



The Evolution of Social Policy: Up to and Beyond COVID-19

Jimi O. Adesina

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated to the global community the need for social policies that are more broadly conceived. There is also an imperative, both in the current period of global crisis and in the long-term, for development researchers, policymakers and practitioners to envision, advocate for, and design social policy infrastructures that are more robust. This briefing paper reflects on the history of social policymaking in Africa to help us to think about how we can create a relevant, comprehensive and impactful social policy regimes for African countries, during and beyond these dynamic times.

FIVE CONCERNS OF SOCIAL POLICY

- » **REDISTRIBUTIVE** effects of economic policy
- » **PROTECTION** of people from market fluctuations and life circumstances
- » enhancement of people's **PRODUCTIVE** potential
- » the reconciliation of the burden of **REPRODUCTION** with other social tasks for the female population
- » improved **SOCIAL COHESION** and nation-building, especially in post-colonial Africa

Box 1: Concerns of social policy

WHAT IS SOCIAL POLICY

Social policy is the collective public efforts at affecting and protecting the social well-being of the people within a given territory. These efforts are not restricted to government provisioning,

but also come from the market, family, churches/mosques, and the wider community.

Social policy has five main concerns – redistribution, protection, production, reproduction and social cohesion (see Box 1). In addressing the five major concerns of social policy, policy makers and practitioners use tools such as education, health, land, agrarian, affirmative action policies, income support, fiscal policy, among others. Social policy successes rely on a mix of different policy instruments/tools within a shared normative context. This matters as much or more than financial resources; policy makers and implementers must be careful not to equate high expenditure on a policy instrument as equal to its outcome; for instance, the United States which has one of the highest

health expenditures per capita has worse health outcomes than Cuba, a much poorer nation.

SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Although there is a tendency to equate social protection with social policy, the two are not the same. Think of three Russian nesting dolls: the largest doll is social policy and nested within it is a smaller doll called social protection, which houses the smallest doll, social assistance. Social protection is a component of social policy focused on preventing and easing the effects of adverse conditions on people’s well-being, while social assistance refers to public programmes aimed at achieving social protection goals.

