DOSSIER

Political contestation and the evolution of National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The rise of social protection in Africa is a complex global phenomenon shaped by a wide range of actors interacting at different levels and whose access to policy space and degree of influence are determined by the power and interests that each actor holds. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the development of the National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) was a political contestation between the government and different external agencies (international financial institutions, international non-governmental organisations, and United Nations agencies); within the government itself; and within the external agencies themselves. This article looks at the process of developing the NSPPF and concludes that the rise of social protection in Africa needs to be understood as a political contestation, not as a mere technical process. Each player was driven by a different ideological position that it would "push" to prevail over other players' interests. While external agencies' push for the policy prevailed, the "success" came at the cost of little national ownership that made its implementation uncertain.

Keywords: Social protection; Social policy; Political arena.

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Disputa política e evolução do National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) no Zimbábue

Resumo

O aumento da proteção social na África é um fenômeno global complexo moldado por uma ampla gama de atores que interagem em diferentes níveis e cujo acesso ao espaço político e grau de influência são determinados pelo poder e pelos interesses que cada ator detém. Da mesma forma, no Zimbábue, o desenvolvimento do National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) foi uma disputa política entre o governo e diferentes agências externas (instituições financeiras internacionais, organizações não-governamentais internacionais e agências das Nações Unidas); dentro do próprio governo; e dentro das próprias agências externas. Este artigo analisa o processo de desenvolvimento do NSPPF e conclui que a ampliação da proteção social na África precisa ser entendida como uma questão política, e não como um mero processo técnico. Cada ator foi direcionado por uma posição ideológica diferente, pressionando para prevalecer sobre os interesses dos outros atores. À medida que a influência de agências externas prevaleceu nessa política, o "sucesso" veio com o custo de uma baixa apropriação nacional, que tornou sua implementação incerta.

Palavras-chave: Proteção social; Política social; Arena política.

Disputa política y evolución del National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) en Zimbabue

Resumen

El aumento de la protección social en África es un fenómeno global complejo conformado por un amplio espectro de actores que interactúan a diferentes niveles y cuyo acceso al espacio político y grado de influencia vienen determinados por el poder y los intereses que cada actor posee. Del mismo modo, en Zimbabue, el desarrollo del National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) fue una disputa política entre el gobierno y diferentes agencias externas (instituciones financieras internacionales, organizaciones no gubernamentales internacionales y agencias de las Naciones Unidas); dentro del propio gobierno; y dentro de las propias agencias externas. Este artículo examina el proceso de elaboración del NSPPF y concluye que la ampliación de la protección social en África debe entenderse como una cuestión política, no como un mero proceso técnico. Cada actor estaba dirigido por una posición ideológica diferente, que presionaba para prevalecer sobre los intereses de otros actores. Al prevalecer la influencia de organismos externos en esta política, el "éxito" se produjo a costa de una escasa apropiación nacional, lo que hizo que su aplicación fuera incierta.

Palabras clave: Protección social; Política social; Escenario político.

2

La contestation politique et l'évolution du National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) au Zimbabwe

Résumé

L'essor de la protection sociale en Afrique est un phénomène mondial complexe, façonné par un large éventail d'acteurs qui interagissent à différents niveaux et dont l'accès à l'espace politique et le degré d'influence sont déterminés par le pouvoir et les intérêts que détient chaque acteur. De même, au Zimbabwe, l'élaboration du National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) a été une lutte politique entre le gouvernement et différentes agences externes (institutions financières internationales, organisations non gouvernementales internationales et agences des Nations unies), au sein du gouvernement lui-même et au sein des agences externes. Cet article analyse le processus d'élaboration du NSPPF et conclut que la mise à l'échelle de la protection sociale en Afrique doit être comprise comme une question politique, et pas seulement comme un processus technique. Chaque acteur était guidé par une position idéologique différente, poussant à l'emporter sur les intérêts des autres acteurs. Comme l'influence des agences externes a prévalu dans cette politique, le "succès" s'est fait au prix d'une faible appropriation nationale, ce qui a rendu sa mise en œuvre incertaine.

Mots-clés: Protection sociale; Politique sociale; Arène politique.

Introduction

The failure of Bretton Wood institutions imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) to achieve the promised economic and social transformation was a turning point for social policy in Africa. From the late 1980s, there has been a shift in policy focus to social protection concerns to mitigate the impact of orthodox structural adjustment programme imposed by the Bretton Wood Institutions (Adesina, 2011). The fact that the World Bank introduced safety nets in the 1990s was an admission that structural adjustment was not working and had caused untold suffering (Holmes & Lwanga-Ntale, 2012). Since then, social policy has been narrowed to social protection and abandonment of the role of the government role in social provisioning in health and education. The social protection agenda is discredited for being a part of the same neoliberal continuum pushed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Mkandawire, 2001; Adesina, 2011; Fischer, 2020). The social protection agenda came with fresh array of conceptual frameworks, analytical tools, empirical evidence, national policy processes, heavyweight agencies and big names in development studies aligned behind it (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). External agencies[1] have played a significant role in supporting adoption of social protection and targeted cash transfers; influencing and funding civil society advocacy for social protection; taking the social protection agenda to the African Union; and capacity building of civil servants and politicians from regional and national levels (McCord, 2014). Consequently, social protection is framed as "an African success story" as a well-calculated move to entice the African governments to institutionalise the social protection agenda (Davies, 2009, p. 15).

Policy support has been one of the key strategies used by external agencies to influence social protection adoption in Africa (Devereux & Kapingidza, 2020). Since 2000, there has been a proliferation of Social Protection Policies and Strategies across Africa (Devereux, 2018, June 7-8). While there is lot of scholarship attributing that diffusion to external agencies, little is said about the actual process of developing such policies and strategies. Despite the 'soft power' of the external agencies, the policy processes depicted political contestations amongst the stakeholders, beyond being technical. Development, both in theory and practice, has suffered a series of errors for many decades that include the belief that poverty reduction is simply a matter of mobilising adequate resources; that poverty is reduced when markets are free; and that a country can successfully industrialise without an effective state (Leftwich, 2008). This is due to the failure to place politics at the core of the development policy processes. Leftwich (2008, p. 3) cautions that "poverty reduction and general improvement in welfare, in short, is not simply a matter of enhancing aid flows, designing appropriate policy

3

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[1] These are bilateral donors, international financial institutions (IFIs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and United Nations agencies.

regimes and supporting institutional development […]. Poverty reduction is a matter of politics". Indeed, politics should be at the centre of the analysis of pro-poor development policies (Reinikka, 2008, p. 5), lest researchers and development practitioners keep on looking for what Grootaert (1998) calls "missing links" (cited in Leftwich, 2008, p. 5).

