians that are multi-dimensionally poor as of 2022.²¹ It has been documented that Nigeria spends less on Social Protection than every other lower-middle income country in the world.²²

Secondly, Nigeria has not fared well regarding the various forms of Social Protection reflected in poor coverage of segments of the population. For instance, the coverage of persons with disabilities is 0.1 percent compared with 64.3 percent in South Africa and 27.8 percent globally. The coverage of retirees is 7.8 percent compared with 92.6 percent in South Africa and 67.9 percent globally. This weak social protection system was evident during the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, between March, 2020 and March 2021, out of 43 million households, only 1.7 million households representing 3.9 percent coverage rate received social safety net support through cash transfers either from federal, state or Local Government.

Thirdly, the Social Protection Programme in Nigeria lacks credible data. The National Social Register is enmeshed in credibility dispute. According to the World Bank, there is lack of updated database of beneficiaries as only 18.1 percent of poor and

vulnerable Nigerians have a National Identification Number.²³

It is well documented that Social Protection in Nigeria suffers from low coverage, weak targeting and fragmentation and are devoid of any linkages to productive opportunities for its large and growing population.²⁴ All of these necessitate the need for an inclusive social protection programme for Nigeria.

5. KEY COMPONENTS OF AN INCLUSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

There are some key components of an inclusive social protection programme. They include the following:

- a. Universal Coverage:** An inclusive Social Protection Programme must ensure universal coverage, particularly for marginalised groups such as women, youth, children, the elderly and persons with disability.
- b. Adequate and Sustainable Financing:** Sustainable financing is crucial for continued existence of Social Protection Programmes. This will involve adequate budget at all levels of government and innovative financing systems including public-private partnerships, donor support and progressive and efficient tax systems.
- c. Comprehensive Social Safety Nets:** Comprehensive social safety nets should include cash transfers, health insurance, unemployment benefits and pensions. These safety nets should be designed to address both immediate needs and strategic needs promoting resilience and self-

sufficiency in the long run.

- d. Effective Implementation:** Effective implementation requires institutions and structures for implementation. There has to be well tailored institutions with robust governance structures. Social Protection programmes require giving of finances to vulnerable people and it is prone to corruption.
- e. Data-Driven Decision Making:** Reliable data is essential for designing, implementing and monitoring social protection programmes. Production of a credible social register is critical in social protection programme. Monitoring and tracking of implementation is critical.

6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There is no doubt that Social Protection is imperative in Nigeria. But there are significant challenges. First and foremost, there is ignorance among policy makers and citizens about the utility of Social Protection in reducing poverty and promoting equity and justice. Secondly, there are resource constraints. There is limited financial resources to ensure universal coverage. This is particularly problematic in a country like Nigeria facing challenges in domestic resource mobilisation. Thirdly, there is the challenge of policy coherence and sustainability. Policy makers are quick to jettison and suspend Social Protection programmes especially when confronted with implementation problems. Fourthly, there is the challenge of inadequate capacity of personnel and institutions involved in social protection. Strengthening the

capacity of personnel and institutions is therefore vital for effective programme delivery. Finally, there is the challenge of corruption. Many public officials see Social Protection as a veritable avenue for corruptibly enriching themselves. Therefore, consideration should be given in the design of Social Protection to ensure checks and balances with adequate monitoring and evaluation.

Despite these challenges, there are huge opportunities to advance Social Protection in Nigeria. First and foremost, there are huge numbers of people requiring Social Protection in Nigeria. The country hosts the largest number of poor people in the world. Secondly, there is a policy moment for Social Protection in Nigeria. Policy moment exists when there is a convergence of policy problem, policy solution and politics.²⁵ The problem is real and there is some level of outrage. The solution is clear-comprehensive social protection programme. The politics is right as the party in power, the All Progressives Congress (APC) is anchored on social democracy and has implemented the largest social investment programme in Africa. Thirdly, there is the possibility to leverage digital technologies to enhance the efficiency and reach of Social Protection to eliminate corruptible transactions. Finally, openness and citizens engagement in the design of Social Protection in Nigeria can increase its effectiveness and credibility.

7. CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

There is no doubt that Social Protection programmes are necessary in Nigeria because of high levels of poverty, inequality,

poor development indices and lack of inclusive growth. Nigeria has a policy on Social Protection (2021), agency for implementation of Social Protection and some investment in Social Protection Programmes. But the country has not benefitted from its Social Protection Programmes like other countries. There is the need for inclusive Social Protection programme with universal coverage, adequate and sustainable financing, comprehensive social safety nets, data driven decision making and effective implementation.

There are challenges of ignorance, resource constraints, policy coherence and sustainability, inadequate capacity and corruption. Despite the challenges, there are huge opportunities to advance social protection in Nigeria because there are huge numbers of people needing social protection and the moment is right to scale up and implement Social Protection in Nigeria. In order to do this the following actions are recommended:

- a. There is the need to revive and scale up Social Investment Programming in Nigeria to increase coverage.
- b. There is the need for increased budgetary allocation to Social Protection to match the country's needs.
- c. Governments at all levels should re-engage the revised National Social Protection Policy (2021), engage in multi-stakeholder consultation and effectively implement the policy.
- d. The coverage of Social Investment programme in Nigeria should be comprehensive in line with the National Policy on Social Protection and should include child labour, the

unemployed, persons with disability, old age, persons living with disability, children etc.

- e. The architecture for delivering Social Protection in Nigeria should be overhauled. The system of operation should be improved to entrench transparency and accountability. Systems of payment should be automated, transparent and amenable to monitoring by citizens and citizen groups.
- f. Sub-national level governments across the country should scale up investing in Social Protection schemes.
- g. The National Social Register of the poor should be reviewed and updated in a transparent, participatory and credible manner.
- h. There is the need for a robust initiative to link safety net intervention to productive livelihoods through access to finance, skills and employment opportunities.
- i. There is the need to push for shared prosperity agenda which will entail achieving broad based economic growth, creating jobs, reducing poverty and inequality and ensuring socio-economic prosperity for all Nigerians.²⁶

Social Protection is a veritable way to reduce poverty in any country. Nigeria hosts the largest number of poor people in the world. Nigeria needs an inclusive and sustainable Social Protection Programme. There is the need for all stakeholders-government officials, CSOs, citizens, the private sector and development partners to join forces in this noble endeavour. Together, we can achieve a more inclusive, equitable and prosperous Nigeria for all.

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