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**Who should get what, how and why?
DfID and the transnational politics of social
cash transfers in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Sam Hickey & Jeremy Seekings

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About the authors:

Sam Hickey is a Professor in the Global Development Institute, at the University of Manchester in the UK. Email: sam.hickey@manchester.ac.uk.

Jeremy Seekings is Professor of Political Studies and Sociology, at the University of Cape Town. Email: jeremy.seekings@uct.ac.za.

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Who should get what, how and why? DfID and the transnational politics of social cash transfers in Sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract

The proliferation of social cash transfers (SCTs) across much of Sub-Saharan Africa has resulted from interactions between international organisations – including both UN and related organisations, the donor agencies of governments in the global North, and international non-government organisations – as well as national governments. SCTs were central to the social protection agenda taken up by almost every international organization since about 2000. In this paper, we employ Tania Li’s framework on how development ideas travel to understand the political economic context for the rising enthusiasm for SCTs, the ideational contestation over these, and the strategies of governmentality deployed to ‘render technical’ problems of poverty and vulnerability. Crucially, we show how international organisations developed diverse approaches to SCTs in terms of who should get what, how, and why. Through a close analysis of the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DfID), we show that this process of policy transfer was shaped by the internal workings of the ‘aidworld’. In part because SCTs were subject to contestation within and between organisations, organisations tended to render political choices as technical ones. DfID was unusual in acknowledging that the process of introducing SCTs in any particular country was a political one, but even DfID viewed SCTs as a largely technical issue, limiting its efficacy in most Sub-Saharan African countries.

Introduction

Social cash transfers (SCTs) proliferated across much of Sub-Saharan Africa from the early 2000s (Garcia and Moore, 2012; Bastiagli et al., 2016). ‘Social protection’, which was variously defined but always included SCTs, was endorsed by one after another of the international agencies and bilateral aid donors. The early frontrunner was the World Bank, whose enthusiasm for SCTs deepened, shifting in part from ‘social safety nets’ to ‘conditional cash transfers’ (CCTs). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) later assumed a leading role in the global debate. Its need to reach out beyond formally-employed workers led it to champion the expansion of

coverage through ‘social protection floors’. HelpAge International and UNICEF identified SCTs as crucial to the well-being of the elderly and children (especially orphans and other ‘vulnerable’ children) respectively. The World Food Programme (WFP) sought to channel more of its relief through cash-for-work programmes, which served similar functions as SCTs. Various European national donor aid agencies identified social protection as central to their poverty-reduction strategies. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) adopted a social protection strategy. By 2012, even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) acknowledged that social protection was necessary if development was to be inclusive. Whereas in 2000 there had been no place for social protection in the Millennium Development Goals, by 2015 SCTs were widely regarded as crucial to the new Sustainable Development Goals. SCTs had become a truly ‘global social policy’.

Agreement over the importance of SCTs, and social protection more generally, did not mean that these diverse international and national agencies shared the same view of SCTs. These bodies differed in their views not only of who should get what (and, to a lesser extent, how) but also of the overall purpose or role of SCTs. Gramscian wars of position were fought within and between agencies as individuals and groups sought to define the policy agenda. In an early analysis of this contestation, Deacon (2007) contrasts the ‘neoliberal’ position of the US-based World Bank and the supposedly ‘social democratic’ position of the ILO and other Europe-based organisations. Hanlon, Barrientos and Hulme (2010) boldly represent the rise of SCTs as a (‘quiet’) revolution from the global South, pointing to innovative programmes developed in Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, India and elsewhere. Deacon (2013) provides an exemplary analysis of the struggles within the ILO and between it and other agencies over the social protection floor initiative. Peck and Theodore (2015) focus on the role of the World Bank in promoting the Mexican model of a CCT (whilst downplaying the alternative Brazilian CCT model). Von Gliszczynski and Leisering (2016) (and Von Gliszczynski, 2015) identify the World Bank, HelpAge and UNICEF as the champions of alternative approaches to SCTs. National aid agencies also promoted their specific approaches to social protection. Across East and Southern Africa, the most influential of the national aid agencies was the UK’s Department for International Development (DfID).

Table 1: Agencies promoting SCTs and related programmes in sub-Saharan Africa¹

Country	Programme	Lead agency/ies	Support agency/ies
<i>Ethiopia</i>	Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)	WB	DFID, USAID, WFP, EU, Irish Aid, CIDA, UNICEF
<i>Ghana</i>	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)	DFID	Brazil, UNICEF
<i>Kenya</i>	Cash Transfers for Orphans and Vulnerable Children	UNICEF, then DFID, WB	HelpAge
<i>Lesotho</i>	Social pensions Child Grant Programme	n/a UNICEF	
<i>Malawi</i>	SCT Programme and Public Works Programme	UNICEF and World Bank	
<i>Mozambique</i>	Programa Subsídio Social Básico (PSSB) and Programa de Ação Social Produtiva (PASP)	World Bank	DFID, ILO, NL, others
<i>Rwanda</i>	Vision 2020 Umerenge Programme (VUP)	DFID, with World Bank	UNICEF, SIDA
<i>Senegal</i>	Programme National de Bourses de Sécurité Familiale (PNBSF)	World Bank	
<i>Sierra Leone</i>	Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP)	World Bank	
<i>Tanzania</i>	Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF)	World Bank	UNICEF, DFID
<i>Uganda</i>	Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE)	DFID	Irishaid, UNICEF, HelpAge, World Bank on overall strategy
<i>Zambia</i>	Social Cash Transfer (SCT)	GTZ, then DFID, with UNICEF	FAO
<i>Zanzibar</i>	Universal old age pension	HelpAge	UNICEF

¹ This reflects which agencies played leading and supporting roles in ensuring that specific social assistance programmes were adopted and in shaping the form they took. We focus here on the largest social assistance programme/s in each case. Whilst these ‘rankings’ are not based on quantified measures, we took into account advocacy, technical assistance and direct funding. We drew on interviews with staff in the agencies themselves and our country case-studies, including: Lavers (2016b, Ethiopia); Grebe (2015a, 2015b, Ghana), Granvik & Seekings (2016) and Wanyama & McCord (2017) (Kenya), Granvik (2016, Lesotho), Hamer & Seekings (2017, Malawi), Lavers (2016a, Rwanda), Ulriksen (2016, Tanzania), Hickey and Bukenya (2016), Mubiru and Grebe (2014) and Grebe (2014) (Uganda), Pruce & Hickey (2016) and Kabandula & Seekings (2016) and Siachiwena (2016) (Zambia) and Seekings (2016, Zanzibar), and our unpublished assessments of Mozambique, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

It is evident from national case-studies² that there has been a wide array of international actors marching to and fro over the battlefields of agenda-setting and policy-making around SCTs (and other forms of social assistance) in Sub-Saharan Africa. Table 1 summarises our assessment of the lead players in SCT reforms in various, mostly Anglophone, Sub-Saharan African countries. We offer this assessment with trepidation: The relative importance of different agencies has not only changed over time and varied by type of programme (and government department), but it is often far from clear (especially to participants themselves) who had more or less influence.