It cannot be disputed that policy process is a conglomeration of various actors motivated by different ideological positions and self-interests. To treat it as a purely technical process downplays the politics embedded in the process. The complexity of policy as a process is also further noted by Brock, McGee and Ssewakiryanga (2002) when they try to explain it in the context of poverty knowledge. According to them (Brock et al., 2002, p. 2),

> policy is a complex, dynamic process, rather than a linear progression of formulation and implementation. This policy process comprises a multiplicity of distinct but linked spaces, in which a wide range of actors, governmental and non-governmental, engage in order to influence and shape policy. Each actor brings into a policy space their own unique version of knowledge about poverty.

Similarly, Hill (2005, p. 4) concurs with the above observations and unreservedly states that policy process is "essentially a complex and multi-layered one. It is essentially a political process, but in the widest sense of that term". He further elaborates that "the study of the policy process is essentially the study of the exercise of power in the making of policy, and cannot therefore disregard underlying questions about the sources and nature of that power" (Hill, 2005, p. 26). Sutton (1999, p. 32) is also agreeable to the above view and also states that policy making is a political process that "is by no means the rational activity that is often held up to be in much of the standard literature". Juma and Clark (1995, p. 128) further observe that the policy process is far from being a rational activity but "actually rather messy, with outcomes occurring as a result of complicated political, social and institutional processes which are best described as 'evolutionary'". In the same line of thought, Devereux and White (2010, pp. 53-57) observe that three overlapping agendas motivate the social protection initiatives in Africa: "a technocratic (what works) concern with evidence of effects and cost effectiveness; a political (what's popular) preoccupation with constituencies, interest groups, and institutions; and an ideological (what's right) concern with universal principles and standards". Consequently, it is the interface of the agendas and those who promote them that "determines social protection policy choices and outcomes" (Devereux & White, 2010, p. 57). It is important to understand the three agendas in the context that each actor in the social protection space might be motivated by a certain agenda different from other actors and that ideological variance may lead to political contestation between the different actors. It is therefore on this basis of overwhelming concurrence that this article takes a political economy approach to examine the development of the NSPPF in Zimbabwe.

4

The paper starts by scoping the social protection system in Zimbabwe and then goes into the actual processes and dynamics of developing the NSPPF. The presentation and analysis are based on interviews with officials from both Government and external agencies in Zimbabwe.

1. Overview of the Social Protection System in Zimbabwe

The current architecture of social protection programmes in Zimbabwe mirrors the Enhanced Social Protection Project (ESPP). In the year 2000, the Government of Zimbabwe together with the World Bank crafted the ESPP "as a comprehensive framework for protecting vulnerable groups against risk and shocks stemming from increased poverty" (Smith, Chiroro, & Musker, 2012). The ESPP constituted the public works programme; Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM); children in extremely difficult circumstance that was a response to an increasing number of orphans mainly due to Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS); and the social protection strategy component that aimed to cement the capacity of the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (MPSLSW) for strategic planning, implementation and monitoring. Initially, the government was supposed to borrow from the World Bank under the Social Funds and Social Assistance Sector to implement the ESPP. However, Zimbabwe was struck off the lending list due to outstanding arrears and sanctions imposed on the Mugabe regime over what the international community called "Governance" issues and a "violent" land reform programme. Components of the ESPP, especially BEAM, were thus fully funded by the government until the height of economic collapse in 2008.

5

Three forms of social protection exist in Zimbabwe, that is, social assistance, social insurance and labour market interventions. The government and non-state actors provide various forms of social protection. Under social assistance, the government offers BEAM, Public Assistance, War Victims Compensation, Assisted Medical Treatment Order (AMTO), the Food Mitigation Programme, child protection services, support to people living with disabilities, drought relief, public works and other livelihood support programmes (United Nations Country Team [UNCT] & Government of Zimbabwe [GoZ], 2014). BEAM was designed to retain children in schools by providing a fee waiver for needy rural and urban children at both primary and secondary schools (World Bank, 2000). Public assistance is means tested cash assistance to destitute people and per capita grants for institutions of care. AMTO is a facility that caters for medication and related expenses in hospitals for "persons over 60 years of age, people living with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children and persons who suffer from continuous illness" (UNCT & GoZ, 2014, p. 93). AMTO dates back to 1960 (Cirillo & Tebaldi, 2016) when the country was still a British colony. The government developed a Social Transfer Policy

Framework (STPF) to "harmonize social transfers, improve their quality, relevance and adequacy, and prescribe guidelines to all stakeholders in the design and implementation of social transfers" (World Bank, 2014, p. 102). The STPF comprised proxy means tested Harmonised Social Cash Transfer programme (HSCT) for labour constrained households; productive community works (PCW) for labour endowed households; agricultural inputs for the rural poor; and fee waivers for health and education (World Bank, 2014). It is important to note that these national social assistance programmes face serious financial constraints and therefore have small caseloads, which is largely attributable to the country's insurmountable economic challenges. Besides the government social assistance programmes, non-state actors also support communities with food assistance and cash transfers in times of shocks and distresses.

Zimbabwe runs three major contributory pension schemes and these are the Public Service Pension Fund (PSPF), the National Pension Fund (NPF) and the Local Authorities Pension Fund (LAPF). The PSPF is the biggest at 86 per cent of total insurance expenditure and the Government has entirely funded it since 2009, as it was not tenable to deduct from civil servants' salaries due to eroding economic crisis (GoZ & World Bank, 2016). However, Chikova (2013, September 16-17) observes that the proportion of the labour force under social security is below 20 per cent. The National Social Security Authority (NSSA) administers the NPF that provides pensions for old age, disability, survivors and those employed in the private sector (GoZ & World Bank, 2016). The LAPF provides retirement, disability, and death benefits for those employed in local authorities. All in all, social insurance constitutes 86 per cent of the total social protection expenditure in Zimbabwe (GoZ & World Bank, 2016, p. 12).

