

‘Social protection, redistribution and development cooperation: piecing the puzzle together’ - Seminar report

Topic

What do we know about the political dynamics determining social protection policy in developing countries? What do we know about the development impact of social protection? When do social protection mechanisms contribute to redistribution? How high is redistribution on the agenda of international donors, civil society and policymakers pushing for social protection? These questions were addressed at the executive seminar “Social protection, redistribution and development cooperation: piecing the puzzle together” organized by HIVA-KU Leuven on 6 March 2017.

Programme

9u – 9u30	Registration
9u30 – 9u35	Opening & introduction
9u35 – 9u45	Welcome speech - Sonja Keppens, Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid
9u45 – 10u30	<i>Things to know about the political economy of social protection systems</i> - Katja Bender , International Centre for Sustainable, Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences
10u30 – 11u	Break
11u – 11u45	<i>What place for redistribution in social protection? Insights from Senegal and Morocco</i> - Sarah Vaes , HIVA-KU Leuven
11u45 – 12	<i>What does the research say about development-related effects of social protection?</i> - Katja Bender , International Centre for Sustainable Development, Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences
12u – 12u20	Q&A for speakers
12u30-13u30	Lunch
13u30-14u30	Facilitated group work
14u30-15u	Plenary reporting from groups
15u – 15u30	Final reflections & closing word

Key messages

Welcome speech by Sonja Keppens

Sonja Keppens placed the HIVA-study on redistributive social protection in its broader context: In order to organize a more structured relationship between the Directorate-general on Development Cooperation on the one hand, and the Belgian academic world on the other, the Academic Research Organization for Policy (ACROPOLIS) was created. One of the topics addressed by ACROPOLIS is 'Financing for Development'. The [BeFinD](#) consortium conducts research on this topic, in support of policy actors in developing cooperation. The study on redistribution in social protection is part of its body of work. Sonja Keppens pointed out several recent developments that show the commitments of Belgian policy makers to social protection and shared that the administration is presently elaborating a concept note on social protection. The study currently being finalized by HIVA can further inform and support these developments.

Things to know about the political economy of social protection systems by Katja Bender

In her presentation on the political economy of social protection systems Katja Bender first illustrated the evolution of social protection on the national and international policy agendas by looking at 1) the number of countries introducing or reforming social protection mechanisms, 2) the rise of social protection on the international agenda and 3) the amount of official development cooperation attributed to social protection. From these recent trends, the conclusion emerges that the paradigms on social protection are changing. She continued with presenting seven propositions that summarized some of the key political economy insights in social protection.

1. **Reform paths across countries and within countries differ** 1) in breadth (their target population or the number of policy areas they touch) and 2) in speed and depth (incremental change, cumulative change, paradigmatic change).
2. There is a **need to move beyond 'conventional wisdom(s)'** on social protection. For example recent evolutions provide base to nuance the role of economic development. Although economic growth can play an important role, it is not a condition for the expansion of social protection.
3. **Extending social protection requires complex and multiple coordination and cooperation processes.** This is because social protection reforms 1) typically are inter-sectoral and thus concern multiple actors ; 2) can be achieved through different models that involve a different mix of actors; 3) most often affect existing systems; 4) touch on competing interests.
4. **Mental models/"Cultural" factors** (beliefs, values, social norms...) **matter**, such as attitudes toward individual/state responsibility, attitudes toward the poor, the insurance culture, country specific beliefs.
5. **The local/sub-national political economies influence reform process.** This is an under-researched area. It refers to, for example, the role of informal institutions, the role of decentralization processes, the impact of sub-national initiatives on national processes, etcetera.
6. **Building social protection systems requires a long-term perspective.**
7. Changes in social protection policies within a country cannot be attributed to domestic factors only: **international influences matter.** International dependencies matter, through policy diffusion. Preliminary research findings indicate that voluntary adoption is more powerful than coercive policy transfers and point to the relevance of learning as well as emulation as mechanisms of policy diffusion on social protection.