Despite these caveats, several things seem clear. First, we have not identified ‘Southern’ actors as being directly influential in this process beyond the single case of Brazil in Ghana: ‘Southern’ governments might have developed innovative models, as Hanlon *et al.* (2010) asserted, but the organisations that promoted their diffusion elsewhere were all based in North America or Europe. Secondly, the World Bank enjoyed considerable influence but was far from hegemonic. Thirdly, despite its role in promoting the concept of the social protection floor, and thus shaping the nature of social protection as a global policy agenda, the ILO has not proved to be a major actor in the spread at the national level in Sub-Saharan Africa of social protection or SCTs in particular. Fourth, DfID was a prominent actor in several countries. In Anglophone Africa, DfID was certainly the most influential of the government aid agencies from the global North.

In the 2000s, DfID developed a distinctive approach to SCTs. For DfID, SCTs came to be seen in terms of the goal of reducing poverty, not the goal of managing risk (to facilitate development, as the World Bank emphasised) or the goal of securing otherwise corporatist social insurance programmes (as the ILO hoped). Given that the elderly and children were often disproportionately poor, DfID shared many of the concerns of HelpAge and UNICEF. DfID was less enamoured by either World Bank-style conditionalities or large-scale workfare, and had some sympathy for the rights-based approach favoured strongly by some other donor agencies, especially from Nordic countries such as Finland.

At the same time, DfID favoured targeting tax-financed benefits on the deserving poor, applying an approach that had long characterised much British social policy-making, without the conditions favoured by either the World Bank (through workfare and CCTs) or the ILO (through contributions). Its approach was, in general, more pragmatic than doctrinaire, but DfID’s pragmatism was shaped by

² See previous footnote.

specifically British policy traditions that had influenced the initial adoption of social assistance in sub-Saharan Africa in countries such as Mauritius and South Africa (Seekings, 2007, 2011). Von Gliszczynski and Leisering (2015) identify ‘general household assistance’ as one of their models of SCTs, but underestimate the role of DfID in promoting this model. DfID was also unusual in recognising the limits of a purely technical approach to policy reform. DfID paid close attention to the politics of reform at the national level, working hard to build political constituencies for SCTs in Sub-Saharan African countries and even imagining that SCTs might perform ‘transformative’ political roles in poor countries.

DfID has been overlooked in the existing literature on international organisations and social protection, despite its prominent role across much of Sub-Saharan Africa. In this paper we examine how a distinctive position evolved within DfID, by considering how it compared and contrasted with the approaches of other international organisations, and how its character both underpinned and limited its efficacy on the ground in national processes of policy-making. Our focus on DfID enables us to fill an important gap in the current literature on how social assistance has been promoted, to locate recent reforms in a more historicised view of the *longue duree* of policy transfer, and to examine precisely how and why policy ideas ‘travel’.

Our approach draws critically on Li’s analysis of how development ideas have travelled and taken root across the global South. Li (2007) first drew on Marx to understand how accumulation, exploitation, and exclusion created the conditions for the articulation of SCTs as ‘global social policy’. Li employed Gramsci to understand how ideological contests over different forms of development are fought and play out. Finally, she drew on Foucault to understand the ways in which poverty is rendered as a technical problem, prompting specific modes of governmentality.

We find Li’s use of Gramsci and Foucault particularly useful. It is not clear, however, how far DfID’s approach can be explained in terms of a crisis of capitalism rather than as a result of the deepening of post-colonial responsibility for poverty that has persisted despite global economic growth. We also borrow from Mosse (2005), who has called for careful analysis of the internal workings of the ‘aidworld’. As Peck and Theodore (2010, 2015) note, even apparently technocratic policies are socially produced. We draw on interviews with key actors within DfID and other international agencies to explore this ‘social’ construction and promotion of global public policies, following Mosse’s entreaty to deepen a Gramscian view of how actors fight on the ‘terrain of contestation’ through understanding better the ideas and incentives at play *within* organisations. This involves recognising ‘the complexity of policy as institutional practice ... the social life of projects,

organisations and professionals ... the perspectives of actors themselves and the diversity of interests behind policy models' (Mosse 2005: 6). Our approach thus builds on, but also goes beyond, current analyses of how social protection has become a global policy agenda, none of which have so far discussed the important role played by DfID in this process, nor (and above all) tracked the process through which SCTs became transferred from global policy agenda to actual policy facts on the ground in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Paying attention to the role played by DfID also serves to locate the post-2000 proliferation of SCTs in an historical context that is far more complex than is generally recognised. SCTs may be substantially novel but they are not entirely unprecedented. When the World Bank, Hanlon et al. and others lauded CCTs in Latin America, they were acknowledging reforms that were innovative across most of that region. In those parts of the world that had been settled or colonised by Britain, however, there was a longer history of SCTs. Imperial Britain exported not only its Poor Laws to some of its 'dominions' and colonies in the late nineteenth century, but also the social pensions and other SCTs that represented the modernisation of poor relief in the early and mid-twentieth century.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, social pensions were first introduced in South Africa in the late 1920s (Seekings, 2007). The British government generally tried to dampen any further interest in social pensions, preferring to promote development (and contributory programmes for select groups of workers in formal employment) (Seekings, 2013), but social pensions were introduced in Mauritius in 1950 (Seekings, 2011) and were debated much more widely across East and Southern Africa between the early 1940s and early 1960s. Britain's history of unconditional SCTs represented an alternative to both the CCTs initiated in Latin America (and backed by the World Bank) and the contributory social insurance programmes long championed by the ILO. The design of drought relief from the 1960s reflected British colonial ideas about who deserved what. When SCTs resurfaced on the policy agenda in the 2000s, it is striking that DfID seemed to draw on deep-rooted British traditions in identifying poor households and especially the elderly poor as the primary target for their programmes.

In the post-2000s period, as in earlier periods of policy reform in Sub-Saharan Africa, reforms have resulted from the interaction between Sub-Saharan African governments and transnational ideas and international actors. Sub-Saharan African governments have variously resisted, embraced, adopted or adapted models from elsewhere, and in so doing created new models of their own. This paper focuses on the transnational dimension of this process. The significant roles played by political

actors from within Sub-Saharan African countries are examined in the other articles in this special issue.

Why did SCTs rise up the global policy agenda?

The process through which global public policies are constructed and transferred can be viewed most clearly from the type of critical constructivist perspective adopted by Li.³ This approach recognises that such processes are ‘deeply structured by enduring power relations and shifting ideological alignments’ (Peck and Theodore, 2010: 169) whilst acknowledging the potential for social interaction to reshape the policy models being advocated or the ideas shaping the behaviour of agents in the process (Stone, 2012; Mosse, 2005). This critical constructivist perspective locates an understanding of how development ideas are formed and travel within the broader political economy.

Ideas about the welfare state gained traction in Western Europe in the middle of the twentieth century, as Polanyi (1944) first observed, as a ‘counter-movement’ generated by the contradictory forces of industrial capitalism, and specifically by the urge to mitigate the damaging effects of commodification (see also Esping-Andersen, 1990). Materialist analysis also helps us to understand how ideas about ‘development’ have been generated by the need for imminent policy solutions to deal with the problems of exploitation and dispossession that arise from immanent processes of economic growth and change (Cowen and Shenton, 1996).