6

Five government ministries are involved in labour market interventions in Zimbabwe (World Bank, 2014). Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSS)[2] is involved in job intermediation; Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Empowerment[3] did non-formal training, microfinance and entrepreneurial training for persons with disabilities; Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises and Co-operative Development[4] takes part in entrepreneurial training and financing; Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture[5] offers second chance education and non-formal training; and Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development[6] provides loans for women (World Bank, 2014). However, such programmes are

[2] Now: Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

[3] Now: Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation.

[4] Now: Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development.

[5] Now: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

[6] Now merged with Small to Medium Enterprises and Co-operative Development to become Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development.

only reaching less than 1 per cent of the unemployed youth (World Bank, 2014). The limited scale of such interventions can be attributed to the protracted harsh economic environment.

The National Action Plan for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (NAP for OVC) is another framework that started as a policy response to an increasing number of orphans mainly resulting from the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the early years of the new millennium. NAP for OVC is a partnership between United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (as the frontrunner for external agencies) and the Government. NAP for OVC I (2004-2010) was a direct response to effects of HIV/AIDS on children. It was implemented through a programme of support that was financed through a donor-pooled funding mechanism under the management of UNICEF and several NGOs were contracted for implementation. Under NAP for OVC II (2011-2015), another donor-pooled funding mechanism called Child Protection Fund (CPF) was established under the management of UNICEF, implementation shifted to MoLSS. NAP for OVC II adopted child sensitive social protection that was hinged on four pillars of Strengthening of the Household Economy, Child Protection, Access to Basic Services and Programme Coordination and Management, with gender, age, disability, child participation, HIV and AIDS cross-cutting the pillars (MoLSS, 2010). The design of NAP for OVC II and CPF was based on the "Child Sensitive Social Protection Thought Paper", a study commissioned by UNICEF in 2010 that proved there was high numbers of OVC (Schubert, 2011). The major accomplishments for NAP for OVC II was that it reached 55,000 households through the Harmonized Social Cash Transfer (HSCT) programme and the initiation of the National Case Management System (NCMS), all funded by CPF I (GoZ, 2015). NAP for OVC III (2016-2020), still funded by CPF, was developed "with the intent of translating into practice the principles and goals of the National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) that relate to children" (GoZ, 2016, p. 12). The NSPPF was developed in 2015 and launched in 2016. NAP for OVC III suffered from donor fatigue as the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID),[7] the major funder of the HSCT, cut the budget by almost half for the second phase of the HSCT (June 2016-May 2019).

Since the turn of the new millennium, national development plans acknowledged the value of social protection and prioritizing the sector in fighting poverty and vulnerability. These include National Economic Revival Programme (NERP), 2001: Towards Sustained Economic Growth; National Economic Development Priority Programme (NEDPP), 2008-2009; Zimbabwe Economic Development Strategy (ZEDS), 2009-2013; the Medium Term Plan (MTP), 2011-2015; and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset), 2013-2018 (GoZ & World Bank, 2016). The development plans also bemoaned the lack of a national policy framework that would integrate and coordinate the loose and

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[7] Now: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

fragmented social protection interventions. The STPF was part of the Government broad plans to develop a social protection strategy that would integrate and strengthen social protection instruments (UNCT & GoZ, 2014). Social protection is one of the cross cutting issues for the current National Development Strategy (GoZ, 2020).

2. The National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF)

The idea to develop the policy framework in Zimbabwe was mooted in 2009 and momentum became high from 2014 onwards.[8] There was a realisation and a general consensus from the government and the development partners that the lack of an overall social protection policy framework was the reason why it was difficult to harmonise and coordinate social protection in the country. Even national development strategies from around 2009 to ZimAsset (2013-2018) lamented the lack of a social protection policy framework.[9] Although there were a number of policy instruments like the Social Transfer Policy Framework, the BEAM Manual and Public Works Guidelines, those tools and the subsequent programmes remained isolated and loosely coordinated.[10] Indeed, "*in the absence of an overall social policy framework, social protection remains ad hoc, piecemeal and of little impact, if any. Harmonisation and coordination are virtually not feasible*".[11] The need for a policy framework also pertinently emerged after launching the HSCT programme in 2012 as affirmed, "*we realised there were other social protection issues that were not covered by the cash transfer programme. So, the push for the NSPPF became vocal again as stakeholders desired to finalise the policy document. So, UNICEF brought resources to finalise the policy*".[12]

The policy framework anchors on five pillars (GoZ, 2016, p. 14): i) social assistance; ii) social insurance; iii) labour market interventions; iv) livelihoods support strategies; and v) social support and care.

The policy takes three approaches to social protection (GoZ, 2016, pp. 24-25):

i. Social protection as a human right, which underscores that social protection is people's entitlement that the State has an obligation to provide as enshrined in international conventions.

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[8] Interview with government official #1.

[9] Interview with government official #2.

[10] Interview with government official #3.

[11] Interview with former government official.

[12] Interview with government official #3.

ii. Systems approach to social protection that treats the poor and vulnerable as heterogeneous and therefore have different forms of vulnerabilities that require different types of support.

iii. Multi-sectoral approach to social protection, which calls for a holistic approach to social protection that makes cross-sectoral linkages and is hinged on a life cycle approach. This is envisaged to enhance coordination and harmonisation.

The three above approaches followed by the NSPPF mirror UNICEF's Global Social Protection Strategic Framework. The UNICEF framework underscores the importance of national integrated social protection systems that are hinged on a systems approach and a multi-sectoral approach (UNICEF, 2012, pp. 49-66), which are replicated by the NSPPF. The NSPPF takes a human rights approach and that also reflects the UNICEF global framework (UNICEF, 2012, p. 18). UNICEF's life cycle approach is similarly emulated by the NSPPF and is tied to the multi-sectoral approach as seen above.

According to the institutional framework, feedback mechanisms are reciprocal from sub-national structures, TWGs and the steering committee and that reflects an interactive relationship among those structures. The steering committee reports to the Social Services and Poverty Eradication Cluster, which was an arm of the then national development blueprint ZimAsset.

9

The following ministries are involved in social protection in Zimbabwe (GoZ, 2016):

- Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare
- Primary and Secondary Education
- Health and Child Care
- Agriculture, Mechanization and Irrigation Development
- Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment
- Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development
- Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperative Development
- Local Government, Public Works and National Housing
- Finance and Economic Development
- Economic Planning and Investment Promotion
- Environment and Natural Resources.

