

Social Cash Transfer Payments in Botswana: The Impact of Covid-19 on Payment Digitization and the Use of Mobile Technologies



LENA GRONBACH

Lena Gronbach is a fourth-year PhD student in the Department of Sociology at UCT. Her research focuses on payment systems for social cash transfers in sub-Saharan Africa and the impact of Covid-19 on payment digitization and the adoption of mobile technologies. She holds degrees in International Business and Development studies from ESB Business School (Germany) and the University of Pretoria, and has worked as a freelance research consultant for various international organizations.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic marked the beginning of an unprecedented expansion of social protection across the global South, as well as a significant boost in the use of digital technologies for the delivery of social protection. Heeding the calls from the global community, most sub-Saharan African governments introduced social protection measures to mitigate the socio-economic impact of Covid-19. Cash transfers made up a third of the overall pandemic response, consisting in horizontal and vertical expansions of existing programmes and the launch of new emergency transfers. In addition, mobile payment technologies experienced a significant boost during the early stages of the pandemic, compared to pre-Covid times. However, the extent of the adoption of mobile technologies varied greatly, depending on the nature of a country's cash transfer response, the existing cash transfer payment system and pre-Covid payment system reforms, as well as the mobile payment ecosystem in the country. The paper analyses recent and on-going payment system reforms for cash transfers in Botswana and analyzes the nature and progress of these reforms in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the overall adoption of mobile payment technologies on the African continent. It argues that the absence of significant short-term payment system reforms in Botswana is closely linked with the nature of its social protection response to the pandemic. It further discusses on-going, longer-term reforms in terms of Botswana's various payment providers, channels and technologies, and the prospects for the adoption of mobile payments.

HOSTED BY: The Institute for Democracy, Citizenship and Public Policy in Africa was established in 2017 to conduct research into the factors that strengthen and sustain democracy across Africa. It is dedicated to the critical reexamination of democracy in Africa and the development of Africa-centric theory through systematic empirical research and a critical engagement with scholarship on other parts of the world.

07 FEBRUARY

12:45 pm - 2 pm SAST

Location: CSSR Seminar Room, Robert Leslie Social Sciences Building, UCT