SCTs first appeared on the global policy agenda in the 1990s, with the World Bank’s largely rhetorical concern to address the social costs of structural adjustment through ‘safety nets’ – introduced in the 1990 *World Development Report* (World Bank, 1990) – and, perhaps more substantively, ‘social action funds’ (de Haan, 2014). Safety nets may have been very modest, but they marked an important break from the emphasis on contributory programmes that had dominated the global policy agenda for more than fifty years. It took a larger rupture within the global capitalist economy, however, for mainstream development ideology to shift significantly

³ See Stone (2012) for the distinction between ‘rational-institutionalist’ and ‘constructivist’ positions, and Hickey and Seekings (2017) for a discussion of their relative merits. In brief, we find that rational-institutionalist approaches pay insufficient attention to the role of politics and conflict in how policy ideas travel, and that critical constructivist approaches are more closely attuned to the highly contested and polycentric character of policy transfer today.

enough to offer an ideological environment within which social protection could flourish.

The East Asian crisis in the late 1990s provided the necessary shock, prompting the World Bank to emphasise social protection, particularly the role of safety nets in managing ‘risks’, in its 2000/01 *World Development Report*. It served almost as a manifesto for the new ‘Post Washington Consensus’ (Hayami, 2003), based on at least partial recognition of the negative consequences of unfettered market capitalism, and of the need to try and re-embed processes of commodification within a social logic (although, as Craig and Porter [2006] argue, the resulting agenda of ‘inclusive neoliberalism’ fell short of a fuller Polanyian form of social liberalism). The Bank’s focus on social protection became institutionalised during this period. It published a ‘Social Protection and Labour Strategy’ in 2001, established a Social Protection and Labour Unit, and allocated funds to experimental CCT programmes.

In knowledge-broker mode, the World Bank made major investments during this period to evaluate the effects of cash transfer programmes in Latin America, and to start sharing learning around such schemes. Peck and Theodore (2015) document the World Bank’s infatuation with the Mexican *Progres*a CCT programme (later renamed *Oportunidades*, and later still *Prospera*). In 2002, the World Bank hosted a conference on CCTs in Mexico and took participants on a ‘pilgrimage’ to *Oportunidades* facilities. This was the first ‘rallying point for the true believers, founding fathers of what would become the CCT *movement*’ (Peck and Theodore, 2015: 86, emphasis in the original). The World Bank promoted SCTs through workshops, conferences, publications, technical assistance and generous funding. It sought to persuade national governments that they could and should contribute more. The World Bank’s produced one of the first two estimates of the costs of social protection programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 (Kakwani and Subbarao, 2005).

The global financial crisis of 2008/09 provided further impetus to the World Bank’s interest in SCTs. In Peck and Theodore’s assessment, ‘the economic and political dislocations prompted by the global finance crisis ... widened the ideological bandwidth on a host of issues in the long-neglected field of social security’ (2015: 123). In 2012, the World Bank restated forcefully the case for social protection in a new strategy document for 2012-22 (World Bank, 2012a). It also published a dedicated ‘Social Protection Strategy for Africa’ (World Bank, 2012b) and an enthusiastic assessment of SCTs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Garcia and Moore, 2012), i.e. in a region where the Bank had hitherto seen SCTs as impractical. As the authors of the latter report wrote, ‘the question is not *whether* cash transfers can be used in

the region, but *how* they should be used, and how they can be adapted and developed to meet social protection and development goals' (2012: 9, emphasis in original). In 2014, the World Bank produced its first *State of Social Safety Nets Report* (World Bank, 2014).

In her analysis of ideas about 'development', Li (2007) also focuses on the World Bank. Given the sensitivity of the Bank (and the IFSs in general) to the perceived health of global capitalism, and the Bank's prominence in (re)constructing the idea of development, it is not surprising that Li drew a link between global capitalism and ideas about development. Li herself paid attention to neither the ways in which ideas were actually formed and contested within the World Bank, nor how they then travelled, nor how or why other agencies engaged with similar issues. The rise of SCTs up the policy agenda was not due to the World Bank alone, however. Other international organisations besides the Bank took up the issue of social protection, and began to lobby for SCTs, for a variety of reasons less directly related to the health of global capitalism or the 'harm done by the free market' (Hanlon *et al.*, 2010: 167). As Peck writes, policy transfer in the 2000s has been 'a multi-site, multi-actor process'; "policy models" need not follow a linear trajectory, or radiate outward, from a singular place of "invention"; social policy-making has been 'globalizing', but it has been uneven, shaped by the interactions between different international organisations and 'translocal networks' (Peck, 2011: 168).

The ILO played an especially important role in this at the global level. The ILO had, since the 1920s, been the leading proponent of contributory, insurance-based forms of social protection. At first intermittently, and then increasingly, the ILO sought a way of broadening its approach to social protection beyond its concern with the privileges enjoyed by workers in formal employment, especially in the advanced industrialised economies of the global North (Seekings, 2010). In the early 2000s the ILO began to prioritise the goal of extending 'coverage' to 'all'. Contestation within the ILO led to the emergence of the 'social protection floor', including tax-financed SCTs and public health care – as the favoured strategy (Deacon, 2013). In 2005, at the same time as the World Bank, the ILO published its first study of the cost of SCTs in Sub-Saharan Africa, attesting to their 'affordability' (Pal *et al.*, 2005).

The ILO's efforts were propelled forward by the global financial crisis (Deacon, 2013). When the UN called on its disparate agencies to coordinate their responses to the global crisis, the ILO persuaded the other agencies to launch a Social Protection Floor Initiative, co-chaired by the ILO and World Health Organisation. An Advisory Group – chaired by former Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet – was established

to examine proposals. This eventually led to the adoption by the International Labour Conference in 2012 of Recommendation #202 on Social Protection Floors, which its champion Michel Cichon gushingly described as ‘a “Magna Carta” of social protection’ (Cichon, 2013: 37). The aim of the Recommendation, the ILO itself wrote, was ‘ensuring effective access to at least essential health care and a basic level of income security as a matter of priority, as the indispensable foundation for more comprehensive national social security systems’ (ILO, 2014: 5; see also Deacon, 2013). The ILO also joined with the IMF in arguing for increased expenditure on social protection (ILO and IMF, 2012). In 2014, the ILO published a glossy *World Social Protection Report* (ILO, 2014), which can be read as an effort to rebrand itself and to reclaim the mainstream terrain of international social protection policy from the World Bank.⁴

The ILO’s interest was certainly shaped by global economic trends, but its priority was to secure the privileges or rights already achieved by workers in formal employment, primarily in the global North. It recognised that the casualisation of work in the global North directly threatened its historic strongholds whilst the limited reach of formal employment in the global South rendered it marginal, both ideologically and politically, in debates about global poverty. It also smarted at the apparent rising hegemony of the World Bank on issues such as pension reform that the ILO had imagined were its domain. The ILO’s primary concerns were with the promotion of ‘decent work’, entailing the formalisation of informal work. The beauty of the social protection floor initiative was that it combined both the protection (and expansion) of existing social insurance schemes and the promise of expanded coverage of the poor through SCTs or other mechanisms.