The above ministries, together with some parastatals, bilaterals, multilaterals and international financial institutions (IFIs), constitute the National Social Protection Steering Committee with the MPSLSW serving as the secretariat. The key pillars of the social protection

system define the technical working groups (TWGs) and each TWG comprises various ministries and organisations that work within that specific context (GoZ, 2016).

The institutional framework is illustrated below.

Figure 1. Social protection institutional framework
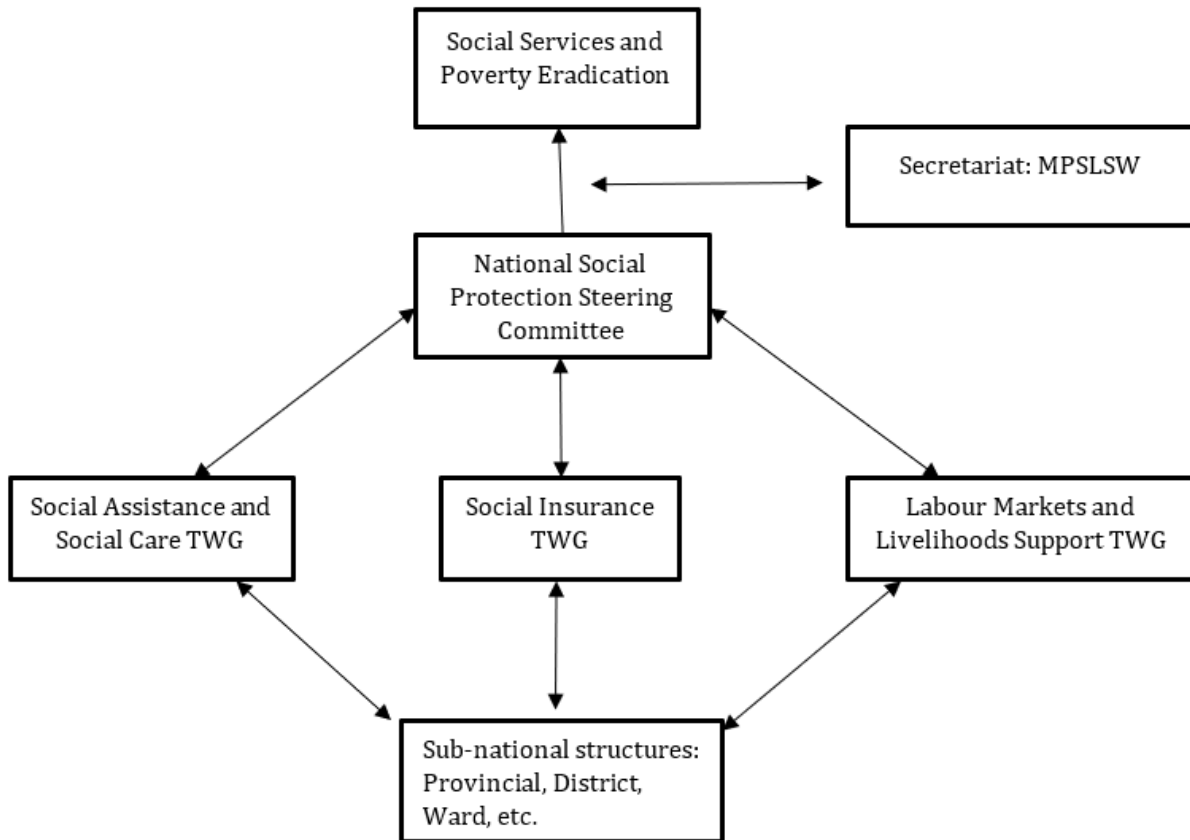
Source: Government of Zimbabwe (2016, p. 43).

10

The policy was eventually approved by the Cabinet in November 2016 and launched in December 2016. What arises is that the process was at the mercy of donor funding and that is the reason why the development of the policy stopped multiple times when an interested donor agency ran out of funds or interest. The process would be stuck for some time and resume when another interested donor agency emerged. The Government would not commit funds to the process, which "ceded power" to the external agencies to drive the process by virtue of being the funders. Nevertheless, the process was contentious within the Government, between the Government and the external agencies, as well as within the external agencies, as interests took centre stage.

3. Intra-government power struggles

The trajectory for the national social protection policy in Zimbabwe was quite complex and uncertain as different ministries working on social protection became more concerned with their line ministries' perspectives and not necessarily the broad national scope of social protection. The process started with a 2009 scoping exercise that brought all stakeholders together to find a common way of developing the policy. What emerged is that ministries became attached to specific pillars that they felt were specific to their ministries.

> *It was then agreed that we needed to build the different pillars individually and then we bring the pillars together. At the end of the day, everybody then realized that there wasn't any interaction at all amongst the different pillars. Then people thought ok let us take a step back a bit and allow the different pillars to review the programmes that they have, the systems that they have and prepare a platform for us as social protection fraternity to then come together at some point and come up with one policy framework that could guide our interventions. It took us some bit of time to throw in ideas because everybody would want to see their sector somehow reflected but it gave us some good footing towards strengthening our collaboration across the different pillars.*[13]

11

The inter-ministry power struggles emerged from the beginning of the process of developing the policy. Related to the above, a former government official also noted:

> *The social protection policy took long to come into being due to leadership issues over which ministry should coordinate and drive the process. The MPSLSW is seen as a ministry for social assistance and other ministries felt it was not the best to lead social insurance and labour market issues. There are about 5 ministries that are involved in labour market issues and various government and private agencies on social insurance. So, it became a tug of war over who should lead what.*[14]

The above sentiments affirm the view that policy making is a political process that involves negotiating and compromising as interests take precedence. The above noted differences emerged in spite of the fact that the MPSLSW is the overall ministry that is also in charge of labour issues by definition and mandate.

Accordingly, the MPSLSW plays an oversight role on all social protection interventions, though there are numerous ministries running social protection programmes as noted earlier on. However, it was not easy to bring together all the government ministries

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[13] Interview with government official #2.