What place for redistribution in social protection? Insights from Senegal and Morocco by Sarah Vaes

Reporting on BeFinD-research, Sarah Vaes (HIVA – KU Leuven) presented a multi-dimensional analysis of the features of the social protection reforms in the domain of health in Senegal and Morocco. In the case of Senegal, focus was on ‘the extension of the health coverage through mutual health organisations in the context of decentralization’ (DECAM) launched in 2013. In the case of Morocco, the spot light was on the introduction of a mandatory health insurance (AMO) for the formal sector and the establishment of a medical assistance scheme for the economically destitute (RAMED) following the adoption of Law 65.00 in 2002 on Basic Medical Coverage. The presentations discussed technical, financial and institutional aspects of the reforms, as well as the policy process that led to them. Key observations proposed in the presentation included 1) the predominant importance of - formal as well as informal- political dynamics in understanding and shaping the technical, financial and institutional aspects of these social protection mechanisms in the making, 2) the limited and incomplete taking into account of redistribution by all actors involved, including civil society organisations and international donors.

What does the research say about development-related effects of social protection? By Katja Bender

In this presentation, Katja Bender traced the main **assumptions about the development impacts** of social health protection and cash transfers, and confronted them with the state of play in existing research. The overview (see presentation in attachment) uncovered that:

- Empirical evidence is available demonstrating the positive development-related effects of social protection, but differences in results also point to the context-dependency of development impacts. Further, not all stated effects have been sufficiently researched yet.
- Although not entirely conclusive, existing research indicates that social health insurance does indeed 1) improve financial access to health services; 2) reduce/prevent impoverishing (out-of-pocket) health care expenditures and 3) improve health status
- although not entirely conclusive, empirical studies on the impact of cash transfers demonstrate positive impacts on nutritional intake, utilisation of health services, access to education, investment e.g. in cattle.

Discussion

The seminar participants represented different developing actors (government, trade unions, NGOs, mutual health organisations, researchers). The goal of the group discussion was to collect information on the attitudes and practices in their respective organisations regarding redistribution and politics in social protection. The discussion was centered on two guiding questions:

- **How can donors encourage their partners to take into account redistribution in their social protection?** Can they? What works? What doesn't work? Why?
- **How should donors take into account local politics that determine the success of social protection reforms?** Should they? How? What works? What doesn't work? Why?

Group 1: reflections & suggestions

- Noted that in fact both questions were **intertwined**.
- About putting **redistribution** on the agenda

- Using conditionality regarding redistribution in bilateral development cooperation was considered not acceptable. It would go against national ownership and alignment.
- Redistribution can have different shapes and consequences. We should not consider redistribution in itself as a goal. Instead ensure fair impact (of specific policies, initiatives). This also means impact studies are important.
- It was pointed out that the concept or term 'redistribution' will in some contexts be considered problematic and may trigger resistance. Other terminology that is more uniting can be used (e.g. equity, fairness)
- Looking at the technical side: there are many different possible models/mechanisms to establish social protection and depending on the context, they will have different impact. Instead of imposing a specific model, it is better to promote learning from good examples.
- About taking into account local **politics**
 - International development actors should not interfere in local politics. But, on the other hand, by having partnerships and by developing interventions in partner countries, one is part of / does influence local politics. "All change is about politics, so if you don't want to influence politics, you should stay out".
 - Awareness of politics is important (to avoid failure/to improve chances of success), is part of the context analysis and plays a role in strategic decision making. But important to avoid interference. It is about finding a good balance.
 - Development actors all do political analyses, but they are not transparent about it. Most bilateral donors have political analysis but do not want to share them with others. Also when it is not an explicit/ institutionalized practice, individuals will take into account local politics in their assessments and decisions. Depends often on individual profiles.
 - Possibly legitimate ways to take into account politics are
 - Taking a multi-stakeholder approach. On the side of the donor as well as the partner.
 - Recognize/promote the role of democratic institutions, including parliaments and trade unions. They may need capacity building to play their role, or to improve their representativeness.
 - Include different stakeholders in the interaction with partner country, i.a. through the structures of social dialogue, social-economic committees (if they are a valid actor)
 - Use the ILO's assessment based national dialogue guide provides as a more transparent approach to do political analysis.
 - In fragile contexts this issue is especially relevant