Several other agencies took up the issue of social protection, not so much in response to the vicissitudes of the global economy, but rather in response to the persistence of poverty. The persistence of both episodic famine and chronic poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere posed challenges to European aid agencies, especially when social and economic rights acquired additional prominence in the late 1990s. Global poverty here was framed as a humanitarian problem more than one flowing from the underlying political economy. Poverty and famine were overwhelmingly concentrated in rural areas, not among industrial or urban populations. They were not so much the products of ‘development’ (or the harm caused by the free market, as Hanlon *et al.* put it) as the consequences of the absence of development and the

⁴ We are grateful to Tom Lavers for this insight. The ILO had previously published a once-off *World Social Security Report* (ILO, 2010). It has subsequently published a second *World Social Protection Report* (ILO, 2017).

limits to economic growth. Whereas the impetus behind welfare state-building in the global North in the twentieth century had been the countermovement against commodification through industrialisation, the impetus to social protection in Africa and South Asia was deagrarianisation, whether short-term (through drought) or longer-term (through population growth that exceeded both the availability of land and productivity rises). Poverty was also exacerbated in East and Southern Africa by AIDS, which (initially) killed working-age adults resulting in households without anyone available to work. Regardless of the extent to which famine and rural poverty were the consequence of capitalist development under and after colonialism, the agencies themselves understood their roles as primarily humanitarian.

An important early initiative in the formulation of social protection as a global policy agenda developed under the auspices of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The DAC served as a thinktank for the governments of industrialised countries on issues around development. In 1999, the DAC established a Network on Poverty Reduction (POVNET), which formed three ‘task teams’ to examine donors’ activities with respect to agriculture, infrastructure and private sector development. Pushed by SCT advocates including Timo Voipio (from Finland), Stephen Kidd (from the UK) and Rudiger Krech (from the German GTZ), POVNET turned its attention to ‘pro-poor growth’ and appointed in 2004 a fourth Task Team on Risk, Vulnerability and Social Protection (later renamed Social Protection and Social Policy) (Voipio, 2007). This brought together a large team of social development and social protection experts from several OECD countries (including Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK), international agencies (including the World Bank, ILO and UNICEF), and large international civil society organisations (including HelpAge International). The Task Team also included members from organisations in the global South such as the Commission of the African Union. The POVNET Task Team became the main forum for consensus seeking inter-agency dialogue on social protection agenda and how it could gain a foothold in the broader development agenda through its potential contribution to promoting human rights, social mobility and inclusive economic growth. The OECD-POVNET Guidance document on Social Protection was finally published in 2009.⁵

The UK’s DfID had prioritised poverty reduction since its establishment as a standalone government department in 1997 (Hulme, 2010). DFID participated energetically in POVNET, and approached the issue of social protection primarily from a poverty reduction perspective rather than as a means of addressing risks or

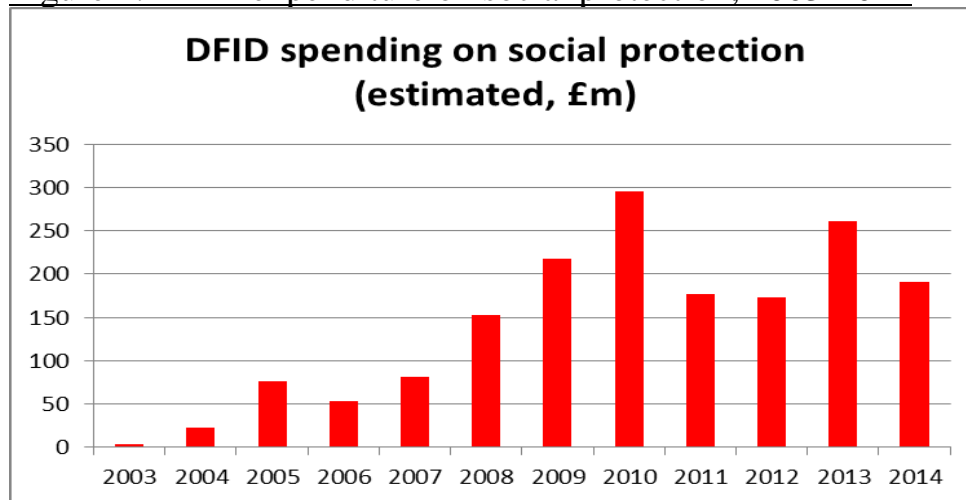
⁵ We are grateful to one of our anonymous reviewers for additional information on these initiatives.

promoting rights. DfID – and the other aid agencies working in Africa and South Asia – was influenced by developments on the ground, including the threats to food security posed by drought and AIDS. DfID staff based in countries like Ethiopia and Kenya drew the attention of London-based officials to the role that SCTs might play as a more institutionalised response to pressing social problems on the ground.

Just as the ILO’s adoption of the concept of the social protection floor resulted from contestation within the ILO (Deacon, 2013), so there was nothing inevitable about the rise of social protection as a commitment within DfID. In 2002, DfID established a policy team entitled Reaching the Very Poorest (RtVP) within its Policy Division. The RtVP team became the locus for exploring and promoting an institutional-level focus on social protection, especially following the appointment in late 2004 of Stephen Kidd as team leader. The RtVP Team commissioned a series of papers, including the 2005 ‘practice paper’ on ‘Social Transfers and Chronic Poverty’ (DfID, 2005) that helped persuade senior staff within DfID of the need to promote social protection. Buoyed by this initial success, the team leader changed the name of the RtVP policy team to ‘Social Protection’ and successfully lobbied for a commitment to social protection to be included in DfID’s 2006 White Paper. Perversely, this nearly led to the RtVP team being disbanded, on the grounds that it had achieved its objective. After informal back-channelling to UK government Ministers, the Team was retained through a merger into a broader team on Equity and Rights (also under Kidd’s leadership). For the newly-promoted team leader, this meant having a larger budget of £2m with ‘complete authority over how spending could be done ... that helped us fund all these events, get these things out and going’ at the country level in Africa and elsewhere.⁶

⁶ This paragraph is based on interviews with DfID staff in June 2015.

Figure 1: DFID expenditure on social protection, 2003-2014



Source: www.devtracker.dfid.gov.uk

From the mid-2000s onwards, DfID worked with other international agencies and domestic policy actors to establish pilot SCT projects and national-level social protection policy processes in several countries. DfID's spending on social protection rose steadily, peaking at almost £300m in 2010 in direct response to the global financial crisis (see Figure 1). Expenditures declined after 2010, when a new coalition government comprising the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties replaced the previous Labour Party government. Proponents of social protection within DfID were concerned that the Coalition government would be less supportive. Indeed, the team's initial efforts to persuade the new Secretary of State of the case for a continued focus on 'social security' failed. Somewhat fortuitously, however, Hanlon et al.'s populist book *Just Give Money to the Poor* was published, distributed widely within DfID, and read by the Secretary of State, who was sufficiently persuaded to endorse the book's message in an open letter to a national newspaper and to back DfID's continued policy focus on SCTs.⁷

DfID also helped to fund other initiatives that promoted SCTs. The London-based non-government network HelpAge International was an early convert to SCTs, advocating universal social pensions as a way to effect the rights of older people. With financial support from DfID, HelpAge played a leading role in steering the African Union to recognise social protection as an integral element in social policy through a conference in Livingstone (Zambia) in 2006 and further consultative meetings in different African cities over the following two years (Leutelt, 2012). DfID also helped to fund further work by the ILO on the costs of SCTs in Zambia

⁷ Letter by the Secretary of State for International Development, *Guardian*, 29th June, 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/29/revolution-global-aid-poor>.

and Tanzania, as well as establishing the African Platform for Social Protection as a network of civil society organisations to advocate for this new policy agenda within and across African countries.