[14] Interview with former government official.

who run social protection programmes. There was even talk to have a neutral ministry (Finance, Economic Planning or Office of the President and Cabinet) with power to convene all stakeholders.[15] For instance, there was a turf war between the MPSLSW and Ministry of Economic Planning over who should lead the process. Economic Planning wanted to lead the process on the basis of it being in charge of the macro-economic fundamentals of poverty reduction yet social welfare issues are in the custody of the MPSLSW.[16] Even when the SDGs came, they were shifted to the Ministry of Economic Planning, despite the fact that the MPSLSW were in charge of the MDGs and were at the forefront of the preliminary preparations for the SDGs.[17]

The inter-ministry tension and the fear that MPSLSW may take back the SDGs resulted in a strange sector ministry allocation:

> *[…] access to basic social services is placed under Ministry of Agriculture. Most of the social protection targets have been allocated to Ministry of Agriculture, which is madness. So, we have raised a red flag that this will definitely not work. But in terms of leadership of social protection, it is quite clear that it is the mandate for MPSLSW. We are pushing for a harmonisation agenda for social protection programmes in the MPSLSW because the numerous programmes are a drain administratively.*[18]

12

The World Bank reiterated the same concerns to Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance is also pushing for all the programmes to be harmonised in the MPSLSW as they admit that a litany of loose programmes is costly and burdensome administratively.[19] The Ministry of Finance received technical support from the European Union (EU) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to develop a management information system for development partner coordination and the ministry benefited from a learning trip in Swaziland.[20] The MPSLSW has been the target ministry for adoption of the social protection agenda and UNICEF together with other external agencies have invested a lot in capacity building and technical assistance.

The inter-ministry power struggles can be understood in the context of a tussle for both control and incentives associated with programmes and projects funded by external

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[15] Interview with former government official.

[16] Interview with donor official #3.

[17] Interview donor official #3.

[18] Interview donor official #3.

[19] Interview donor official #3.

[20] Interview with government official #5.

agencies. All the concerned ministries wanted to be at the forefront of the "new phenomenon" that de Haan (2014, p. 2) calls "the fastest growing sectors in the aid industry" in the new millennium. There are "obvious personal interests in working in donor supported project and programme management units and on earmarked donor funded activities in general because of the higher salaries and fringe benefits that are often provided in these arrangements" (Anderson & Therkildsen, 2007, p. 16). Other ministries would therefore resist to be convened by the MPSLSW as well as the agenda to harmonize social protection interventions within the MPSLSW. In contrast, the MPSLSW had a "better" understanding of social protection than the rest of other ministries. Consequently, the social assistance pillar quickly got furnished with the required information ahead of other pillars that took longer.[21] Somehow, that reinforced the belief that the MPSLSW's understanding of social protection was essentially in terms of social assistance.

4. Political struggles between external agencies

Inter-external agency politics also affected the process as UNICEF tried both to safeguard its interests as well as to find the best way to incorporate other external agencies' interests. Quite a number of bilateral and multilateral agencies were involved, in one way or the other. "*Talks for a social protection policy started in 2009 with the UNDP. The UNDP disappeared from the agenda and we got stuck for a while. Later on, UNICEF came on board but disappeared again. When UNICEF later on reappeared, they have never stopped and have been at the forefront until today*".[22] The fact that the government got stuck upon "disappearance" of external agencies shows that the process was heavily dependent on donor funding. The process to develop the policy was funded by UNICEF, World Bank, DFID, International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNDP, Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – CPF donors.

While the external agencies were comfortable to have UNICEF as their lead in the policy processes, that did not absolve them of any conflict as they too had differences between each other. ILO wanted to fast track the policy process, an approach declined by UNICEF.

> *I actually remember arguing with colleagues in ILO who were pushing the process to be very fast but we said no we want a national dialogue based process where we try as much as possible to ensure that we have involved a wider spectrum of people. At each stage you could get people who would say they were never*

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[21] Interview with government official #2.

[22] Interview with government official #2.

involved and we would take time to get their input and assure them that it was never too late. So, the process itself was quite long.[23]

The policy process even generated a bit of tension between UNICEF and other external agencies. For instance, the World Bank was very keen to push for a conditional cash transfer approach, which UNICEF does not subscribe to.

We did not agree with the World Bank on the conceptual pitch, we know the Bank always have ideas that they want to force down people's throats. We were quite strategic, when we started to push Government for this, we quickly put in resources and brought everyone to the table. I think we played the politics right. We actually requested the World Bank to second a consultant to the team developing the policy just to manage the political dynamics but it was clear that they were not the drivers of the process. We made sure that the Government was in the driving seat as well and we provided a lot of backstopping to the Government to ensure that they were the ones in charge and we did not get swayed into the World Bank thinking of social protection. The World Bank's thinking on cash transfers has always been conditional. However, they are now beginning to appreciate the value of unconditional cash transfers. Recently they did an analysis in Zambia and their report shows unconditional cash transfers are increasing recipient household consumption by 56 per cent above the transfer value. Hearing this from the Bank, I said to myself: "Well, the Bank is seeing light at last".[24]

14

The above narrative portrays external agencies as political players with vested interests in the social protection agenda. They might be driven by the motive to fight poverty but disagree on the best approach to achieve it. Thus, each one of them would "fight" to impose its approach. By resisting the World Bank's influence, UNICEF was trying to protect its rights-based child-sensitive approach to social protection that would be sustained by unconditional cash transfers. In 2010, UNICEF partnered MoLSS to commission an institutional capacity assessment of the Department of Social Services to execute its national mandate of childcare and protection (Wyatt, Mupedziswa, & Rayment, 2010; Schubert, 2010). UNICEF used its "neutral" position to take charge of the policy process and the claim that the Government drove the process could be mere tokenism. The policy space was essentially a "battlefield" for UNICEF and the World Bank as they both tried to impose their ideas on how best to programme social protection in Zimbabwe. The absence of the government from the funders says a lot about who controlled the process. Indeed, "he who pays the piper calls the tune".

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[23] Interview donor official #3.

[24] Interview with donor official #3.

5. Political contestation between Government and external agencies

It is fundamental to note that Zimbabwe runs a litany of fragmented social protection interventions from both the Government and external agencies. Mupedziswa (2018, p. 44) notes that social protection programmes in Zimbabwe are impressive on paper as they only reach a very small fraction of the vulnerable due to "limited resources and lack of capacity, poor targeting and the limited coverage of the schemes". Masuka et al. (2012) further reiterate that social protection in Zimbabwe is adversely affected by retarded human and financial capacity attributable to political and economic constraints prevailing in the country.

> Zimbabwe supports a highly varied, diffuse mix of social safety nets interventions, while many African countries today are backing the emergence of single flagship interventions, such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in Ghana, the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia (PSNP), and the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF). Despite a sustained economic crisis and recurrent emergencies, Zimbabwe has retained many of the same social safety nets interventions for over 20 years. Most programs have not been scaled up to respond to recent crises, which is a key shortcoming in the sector (GoZ & World Bank, 2016, p. viii).

