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Designing Social Protection as an Effective and Sustainable Investment

Social protection is a dynamic and innovative response to poverty and vulnerability. How can what is 'good' practice be transformed into common practice? Mainstreaming good practice will allow more poor people to benefit from social protection programmes that are successful and sustainable.

Capturing and institutionalising good practice is crucial in social protection programmes because it allows us to assess the most effective ways to maximise investment in development outcomes.

There is increasing evidence showing how social protection can prevent poverty from passing between generations by helping the children of poor parents to escape poverty. Social protection as an investment in people is known to promote human capital though impacts on schooling, healthcare and nutrition and to protect and help build assets (Barrientos and Nino-Zarazua 2011).

Irish Aid, the Centre for Social Protection at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and UNICEF formed a partnership that examined how good practice can interrupt this inter-generational transmission of poverty (IGT) by making social protection adequate to meet people's needs, timely by being provided both on time and at the right time, predictable so that people can plan accordingly and sustainable both financially and politically.

Case Studies

Kenya's Cash Transfer Programme for Orphans and Vulnerable Children is a government-run programme that provides cash payments to over 100,000 households. Investment in the design phase uncovered useful local knowledge, used lessons from other programmes and enabled a continuous learning process among implementers. This improved the programme and helped people feel they were part of it.

Zambia's Social Cash Transfer is moving from a pilot scheme to a national-scale social protection programme that will reach over 68,000 households by 2015. An important part of this transition has been influencing policymakers, led by civil servants who advocate for investing in social protection to their ministry of finance colleagues.

Mongolia's Child Money Programme was a national conditional cash transfer programme reaching over 60 per cent of the country's children. It was abolished in 2010, providing us with insights into why social protection programmes may not be sustained.

Emerging Lessons on Good Practice in Social Protection

Five topline lessons of good practice that can help interrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty emerged from the three programmes described here. Because these lessons generalise across the case studies, they are likely to be relevant in the design and implementation of social protection elsewhere.

Evidence from Kenya

In Kenya, children who received social protection were sent home from school less often because they could pay for text and exercise books, desks, and exam fees. Money was spent on food, providing children with energy to learn, and on new uniforms which the children said made them proud to attend school.

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Emerging Lessons

1. Don't expand prematurely

Spending sufficient time and resources to get the design phase right saves time and money in the long term. How to target, enrol and pay a large number of people are difficult questions that take time to get right. In Kenya, government and partners spent time learning lessons from successful social protection programmes in other countries. Pressure to move to implementation prematurely can lead to programme failure.

2. Involve people as decision-makers, not only as beneficiaries

Involving communities in social protection programmes makes them more effective and legitimate because beneficiaries are more likely to view the programme as fair and non-political. In Kenya, community validation of targeting lists by local committees increased transparency and reduced suspicion of bias or corruption. Voluntary groups can also make programmes work better. Trusted individuals provide much needed support and advice to beneficiaries, including how to qualify for support and budget.

3. Build relationships

Effective relationships between those responsible for implementing social protection programmes are essential to supporting coordination and creating an environment of trust where learning can take place. Effective relationships require two key ingredients: capacity in government ministries to take the lead, and a commitment from development partners to work together. In Mongolia a lack of coordination among development partners contributed to a decline in the government's political support for the programme.

4. Influence key decision-makers

Influencing is now recognised and understood as important to setting up, expanding and sustaining social protection programmes. In Zambia, influencing has been a carefully planned process led from within. Advocates used the personal testimony of beneficiaries to expose decision-makers to the positive effects of social protection on people's lives. These testimonies have been corroborated with statistical evidence to strengthen the case for investing in social protection.

5. Invest in technology to save money and build confidence

Investment in management information systems to identify people, deliver resources and monitor results can reduce errors, save money and lives and build confidence in social protection. In Kenya and Zambia, the confidence in the management information systems helped to sustain government commitment to social protection programmes and financial support from development partners.

Implications for Managers and Practitioners: Promoting Good Practice in Social Protection Programmes

1. Good practice needs to be developed and agreed upon if social protection is to be successful and sustainable. Good practice principles should be incorporated into national social protection policies and into the plans and strategies of development partners.

2. To implement good practice, compromises will need to be made in terms of time and money. Good practice is not necessarily the quickest or cheapest way to run the programme in the initial phase. However, spending time and money to get good practice right early in the programme will save lives and resources in the long run.

3. The success of every programme draws on critical assets in the context in which it is working, whether these are individuals or infrastructure. It is important to think not only about what worked in successful programmes, but why it worked. Drawing on these lessons will help in building good practice elsewhere.

Further Reading

Jackson, C.; Butters, S.; Byambaa, E.; Davies, M. and Perkins, N. (2011) 'Lessons for Social Protection Programme Implementation in Kenya, Zambia and Mongolia', IDS Research Report 69, Brighton: IDS

Barrientos, A. and Nino-Zarazua, M. (2011) *Social Transfers and Chronic Poverty: Objectives, Design, Research and Impact*, Chronic Poverty Research Centre.

UNICEF 'Good Practice in Social Protection – Mapping Innovation for Practice and Policy', film produced by UNICEF in conjunction with the Institute of Development Studies, UK

Ward, P. (*et al.*) (2010) *Cash Transfer Programme for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC), Kenya: Operational and Impact Evaluation, 2007–2009, Final Report*, Oxford: Oxford Policy Management

Credits

This *In Focus Policy Briefing* was written by Mark Davies, the programme manager of the Centre for Social Protection at IDS. It was edited by Clare Gorman and Ewan Robinson. The brief is based on the IDS Research Report 'Lessons for Social Protection Programme Implementation in Kenya, Zambia and Mongolia' (see Further Reading for full citation).

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