The World Bank, ILO, DfID and many other international organisations all embraced SCTs as a central element in social protection, tentatively in the early 2000s, then more forcefully in the aftermath of the 2008/09 global financial and economic crisis, in line with Li's suggestion that shifts in the global political economy can play significant roles in the rise of new global policy agendas. These different organisations had diverse motivations and objectives, extending beyond the stabilisation of the global economy to the protection (and strengthening) of existing policies (favouring organised business and labour) and a largely humanitarian concern with poverty reduction (informed by the priorities of tax-paying voters and civil society in the democracies of the global North). The common interest in SCTs and social protection was reflected in the apparent consensus eventually achieved over (for example) the ILO-led social protection floor initiative. But the international organisations saw SCTs in diverse ways. There was little agreement between them over who should benefit (the poor, the destitute, older people, mothers or families with children, formally-employed workers, informally-employed workers, peasant farmers, or everyone), by how much (i.e. how generous should benefits be?) or with what conditions attached. The result was that the international organisations engaged in Gramscian wars of position (Li, 2007), not only with respect to the national governments whose policies they hoped to shape, but also with respect to the other international organisations (Deacon, 2007) or and, as suggested by Mosse (2005), to other interests and ideas within their own organisations.

Wars of position over global social policy

Almost all of the international organisations published documents, convened workshops and conferences, took national politicians and officials on study tours, and provided or paid for technical assistance. Some of them helped to fund, or funded entirely, approved SCT programmes. These were mechanisms through which international organisations promoted their own vision of SCTs, and sometimes criticized alternative visions. In her work on how ideas about development travelled, Li (2007) employed a Gramscian to contestations over ideas and the role of discourse. 'Policy transfer' flows through relations of power not only between the global actors and national governments but also between global actors themselves. International policy spaces are thus 'terrains of contestation' within which advocates

play out ‘wars of position’ over ideas and policies (Deacon, 2007). These ideas and discursive struggles took place across three distinct levels: ‘paradigmatic’ ideas at the level of worldviews, ‘problem-framing’ ideas which serve to identify and define the ‘problems’, and specific ‘policy solutions’ (Schmidt, 2008; see also Hall, 1993). International organisations differed on all three levels. Workshops, study tours, documents and the other mechanisms of advocacy were weapons in these wars of position over SCTs.

Writing in 2007, Deacon assessed that the global social policy landscape was contested by three main ideological camps: ‘USA-influenced desire for global neoliberal policies’; ‘European-influenced desire for global social democratic policies’; and ‘Southern-centred debates about getting out from under any northern-imposed agenda for global economic and social policy’ (2007: 22). With hindsight, it is clear that this typology was only half valid. Labelling the World Bank approach as neoliberal understates its new-found enthusiasm for large-scale, tax-financed SCTs, within the broad ideological shift towards the ‘*inclusive* neoliberalism’ of the ‘Post Washington Consensus’ (Craig and Porter, 2006), as well as its later willingness to drop conditions in many settings. Viewing the changing in thinking about SCTs as a ‘Southern’ revolution (as Hanlon *et al.* put it in 2010) was accurate with regard to the geographic *location* of some of the original models (Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, India) but underestimates the importance of international organisations based and rooted in the global North as the *brokers* or agents of subsequent diffusion.

Whilst regional organisations (such as the African Union) have adopted policies on social protection, and some governments (notably Brazil) have actively promoted their model,⁸ there is little evidence that these have had much effect relative to the influence of Northern-based and rooted organisations.⁹ Viewing European approaches as broadly social democratic was correct insofar as they proposed a more extensive role for the state than the World Bank, but the label masked deep differences over the form of state intervention between (for example) the ILO, the Nordic countries and DfID. Whilst the ILO did embrace SCTs, it also rejected proposals from within the ILO for more universal programmes (Deacon, 2013). In

⁸ The Africa–Brazil Programme on Social Development, financed by DfID, brought together delegations from Brazil and six African countries to discuss SCTs. This seems to have influenced the design of the LEAP programme in Ghana (see Leite *et al.*, 2015: 1454; Grebe, 2015).

⁹ The diffusion of social pensions to Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland seems to be an example of South-South diffusion, from South Africa. But there is no evidence of any active agency by the South African government or any other organization (see articles by Granvik and Seekings in this special issue).

practice the ILO continued to favour employment-related programmes, viewing tax-financed programmes as residual, for groups of people without any employment. The Nordic social democratic approach – which was especially influential within OECD-POVNET – entailed a rights-based approach and favoured universal programmes over programmes targeted on the poor. A focus on the ‘social dimension of development’ – as opposed to employment or poverty – was ‘characteristic of our Nordic approach to development cooperation’, wrote the Finnish chair of the OECD-POVNET Task Team on Social Protection (Voipio, 2007: 45). DfID, in contrast, reproduced a distinctively British tradition, which tended to favour the market as the engine of development and residual state programmes targeted at the poor, although more generously and with a broader sense of deservingness than the World Bank.

Each of these organisations sought to promote its models, its definition of the problems to be solved, and even its worldview. The World Bank was especially energetic in this from 2002, hosting major conferences to promote CCTs in Puebla (Mexico, 2002), São Paulo (Brazil, 2004) and Istanbul (Turkey, 2006). The Bank promoted CCTs first in Latin America, working with the Inter-American Development Bank, and then in middle-income countries elsewhere (Holzmann, 2008; Sugiyama, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2015; von Gliszczynski, 2015). Reflecting its institutional move into ‘knowledge-broker’ mode, the Bank provided an electronic platform to help establish a Latin American ‘community of practice’ on social protection and a series of international conferences aimed at facilitating policy learning; starting with the Istanbul conference in 2006, this has become institutionalised as an ongoing series of ‘South-South Learning Forums’.¹⁰

The World Bank was not initially persuaded that governments in Sub-Saharan Africa had the capacity or level of social service provision required to adopt CCTs. Presentations at its 2006 CCT conference covered small *planned* programmes in Angola and Sierra Leone, but the Bank ignored unconditional SCT programmes in Southern Africa and continued to prioritise instead community-driven development initiatives and public works schemes, especially in arid, drought-ravaged areas. By this time, DfID had mostly withdrawn from Latin America, and had little direct contact with either Mexico or Brazil. But DfID had personnel all over Sub-Saharan Africa and saw the continent as very much its terrain. DfID thus aimed to fill the regional gap left by the Bank. This marked a change in strategy. Hitherto, DfID’s initial forays into the ongoing construction of social protection as a global policy agenda had been timid. DfID staff recall attending World Bank meetings on social

¹⁰ Interview with senior World Bank official, 7 December 2015.

protection in Washington DC during 2003-2004: ‘We saw ourselves as largely falling in with the Bank, we were sent to the Bank to listen and learn, not to challenge’.¹¹ By 2006, DfID felt able to challenge directly the World Bank’s assumption that SCTs were only feasible in middle-income countries, as well as the Bank’s preference for conditional programmes.¹²

This policy-level ‘war of position’ (Deacon, 2007; Li, 2007) played out at the third of the World Bank’s conferences promoting CCTs, in Istanbul in 2006. Keen to challenge the Bank’s hegemony, and to create more room for itself as a policy entrepreneur in the field, DfID’s Social Protection Team helped co-finance the conference, and thus brought in some of its favoured consultants, including Dr Michael Samson of the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) in Cape Town, which DfID amongst others helped to finance. At the conference, Samson clashed with the World Bank’s Norbert Schady over the evidence in support of conditionality.¹³ Although the Bank did not change its position at this stage, DfID secured an agreement for further research to be undertaken into the role of conditionality, the results of which revealed that it played a partial role at best in securing the developmental impacts associated with cash transfers (Fizbein and Schady, 2009).