15

The rationale behind holding on to old programmes that may be out of touch with realities of the time could be that the government is quite aware of the political capital they invested in such programmes. Dismantling such programmes for one flagship social protection programme could be "politically risky". This conforms to Hickey's (2007) observation that social protection plays to elections, party politics and politics of patronage and that political elites determine the terms of policy and political debates, who benefits and size of a social protection initiative. Thus, the old programmes still guarantee the politicians the votes that they need most, contributing to the reluctance for policy reform. The flagship programmes referred above are donor dependent programmes where the various governments conceded to external pressure. In Zimbabwe, there is little buy-in from the government for social protection programmes initiated by non-state actors and adoption of such is not guaranteed.

> There are too many pieces of social protection against little resources. The challenge for Zimbabwe is that there is no rethink of policy and strategy to suit the current context of economic recession. Since 2000, there is no policy reform and it is a business as usual approach. There is no consolidation of the little resources for improved impact.[25]

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[25] Interview with former government official.

They may be old programmes but their strength is that they are institutionalized within the government system. In contrast, external agency funded programmes are institutionally fragile. Due to the prolonged economic crisis, Zimbabwe has been incapacitated both in terms of financial and human resources. Overall, social protection initiatives like BEAM are not adequately resourced due to the economic crisis and governance issues. Similarly, Mupedziswa (2018) underscores the importance of political stability and solid governance in developing and implementing social protection interventions. The parallel programmes created and supported by external agencies incur high administrative costs (GoZ & World Bank, 2016).

6. The tokenism of participation

The process of developing the NSPPF started in August 2014 and the first submission of the draft to the cabinet was in November 2015. In July 2014, there was a high level workshop for ministers.[26] UNICEF engaged consultants in 2014 to start working on the policy document, first consultative meetings started that same year and the process gathered a lot of momentum in 2015.[27] External agencies funded the process including expenditure for the policy consultancy. However, not all actors matter in the policy space and not all voices are incorporated into the policy. Manipulation, decoration and tokenism are non-participation and are the three bottom rungs of Hart's ladder of participation (Hart, 1992).

16

From the beginning, the process of developing the policy was predominantly a preserve for actors at national level. This resonates with Ouma and Adesina (2018) who point out that agents in the social protection exercised control by hiring experts, excluding other actors and influencing the choice of domestic actors through social learning. Similarly, UNICEF provided the technical support and a series of workshops and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) were signed between the government and external agencies to push the process.[28] A national steering committee comprising the government and external agencies was set up to discuss and lead the process at technical level.

> *The national steering committee was multisectoral. It included line ministries whom we thought could be champions in the various pillars of social protection. The Ministry of Finance, the Office of the President and Cabinet, development partners and UN (United Nations) agencies were part of the steering committee. We also roped in representatives of special groups primarily organisations for*

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[26] Interview with government official #2.

[27] Interview with donor official #3.

[28] Interview with donor official #3.

persons with disabilities, older persons, private sector, and Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) of the University of Zimbabwe. That steering committee allowed us to coordinate the process and consultations for various pillars. We had one international and three local consultants (2 based in South Africa and 1 based in Zimbabwe) who played a facilitatory role. The steering committee's role was primarily to coordinate these activities, supervise the consultants and help in engaging various stakeholders throughout the consultation process. Overall, after that process, our role as convenors for social protection was cemented.[29]

A working party of secretaries which was a committee of permanent secretaries chaired by the permanent secretary of MPSLSW, provided oversight for the process. A cabinet committee of ministers also chaired by MPSLSW was the highest structure set to oversee the development of the policy. Final approval of the policy document was the jurisdiction of the Cabinet.

There is wide acknowledgement from both government and external agencies that the policy process was very consultative.

The process was highly participatory and highly consultative. We had consultative meetings, validation meetings, high level meetings involving the permanent secretaries and the ministers. All those teams met and considerably looked at the draft policy that we had developed and went further to refine it. This made our life much easier when the policy was going through the approval process because all the ministers who are in the Social Services and Poverty Eradication Cluster of the ZimAsset had sight and discussed the draft policy before.[30]

17

At national level, it involved consulting the central government and the external agencies. The Ministry of Finance and MPSLSW, bilateral and multilateral agencies were the key players at national level. These were deemed to be the key people dealing directly with policy. Provincial and district consultative workshops were also held to get views of stakeholders involved at those levels.[31] Validation workshops were then held at both provincial and national levels to ensure that the policy draft encompassed views from all the stakeholders. Impact Research, a research consultancy firm operational in both Zimbabwe and South Africa, led the consultation.

The involvement of the parliament in the development of the NSPPF could not be ascertained. The parliament is a national and formal institution that bears political power and

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[29] Interview with government official #2.

[30] Interview with government official #2.

[31] Interview with government official #2.

is principally supposed to play an important role in ensuring that the policy process is democratic, accountable and serves the rights of the people, as asserted by Gaventa (2005). The lack of active involvement of the parliament in the development of the NSPPF undermined an institution whose political capacity would have helped pushed the agenda to the executive arm of the government. It is not surprising that attempts by external agencies to influence the parliament to vote for more budget commitment for social protection have not born much success.

> *We actually had a breakfast meeting with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Poverty Eradication which is social protection essentially to actually give them the evidence and push for the budget process that they need as parliamentarians to make sure that social protection is adequately reflected in the budget and it's adequately resourced without it losing the whole human dividend that they can get.*[32]

A more political engagement with the parliamentarians from the beginning could potentially produce a better political buy-in for social protection than merely "giving them evidence". It was surprising to note that the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Poverty Reduction never participated in the development of NSPPF and were therefore not aware of the policy.[33] Indeed, the parliament is never mentioned in the NSPPF (GoZ, 2016). The role of the parliament is further strategically important as it "shepherds" the national constitution. Despite rhetorically obliging the State to provide social services and social care to the needy, the constitution remains a useful tool for lobbying and advocating more social spending from the government.