Group 2: reflections and suggestions

- Some features of the **Belgian policy on social protection**
 - Provide a core contribution to the ILO
 - Work on tax reforms in general but not specifically related to redistribution through social protection
 - Committed on digitalization
- **Experiences** from projects/programmes
 - Belgium's underlying approach is to promote the establishment of social protection mechanisms that are equitable, and this is linked to or implies redistribution to some extent. In that sense, redistribution is implicitly addressed in the policy dialogue with

partner countries. For example through discussion on whether or not to introduce mandatory mechanisms.

- Partner countries prioritize the expansion of coverage and show political reluctance to use social protection mechanisms to engage in redistribution. The latter is more difficult, more sensitive, less concrete. Explain for example the focus on cash transfers.
- About taking into account **politics**?
 - Legitimacy to engage in politics is questioned, but development cooperation happens with political actors and is about policy change.
 - Risk is that if you stay away from politics, the health care for the poor will become poor health care. (In that respect: will the introduction of floors not dilute ongoing efforts to improve actual health care, because of the increased imbalance between supply and demand?)
 - How?
 - Policy dialogue plays an important role. It is also a moment to look for shared values.
 - Should not enforce ideas, instead always engage in an open dialogue
 - Be aware and make partner aware of the potential adverse effects of specific actions/interventions on social contract
 - Doing policy analysis is important. So is learning by doing.

Other reflections by participants

- Importance of research that considers socio-political determinants, especially when aiming to understand processes of political (non)-reforms and treats to more redistribution.
- The research did not include a more in depth analysis of the reasons why transformations in the field of social protection are so slow, especially considering the informal sector.
- Further research is needed considering the fact if the process of decentralisation is either an opportunity or an obstacle for the promotion of solidary social protection. E.g. on the role of 'terroirs' as a means to avoid anonymity.
- Interesting subject of research could be the effects of the factor of contribution in the ownership and redistribution of systems of UHC. Do contributory and/or democratically governed systems incite more ownership and redistribution other systems?
- Noted a total absence of gender-considerations in the research.

List of participants

Ajuaye	Adeline	HIVA - KU Leuven
Astor	Evelyn	International Trade Union Confederation
Bender	Katja	IZNE, Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences
Bossyns	Paul	BTC
Decoster	Kristof	ITG
Dereymaeker	Jan	MINK-A vzw
Detavernier	Koen	11.11.11
Elsen	Piet	OKRA 55+
Fonteneau	Bénédicte	HIVA - KU Leuven
Huyse	Huib	HIVA - KU Leuven

Keppens	Sonja	DGD
Laleman	Geert	ITG/DGD
Loridan	Joyce	NVSM
Makundi	Hezron	HIVA - KU Leuven
Patrick	Vanderhulst	Louvain Coopération vzw
Roosen	Tim	ITG/ Be-Cause Health
Rousseau	Thomas	RIZIV/COOPAMI
Vaes	Sarah	HIVA - KU Leuven
Van Ongevalle	Jan	HIVA - KU Leuven
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Additional information

For additional information you can contact [Sarah Vaes](#), [Jan Van Ongevalle](#) or [Bénédicte Fonteneau](#) at HIVA –KU Leuven. Or take a look on our website: <https://hiva.kuleuven.be/nl/onderzoek/og-duurzame-ontwikkeling/mondiale-ontwikkeling/themas/sociale-bescherming> for the latest news on our research on social protection.