A similar confrontation took place at a lower level workshop on child protection in Kenya. DfID funded a consultant to challenge the Bank’s favoured consultant (Francisco Ayala) on the role that conditions had played in cash transfer programmes in Latin America. This also led to an agreement to test conditional against unconditional grants, and also hard against soft versions of conditionality. According to a DfID team member, the evidence for conditions fell apart when tested through the SCT for orphans in Kenya.¹⁴ When the World Bank did later begin to broaden its support for SCTs from workfare to child and family grants, from about 2012, it did not push for conditionality. In the meantime, DfID and other agencies had taken on leading roles in promoting SCTs in Sub-Saharan Africa, something further enabled by the ‘harmonisation’ dimension of the Paris Declaration, which in some contexts saw the Bank relinquish leadership to DfID in this policy domain.

¹¹ Interview, 12 June 2015.

¹² Interview with World Bank policy expert on social protection, 7 December 2015.

¹³ These issues arose at the previous conference, in 2004, when Brazilian scholars challenged the hard conditionality and inattention to rights in the Mexican model (Peck and Theodore, 2015), but the Brazilian critics did not have the institutional backing of an international organisation.

¹⁴ Interview, 20 June 2015.

DfID saw itself as promoting an alternative to the World Bank. As one DfID official put it, the Bank was at the time concerned only with ‘risk, they weren’t talking about chronic poverty, so we saw a gap’ and framed ‘ourselves in a way to create a niche for ourselves’.¹⁵ DfID’s approach was more ‘European’ than the World Bank’s, but it was not rooted in the strong commitment to rights and universalism that characterised the Nordic agencies. DfID officials saw themselves as pragmatic, seeing things ‘in contextual terms, what works and is required in different contexts’.¹⁶ But this was a pragmatism typical of British policy and ideological traditions.

DfID sought to displace the indirect influence that the Bank exerted in Sub-Saharan African countries, especially through economists employed in finance ministries. DfID deployed consultants who favoured bolder SCT programmes (such as Stephen Devereux from the Institute for Development Studies in the UK), funded annual training programmes in Mombassa and elsewhere, and sought a leading role for its own or like-minded personnel on the social protection sector working or advisory groups formed by international organisations to ‘harmonise’ their approaches and ‘advise’ national governments. DfID’s approach to promoting social protection in Sub-Saharan Africa would be strongly informed by its institutional practices and the ‘zeal’ of the Social Protection Team Leader, as well as its wider ideological positionality. Faced with an often sceptical response from government officials, DfID advisors were able to respond rapidly to requests for financial and technical assistance in considering and developing social protection policies (e.g. fiduciary risk assessments, pilot evaluations), and proved more nimble than the World Bank, with its more cumbersome internal workings (Hickey *et al.*, 2009).

Even when organisations appeared to reach agreement to cooperate, suspicions lingered. Whilst the World Bank appeared to support proposals for social protection floors, it never actually endorsed the concept, and continued to prefer the concepts of ‘social protection systems’ and ‘social safety nets’. Its flagship report, for example, was titled *The State of Social Safety Nets* (World Bank, 2014). More importantly, it helped to establish a new mechanism for global co-operation on social protection, the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B). Some ILO officials view SPIAC-B as a (successful) attempt to usurp previous, ILO-led structures, and drive the social protection agenda in the direction favoured by the Bank.

¹⁵ Interview, 3 June 2015.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The governmentality of social protection: ‘Rendering technical’ and working politically

Despite the contestation within, and especially between, international organisations over the purpose and form of SCTs, most of the international organisations utilised a discourse that rendered the adoption of SCTs as a purely *technical* process. In their interactions with national governments in Sub-Saharan Africa, the international organisations generally presented arguments in favour of SCTs as technically efficient ways of achieving technical goals such as poverty-reduction. They also tended to downplay the political choices that had to be made.

In the third dimension of her approach, Li draws on Foucauldian studies of governmentality to understand ‘the ways in which rule is actually accomplished’. This involves examining the way that powerful transnational actors ‘render technical’ the intractable challenges of poverty and inequality in order to sustain a particular world order. As Li writes: ‘To render a set of processes technical and improvable an arena of intervention must be bounded, mapped, characterised and documented; the relevant forces and relations must be identified; and a narrative must be devised connecting the proposed intervention with the problem it will solve’ (2007: 126). The technical approach to SCTs is evident for most of the international organisations. For the ILO,

The lack of access to social protection constitutes a major obstacle to economic and social development. Inadequate or absent social protection coverage is associated with high and persistent levels of poverty and economic insecurity, growing levels of inequality, insufficient investments in human capital and human capabilities, and weak aggregate demand in a time of recession and slow growth (ILO 2014: xix).

For the World Bank, the ‘gold standard experimental design’ of the Mexican CCT model served to validate it, and to ‘bullet proof’ it from ‘political interference’; ‘what often are inescapably political decisions about the design and financing of antipoverty interventions’ were elevated into ‘the heady heights of scientific progress’ (Peck and Theodore, 2015: 93-5). Peck and Theodore note that ‘a deepening reliance on technocratic forms of policy development and delivery is a widely observed feature of late-neoliberalism’ (*ibid*: 172), but with respect to SCTs even many of the Bank’s critics couched their counter-arguments in technical terms. Hanlon *et al.*, for example, chose to conclude that SCTs were affordable, that

recipients did not ‘waste’ the money, that SCTs were ‘an efficient way to directly reduce poverty, and they have the potential to prevent future poverty by facilitating economic growth and promoting human development’ (2010: 2).

International organisations tended to present their goals, and to specify the problems needing solutions, in technical terms. HelpAge International emphasised strongly the rights of elderly people on its website and in general strategic documents (e.g. HelpAge, 2011), but when it promoted SCTs within Sub-Saharan Africa it emphasised their efficiency in terms of mitigating poverty among the elderly, with hardly a reference to rights (see, e.g., Knox-Vydmanov and Galvani, 2016, on Malawi).