Participation of the communities, the intended beneficiaries of the policy, is seemingly sceptical from the beginning to the end of the so called "consultative" process. "*The process was highly consultative but what I do not see is community participation. This process was spearheaded by Impact Research, perhaps they can tell you more*".[34] However, participation of the communities could not be ascertained especially that social welfare officials at district level were not aware of the policy development process. In fact, it appeared they were hearing it for the first time from this researcher. "*I am not aware of any social protection policy development taking place. If you get a copy, I would be more than grateful if you share with me*".[35] All the four district officials were not aware of the policy. What they were familiar

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[32] Interview with government official #3.

[33] Interview with chairperson of the committee.

[34] Interview with former government official.

[35] Interview with government official #4.

with were the old guiding manuals they use in the implementation of the various social protection instruments like the HSCT, BEAM and the Drought Mitigation Programme. The fact that government officials at district level were not aware of the policy makes participation rhetorical. Indeed, that gives an impression that what is of paramount importance to the communities is receiving assistance to meet their daily needs not the processes leading to the programmes that they find themselves in. When the communities are not actively involved in the policy processes they are "pacified" into accepting the status quo and are reduced to "welfare recipients" not active participants.

Participation of NGOs in the consultation process for the NSPPF could not be ascertained during this research. All the research participants from the NGOs expressed ignorance of the process and some were not even aware of the policy. Although, the policy acknowledges involvement of the National Association for Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), the umbrella body, the depth of the involvement is not clear. Most of the international NGOs, like the bilaterals and multilaterals, are domiciled in the capital city of Harare where most of the national consultative activities took place. NGOs are also important providers of social protection in Zimbabwe.

In terms of lack of active civil society in social protection, Zimbabwe is like the rest of other African countries, except South Africa and Zambia. There is no active civil society participation in social protection in Zimbabwe. Civil society in Zimbabwe are more into welfare provision than lobbying and advocacy. The external agencies in Zimbabwe are also not keen to support civil society activism in social protection as noted by one of the officials. "*The Government of Zimbabwe does not listen to civil society and it would be meaningless for us to fund civil society organisations (CSOs) to lobby for social protection*".[36] However, there have been attempts to register a CSO in the name of Platform for Social Protection (Zimbabwe chapter) but they have not been successful due to the alleged restrictiveness of the Private Voluntary Organisation (PVO) Act.[37]

The three bilateral agencies, DFID, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), together with UNICEF at the forefront were the key players in lobbying the government and advocating social protection policy. One of the donor officials noted "*there is pressure from the SDC and DFID to cabinet to pass the National Social Protection Policy Framework*".[38] There are challenges of ownership of the policy if the pressure to pass the policy came from the

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[36] Interview with donor official #1.

[37] Interview with civil society representative.

[38] Interview with donor official #4.

external agencies. The "carrot and stick" approach applied by the external agencies worked well but it still remains to be seen if all stakeholders commit themselves to the policy framework. Another donor official complained, "*the National Social Protection Policy Framework was not written by the government but by consultants funded by UNICEF. Now the government owns it and claims credit*".[39] This assertion reflects who drove the policy and displays that while external agencies claim that the Government drove the process, credit still belongs to them not the Government. If consultants wrote the policy, it may not be obvious that the contents are a true reflection of the priorities of the Government and it does not follow that the government is bound by the policy document. This could spell uncertainty over financial commitment and political will for the implementation of the policy from the Government.

> *On the Government side, there are two levels. The technical level has a clear appreciation of social protection and the appetite to sort of push the social protection agenda is quite there. But when you go a gear up to the political and policy level, it's not very much there and can only be there when it can be converted to votes. There is a lot of lip servicing and the approach is very rudimentary and driven by a political end rather than a social end. The unfortunate thing at both political and technical layers of the government is that their understanding of social protection is on the humanitarian side not from a developmental angle.*[40]

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The above sentiments reflect that the external agencies' success in pushing the agenda in Zimbabwe is limited to technical not political levels of the government. While external agencies may be driven by social motives to fight poverty, politicians are driven more by what keeps them in power than anything else. Therefore, the high level of the government, which is very political, remains sceptical and suspicious as noted at the Victoria Falls conference organised for the Cabinet by UNICEF in 2015.

> *You fly ministers all the way to Victoria Falls to be with them for two hours. The first day was actually to drill them on social protection. The second day was essentially window dressing day with the Vice President and so forth. But you could still tell that we are not talking the same language. For instance, Nyasha Chikwinya*[41] *remarked: "This social protection you talk about […] you want to give money to the apostolic sect so that they marry more wives and bear more*

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[39] Interview with donor official #2

[40] Interview with donor official #3

[41] Then Minister of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development.

children." When you hear this from a minister, you realise we are still a long way to take the agenda up there.[42]

The statement from the minister above reflects the Government's ambivalence towards social protection. It also denotes how the push for cash transfers by external agencies narrowed the understanding of social protection. Due to political differences between Government and the external agencies, there was delay in the approval of the policy by the cabinet. UNICEF had a full draft of the policy around September 2015 that it submitted to the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare for her to submit it to the Cabinet for approval.

> *At one point we were told the draft policy had gone to the Cabinet when it did not. When the process started, she*[43] *was very enthusiastic and, in my view, I could tell that she was taking the policy for her performance appraisal. At one point she called me to ask the whereabouts of the policy and I told her we submitted to her team. I had to make sure that her team gave her another copy. However, when political expediency took over, it disappeared from the radar until a new principal director who, sort of, understood the vision came on board and started pushing.*[44]

The impression one gets from the above statement is that the Government was expected to approve a UNICEF policy, not a national policy. A national policy is not driven by external agencies but by the Government itself. When a minister asks for a copy of the policy from an external agency official, it says a lot about the policy-making process.

21

7. External financing and the rhetoric of government ownership: Implications on policy implementation

> Ownership implies that the recipient government's political objectives dominate the development agenda, and that transparent local political decisions are made based on broad involvement and participation of local stakeholders. This requires that government, parliament and other political institutions make decisions about policy and resource allocation serviced and advised by the civil service without distorting donor interference (Anderson & Therkildsen, 2007, p. 9).

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[42] Interview with donor official #3.

[43] Prisca Mupfumira, the then Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

[44] Interview with donor official #3.

The social protection policy process in Zimbabwe fell short of the above description of the concept of ownership. World Bank, ILO, DFID, and FAO, UNDP and all members of the OECD CPF donor group (GoZ, 2016) funded the process of developing the NSPPF. Government did not fund the policy. The World Bank funded the first draft and when their funding ended, UNICEF came on board and funded the process until the cabinet approved the policy.[45] It is important to note that funding of the policy process was through UNICEF and not directly to the Government.

