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Examining the Catalytic Effect of Aid on Domestic Resource Mobilization for Social Transfers in Low-Income Countries

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prepared for the UNRISD project on
Politics of Domestic Resource Mobilization

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This paper is part of a series of outputs from the research project on The Politics of Domestic Resource Mobilization for Social Development.

The project seeks to contribute to global debates on the political and institutional contexts that enable poor countries to mobilize domestic resources for social development. It examines the processes and mechanisms that connect the politics of resource mobilization and demands for social provision; changes in state-citizen and donor-recipient relations associated with resource mobilization and allocation; and governance reforms that can lead to improved and sustainable revenue yields and services. For further information on the project visit www.unrisd.org/pdrm.

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Acronyms

CT-OVC	Kenya's Cash Transfers for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
DFID	United Kingdom's Department for International Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for Technical Cooperation)
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus infection/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IFI	International Financial Institution
LEAP	Ghana's Livelihoods Empowerment Against Poverty
MMYE	Ghana's Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAP	Old Age Pension
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OVC	Orphans and other Vulnerable Children
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
PSNP	Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme
PSSB	Mozambique's Programa de Subsídio Social Básico (Basic Social Subsidy Programme)
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SCT	Social Cash Transfer
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Abstract

Social transfers, a non-contributory form of social protection, present a great potential to tackle poverty and inequality, and support inclusive socioeconomic development. Yet, they also represent a long-term financial commitment, and in environments where they are most needed, national policymakers are often reluctant to introduce them. In reaction to this situation, foreign aid actors have been allocating resources to support the expansion of social transfers in low-income countries. Progress in terms of policy uptake has been slow, and there has been concern over the ability of aid initiatives around social transfers to translate into sustainable policy changes and contribute to more inclusive development patterns. Better understanding why governments come to adopt and finance certain types of social transfers—and what role, if any, foreign aid actors play—can usefully inform the formulation of strategies towards the expansion of basic social protection in countries where the process appears to have stalled. This paper is part of the UNRISD research project on ‘The Politics of Domestic Resource Mobilization for Social Development’. Its specific contribution is with regards to the catalytic effect of foreign aid on domestic resource mobilization for social transfers in low-income countries. The paper elaborates on a comparative analysis of the origins and features of six sizable social transfer schemes currently operating in low-income African countries. Findings suggest a catalytic effect of aid on mobilizing additional domestic resources for social transfers. But in light of these findings, the paper questions whether, at least in some cases, a narrow focus on social transfer instruments may have distracted public resources (domestic and foreign) away from deeper causes of poverty and marginalization, doing a disservice to the transformative agenda development partners claim to defend.

Author

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