Crucial to their projects of specifying and solving ‘problems’ was the deployment of ‘expertise’ and the construction of ‘epistemic communities’. ‘Knowledge networks and epistemic communities give discursive, intellectual, and scientific structure to the global agora’, argues Stone (2008: 32); ‘they provide scholarly argumentation and scientific justification for “evidence-based” policy formulation’. An important role is played here by ‘policy entrepreneurs’ who ‘use their intellectual authority or market expertise to reinforce and legitimate certain forms of policy or normative standards as “best practice”’ (Stone, 2012: 494). Policy entrepreneurs and international organisations generally did not invent challenges: Poverty, drought, AIDS-mortality and so on were real. But they did serve to shape how these challenges were packaged as problems, and more specifically as problems that needed to be prioritized, and this prepared the ground for the advocacy of specific suggestions.

In terms of problem-framing, the World Bank funded a series of national-level risk and vulnerability assessments from the early 2000s, in part to help provide a diagnostic basis for its risk-based approach to social protection (Kozel, Fallavier, and Badiani 2008). UNICEF helped to specify the problem of ‘orphaned and vulnerable children’ (OVCs), which included those ‘single-orphans’ who had only lost one parent, regardless of the presence of other kin (Green, 2011). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the first major policy entrepreneur was probably German development consultant Bernd Schubert, whose experience with a small (and, unusually, urban) SCT in Mozambique in the early 1990s was followed by pioneering work in crafting the Kalomo SCT pilot project in Zambia and then further initiatives in Malawi and elsewhere (von Gliszczynski, 2015: 28-30). Schubert was an expert deployed variously by GTZ, DfID and UNICEF.

Other agencies deployed their own ‘experts’. The World Bank used extensively an ex-staffer from Ecuador, Francisco Ayala, who established his own consulting firm to provide ‘technical assistance’ on the design and implementation of SCT programmes, with a particular focus on CCTs. DfID (and other agencies such as UNICEF) later countered through using Michael Samson, based in Cape Town, who emphasized a more rights-based and welfarist approach to social protection.¹⁷ Employed by different development agencies to design and help implement schemes that reflected their ideological and programmatic preferences, these and other policy entrepreneurs played important roles in determining the specific form that SCTs actually took on the ground in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Ferguson (2015) argues strongly that SCTs were fundamentally subversive of the development agenda, by shifting attention from issues of production (and, especially, work) to issues of distribution. Ferguson’s point is important because many of the actors in struggles over SCTs did *not* acknowledge this in the discourses they employed to specify and solve problems. In employing developmentalist discourses, international organisations tended to reinforce technical rather than political understandings of the problem. It is not clear that this was politically effective in the Sub-Saharan African countries where they were promoting SCTs. As the country case-studies in this special issue show, political elites in Sub-Saharan Africa tended to view SCTs through conservative lenses. For political elites across much of Sub-Saharan Africa, poverty was a moral issue, rooted in the irresponsibility of individual poor people, not primarily a *social* issue. As almost all international organisations recognised, framing SCTs in terms of rights was especially likely to stiffen opposition.¹⁸

DfID, unusually, moved part-way to recognising that the promotion of SCTs was a political challenge. DfID’s initial approach to promoting social protection and SCTs in Sub-Saharan Africa included efforts to render it as a technical solution to the problem of poverty. Standard forms of technical and financial assistance were deployed, including a concerted effort to develop a stronger evidence base around

¹⁷ Interview with ex-DFID policy leader on social protection, 30 June 2015. We discuss these particular policy entrepreneurs not to suggest that they were the only ones who played important roles in shaping which policy ideas travelled to sub-Saharan Africa, but to illustrate and extend the broader level point that certain individuals were crucial not only to the wars of position within and between international organisations (Deacon (2013), but also to the process of rendering political choices as technical ones at the country level.

¹⁸ National governments (and especially Ministers of Finance) were also concerned with the costs of social protection programmes (see Seekings, 2017c). DfID sponsored some research into the affordability of programmes, including in Tanzania and Zambia.

social protection and explore different modes of operationalising cash transfers on the ground. However, where elite resistance was encountered, DfID adapted its approach to incorporate new advice on ‘thinking and working politically’ (Dasandi *et al.*, 2016). DfID had been an early adopter of this new approach, and by the mid-2000s had moved from employing political economy analysis to inform country-level processes of programming and policy engagement to commissioning studies of particular policy sectors (DfID, 2009). This included at least three studies of the political barriers and opportunities associated with promoting social protection in sub-Saharan Africa (including Barrientos *et al.*, 2005, on Zambia, a confidential study on Uganda, and an overall analysis by Hickey *et al.*, 2009). This led DfID staff to work on building broader ‘coalitions’ in support of SCTs (see, on Uganda: Grebe and Mubiru, 2014; Grebe, 2014; Hickey and Bukenya, this volume; and on Zambia: Kabandula and Seekings, 2016; Siachiwena, 2016; Pruce and Hickey, this volume).

Tens of millions of pounds were spent on ‘policy engagement projects’ aimed at influencing African governments to adopt social protection.¹⁹ Senior bureaucrats and politicians were sent on study tours to witness the benefits of successful cash transfer projects in a range of Latin American and African countries. Pilot projects that were launched to help generate country-specific evidence on the effectiveness of cash transfers, started to generate their own political dynamics, leading citizens and MPs to lobby their governments to extend cash transfer programmes. DfID money has also funded media campaigns to help spread awareness of cash transfers and their effectiveness, and has been increasingly willing to do so during key political moments. For example, whereas DfID staff in Zambia sought to hold back the roll-out of a pilot programme for fear of it being used as a form of vote-buying in relation to the 2011 elections, their counterparts in Uganda used the build-up to the 2016 elections to politicise further the case for cash transfers in order to secure further financial support from government for SCTs (see Hickey and Bukenya, this volume).

This contrasted markedly with the World Bank’s country-level approach to policy engagement; as one World Bank policy expert on social protection noted, when it comes to ‘influencing, we don’t do the DfID thing’ (Interview, 7 December 2015). The approach also created some disquiet within DfID, in part as there was a sense

¹⁹ One example here is the Expanding Social Protection programme in Uganda, which spent over £54 million between 2009-15 to try to increase the level of political commitment to social protection in Uganda and the capacity of the Government of Uganda to deliver a coherent social protection strategy, to help address the challenge of the government’s approach to social protection (SP), formerly characterised by limited reach and lack of coherence, in the absence of a long-term vision and co-ordinated leadership on SP. (<https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-200349>).

that the advocacy effort was running ahead of the evidence-base regarding the effectiveness and affordability of cash transfers in sub-Saharan Africa. As one DfID team member admits, ‘We were in advocacy mode, we over-egged the growth aspect if we’re honest’ (Interview, 3 June 2015). Another was anxious that ‘We were handing very difficult problems to our partners, with missionary zeal, and it wasn’t very savvy. That is an NGO’s job not a donor’s job, not really for the UK to throw its weight around in other countries in that way’ (Interview with Social Protection Team member, 15 June 2015). This raises important concerns regarding issues of sovereignty and who controls the policy agenda in sub-Saharan Africa, despite donor rhetoric around ‘ownership’ (Whitfield, 2009).