> *Why donors are not funding Government directly is a political issue. The relations with the West are frozen and the money is coming from the West. So, donors are more comfortable supporting government programmes but not giving government the money to a point where even when we have the money, we have restrictions in as far as what money can be channelled through government systems*.[46]

While the NSPPF was passed, it is difficult to discern how both the government and the implementation partners intend to implement the policy without costing and an implementation plan. It remains to be seen how they would move forward without an outline of the costs, activities and specific ministries responsible. The implementation plan was developed separately but submitted together with the policy to the Cabinet for approval. 'We submitted the policy framework together with the implementation matrix so that they are handed over to the cabinet for approval'.[47] However, the policy was approved and launched without an implementation plan. The absence of costing makes sceptical if there is any commitment and political will from the government and development partners to fund implementation. In the introduction of the policy, the following statement casts doubt over the commitment to fund the implementation.

> It must be pointed out that because this is not a Strategic Plan nor is it a Programme document, there is no implementation plan included as part of this document. There was consensus among workshop delegates that a Policy Framework of this nature should be a guiding document for a very long time in the development of programmes and interventions designed to address both goals and objectives and, as such, could not be limited to a specific time frame (GoZ, 2016, p. 19).

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[45] Interview with government official #3.

[46] Interview with donor official #3.

[47] Interview with donor official #3.

There is a rhetorical attempt to commit the government to be the main funder of the policy and a deliberate reference to Section 30 of the Constitution that obliges the State to fund social protection within permissible resources: "[…] the State must take all practical measures within the limits of the resources available to it, to provide social security and social care to those who are in need" (GoZ, 2013a, p. 23). There is also another rhetoric to align the NSPPF to the Social Services and Poverty Eradication Cluster of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset), a national development plan for 2013-2018 (GoZ, 2013b).

> Thus, the government commits itself to be the central funder of social protection and undertakes to mobilise new and additional resources to fund social protection. To this end, social protection will be funded mainly from government revenue augmented by funding from private sector, civil society organisations and development partners (GoZ, 2016, p. 48).

Without costing and an implementation plan, the policy would be reduced to a wish list of objectives, target group(s), policy options and expected outcomes. However, UNICEF played a leading role in the development of the implementation matrix and when it submitted it to the Government, the Government took long to share the revised version.[48] If UNICEF spearheaded the development of the implementation matrix, it could indicate limited commitment and ownership from the Government. Brinkerhoff (1996, p. 1396) notes:

23

> New policies often reconfigure roles, structures, and incentives, thus changing the array of costs and benefits to implementers, direct beneficiaries and other stakeholders […]. As a result of these problematic features of policy implementation, no amount of donor pressure or resources, by themselves, can produce sustained reform. It takes ownership, both of the policy change to be implemented and of any capacity-building efforts intended to enhance implementation.

It is difficult for the government to own a policy and fund its implementation when the policy was not its initiative. With the economy struggling and resources limited, the government may be having 'better priorities' than social protection. Although the development partners claimed that the Government led the process, there were a lot more efforts from external agencies than the Government. While the external agencies played an enormous role to develop the policy and the implementation matrix, their commitment to fund implementation is not certain, given their massive downscaling of their funding for the Child Protection Fund. External funding through UNICEF, instead of direct budget support to the

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[48] Interview with donor official #3.

government, came at a cost of less policy influence in Zimbabwe as shown by not so much interest from the Government to robustly adopt the policy. While external agencies drove the policy process by virtue of being the funders, that augmented the Government's intransigence towards the social protection agenda.

Sixth year after the launch of the NSPPF, the only notable progress is that technical working groups are now in place and they meet quarterly to provide updates that are consolidated into the National Steering Committee briefs; and the development of an integrated social protection management information system (MIS) has "advanced" and expected to be completed by end of June 2022[49] (thanks to significant support from UNICEF). Donors pulled out of the CPF at the end of 2018 without a proper exit strategy and that created pressure for the Government to "take over" the programme. Despite "taking over" the HSCT, Government's ambivalence to cash transfers is evidenced by the little commitment to commit adequate resources and expand the programme to all districts. The HSCT is currently running in 31 districts and there is promise to reach four more districts by December 2022.[50] Implementation of social protection in the country remains loose and fragmented (business as usual) and divorced from the integrated and harmonised approach presented in the policy. For instance, UNICEF is managing the remainder of CPF targeting child protection activities in selected districts; and there are still multiple uncoordinated databases and MISs on social protection. While the implementation matrix for the NSPPF is in place, there is still no budgetary commitment. The life cycle approach advocated by the policy requires substantial resource commitment that the Government is not ready to provide. The pillar on labour market interventions continues to be upset by the hostile economic environment.

24

Conclusion

The development of the NSPPF in Zimbabwe was a political contention at three fronts. Firstly, it was between external agencies. UNICEF contested the World Bank's push for conditional cash transfers in favour of unconditional cash transfers, which aligned to its human rights approach. Given UNICEF's control over the donor pooled CPF, it was strategically positioned to ensure that its preference prevailed over that of the World Bank.

Secondly, the contestation was between the Government of Zimbabwe and the external agencies (UNICEF, World Bank and others). The Government is ideologically rooted in supporting productive capacities of the people (especially agricultural inputs), not giving

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[49] Interview with government official #1.

[50] Interview with government official #1.

them cash. UNICEF was central to the development of the NSPPF and took it as an opportunity to push for "child sensitive social protection" in line with its international mandate. The fact that external agencies did not fund the Government of Zimbabwe directly compromised the role of the Government. UNICEF and the other external agencies were therefore in charge of the process as they provided the funds. The fact that the Government did not fund the process provided more space for UNICEF and the other external agencies to drive the process. UNICEF handpicked and hired consultants that presented its approach to social protection (not the Government's preference). Whilst there was some degree of participation at national level, the districts and communities were peripheral to the process.

Thirdly, it was a contestation within the government itself as different ministries that run social protection programmes (including the traditional leader, MPSLSW) "battled" for control of the process and prevalence of their individual ministry policy positions while the Ministry of Finance was not convinced to fund "free cash" transfers. Ministries conflicted over which ministry was best placed to coordinate the process as they thought MPSLSW was a "weak" convenor.

Despite the success of the external agencies in pushing for and funding the development of the NSPPF, lack of national ownership is evidently haunting the much expected implementation of the policy.

25

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28