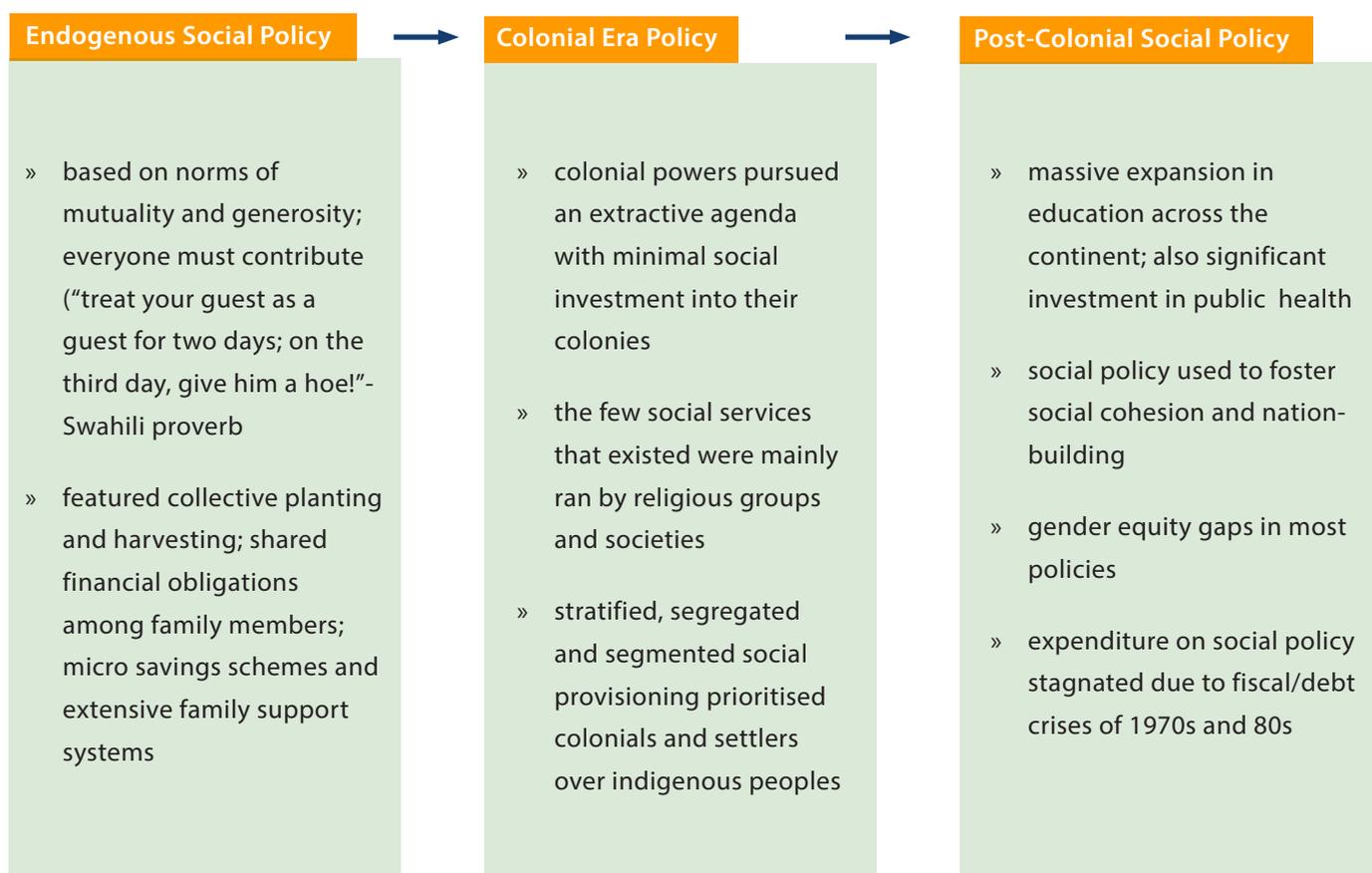


Figure 1: Evolution of Social Policy in Africa

Figure 1 maps out the forms of social policy that existed in Africa up to the early 1980s. At this time, Structural Adjustment Programmes meant to address the economic crises meant that most countries suspended or drastically reduced their investment into social policy. Poverty indices across the continent rose sharply, pushing more people into more dire economic and social circumstances. Although the trend has shifted to more protective policies in the past couple of decades, the transactional approach to service provision persists. This has created a stratified, segregated and segmented system of social provisioning where those with the most financial resources are able to access the best social services, leaving those most in need on the margins.

SOCIAL POLICY RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

African governments have tried to cushion their most vulnerable citizens from the impact of the pandemic. However, the scope of assistance has been insufficient to reach most of the indigent population, and the financial benefits inadequate to meet their daily needs. Nigeria disbursed an average of N333/day to 11 million people in 2.6 million households, while official statistics show between 80 to 84 million citizens live in poverty. In Togo, approximately 581,000 beneficiaries received an average of CFA147/day. For proper context, a loaf of bread in Lagos and Lomé costs N350 and CFA317 respectively. In South Africa, the Temporary Employee/Employee Relief Scheme (TERS) utilized the assets of the national

Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) to disburse over 11.5 million payments totalling more than R51 billion as of October 2020. The TERS scheme is considerably more generous than the R11.66 per day given to those without any social grants, under the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress (SDR) Grant, which is less than the R15 needed to purchase a loaf of bread.

THE CRUX OF IT ALL

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great impact on the working poor, and particularly those in the informal sector who have been largely left out of social assistance efforts. Many other poor people tend to be excluded from such interventions as they have some form of income, no matter how little it may be. Even when coverage is expanded, the targeting mechanisms exclude a significant number of vulnerable people, and the financial aid is barely enough for daily living and wholly insufficient for poverty reduction.

Both the current pandemic and the history of policymaking on the continent suggest that in a post-COVID Africa, policy makers need to transcend the stratified, segregated, and segmented social policy systems prevailing across continent and to return to a broader vision of social policy. Such a transformative social policy would take into account all the five functions of social policy--production, protection, reproduction, redistribution and social cohesion (see Box 1)--and underpinned by an ethos of equality and solidarity.



The world awaits those who have the capacity to imagine a new tomorrow!

Prof. Jimi Adesina (18 Feb 2021)

Speaker



'Jimi O. Adesina is Professor and DSI/NRF SARCHI Chair in Social Policy at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Professor Adesina obtained his PhD from the University of Warwick, Coventry in 1988 and taught for several years at the University of Ibadan. He was Professor of Sociology at Rhodes University and the University of the Western Cape before moving to UNISA. His research interests include social policy and the political economy of Africa's development.

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- The Evolution of Social Policy in Africa: Up to and Beyond COVID - Professor 'Jimi O. Adesina
- Social Policy in Times of Crises - Dr. Michael Kpessa-Whyte
- Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy Beyond COVID-19 - Professor Dzodzi Tsikata

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