DfID sought to understand national-level political dynamics. It tended to understand these in terms of the kind of political disagreements labelled as the ‘Finance Ministry’ and ‘Civil Society’ tendencies by Kanbur (2001), drawing on his experience in debates over poverty reduction in the 1990s. As Kanbur emphasised, even in the 1990s these tendencies did not correspond precisely to referred to the institutions referred to in the labels.²⁰ In general, however, in countries such as Zambia and Uganda in the mid-2000s, one group of government officials was more closely aligned with the policy preferences of the World Bank and other IFIs, whilst a separate group shared many of the preferences of European and UN development agencies. As we have seen above, the IFIs were not opposed to SCTs, and at least in the 2010s advocated increased expenditures on them, but they preferred expenditure on children and workfare over other forms of SCT. Also, as we have seen above, the European and UN development agencies did not share exactly the same approaches to SCTs. The result was that each agency sought to mobilise and strengthen its own allies at the national level. The ILO, for example, had much stronger links with Ministries of Labour (and a specific set of NGOs) than with ministries responsible for ‘social development’ (and NGOs concerned with this). In relation to struggles over social protection from the early 2000s, DfID generally sought to strengthen specific ‘civil society’ tendencies at the national level in Sub-Saharan Africa. Wars of position at the national level were thus shaped by the wars of position at the international level.

The political dynamics over SCTs within Sub-Saharan African countries could not be reduced, however, to disagreements between officials aligned to either the World

²⁰ The Finance Ministry tendency includes not only ministries of finance, but also of trade and business, central banks, many officials within IFIs and certain civil society organisations, including think tanks. The Civil Society tendency, meanwhile, is usually constructed of social sector ministries, UN and European aid agencies and civil society organisations (Kanbur 2001).

Bank or one or other of the European and UN agencies. In some countries, political elites were skeptical of SCTs in part on the conservative grounds that SCTs undermined patriarchal family relations and social relationships within communities, eroded the work ethic and created ‘dependency’ on the state. By providing ‘something for nothing’, SCTs violated conservative norms of who deserved what, how and why (Kalebe-Nyamongo and Marquette, 2014; Ferguson, 2015; Seekings, 2017). DfID and other agencies sought to challenge these beliefs on largely technical grounds, commissioning studies to demonstrate that SCTs had productive (or developmental) as well as protective benefits. This kind of evidence made sense in a war of position against neoliberal critics, but was largely tangential to more conservative anxieties. DfID and other agencies were generally aware that it was not a good idea to refer to individual social and economic rights in their interactions with national policy-makers, but they lacked a good understanding of how to engage with conservative policy-makers. This helps to explain the narrow and parsimonious form that SCTs have so far taken across much on the continent.

Conclusion

The rise of SCTs as a global public policy since the turn of the millennium, and their subsequent (slow) roll-out in sub-Saharan Africa, has been shaped by the convergence of different aspects of political economy, ideas and governmentality, as worked through the aid world and the role of aid agencies in promoting development as specific forms of ‘institutional practice’.²¹ At both the international and national levels, international agencies fought wars of position with rivals and sceptics. They tended to employ technocratic discourses, but the politics was never far below the surface. ‘Global poverty management’ is not as technocratic and depoliticised a process as some critics tend to suggest (e.g. Li, 2007; Peck, 2011). Cash transfers have certainly been presented as the ‘practically feasible solution’ to an ‘ideologically framed consensus’ regarding poverty alleviation, but what we found striking is rather the highly and deliberately politicised approach that this has often involved.

²¹ Note that the slow rate of progress in most countries also needs to be understood in relation to the contraction of fiscal space that most low- and middle-income countries faced as a result of the global financial crisis of 2007 (ILO 2014). However, our primary focus here has been on the types of social assistance that were promoted in sub-Saharan Africa during the mid-late 2000s, rather than the level of expenditure per se.

The process through which the global SCT agenda has been created by international organisations with specific interests, practices and ideas has led to the production of ‘a fragmented and incomplete universalism’ (Von Gliszczynski and Leisering, 2016: 325) on the ground in Sub-Saharan Africa. This incompleteness includes the absence of a focus on forms of social protection that go beyond the ameliorative and embrace more transformative forms of social protection (e.g. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004). In one sense, this fits with the critique that global policy transfer today involves promoting technical and ameliorative responses to the highly political challenges of poverty and inequality in order to sustain a particular world order (Li, 2007; Peck, 2011). The result is a strategy for promoting poverty reduction that responds to failures in market access and poor governance rather than an entirely new, southern-based model of welfare capitalism (as Hanlon et al., 2010, suggest).

However, if one takes more seriously the role of domestic elites and their ideas in transnational processes of policy transfer, as we do within this special issue, there is little evidence to suggest that a more radical approach would have been welcomed by political or bureaucratic elites on the continent, whose ideological perspectives are arguably more closely attuned to the liberal and conservative forms of social protection, involving minimal transfers to labour-incapacitated or otherwise highly-deserving individuals (Seekings, 2017a), than to more radical forms of social protection (Hickey, 2014). African elites have for around a century been receptive to certain liberal ideas around social assistance, but generally to a parsimonious extent.

A ‘pauperist’ model of welfare reform took hold in some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-twentieth century, and expanded (evolving into a more citizenship-based model) in the (unevenly) democratised polities of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Sub-Saharan Africa because some of the relevant ideas and models articulated or promoted by outsiders resonated with local colonial and post-colonial elites in the face of changing social and economic conditions, which are of crucial importance. Foreign models were therefore only embraced and adapted where they were aligned with the underlying normative worldview of local elites (Seekings, 2016b) – and, as we show elsewhere in this collection, their political interests. The strongest examples of elite commitment to social protection have little to do with an alignment with either the World Bank’s residualist position or the welfarist rights-based approach of the UN (and Nordic agencies) or DfID’s poverty agenda, but reflect rather the productivist ideology that has become widespread across Sub-

Saharan Africa, particularly amongst governments with more developmentalist ambitions (Lavers 2017a, 2017b).²²

However, there has arguably been more space for promoting an approach that reflects the wider lessons from the redistributive benefits of progressive fiscal policy in Latin America (Melo et al, 2016) rather than seeking to cherry-pick the most transferable intervention from its wider context (Peck and Theodore, 2015). Cast within the broader goal of securing a stronger fiscal contract between states and citizens (Teichman, 2008), this would have involved adopting a more joined-up approach to promoting improved levels of revenue-generation and more progressive forms of taxation, government capacity-building, alongside a more ambitious focus on transfers and employment. Promoting a narrow and limited focus on cash transfers risks problems of convergence in the realm of politics as well as undermining developmental progress, whereby ‘... in the absence of a redistributive societal compromise involving both increased taxation and social spending, progress on the social policy front (particularly increased financial commitment) raises the specter of a descent into populism unless increased financial resources are forthcoming’ (Teichman 2008: 455).

This scenario already seems to be unfolding in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia, where cash transfers are converging with clientelistic and populist forms of politics. This latest phase of transnational-national negotiations over the form that social protection should take in sub-Saharan Africa remains a work in progress, and different socio-political implications may emerge from the move to adopt social cash transfers if they start to become a more institutionalised part of state-society relations (Ferguson, 2015). For now, however, the narrowness of the instruments being used, the parsimonious level of transfers involved and the ideational convergence around a thinly redistributive form of liberalism, all suggest that any broader gains for citizenship and the social contract in Sub-Saharan Africa will be a long time coming.

²² In many cases, national elites have shared the concerns of the World Bank over possible ‘dependency’ on ‘handouts’.

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