
Understanding the Role of External Pressures in Social Protection Reforms in Africa: A Comparative Political Economy Analysis of Ghana and Zambia

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Résumé

In this paper I interrogate the diffusion and seeming convergence of social protection, represented by Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), in Ghana and Zambia and how the extension of existing mechanisms of CCTs poverty-centric targeting to other social programmes have effectively diffused the ethos of targeting in the larger systems of social provisioning, and the consequence this is having on transforming the nature of the entire social protection system in the case countries. I argue that the uniformity of the schemes and the manner by which Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) and Zambia's Social Cash Transfers (SCTs) were introduced and eventually adopted is caused, in part, by donors and other international development organisations wielding influence in domestic policymaking within the context of an asymmetrical policy space and power relations. However, I do not conceive of external influences/pressures to occur in a deterministic manner, but rather, through the willing participation of policy elites in the country cases, who have internalised transnational interests, and hence, could not be identified as purely domestic actors.

Unlike extant explanations that tend to be one-dimensional, emphasising either external or domestic factors, I seek a balanced interpretation based on my critical assessment of the complex interaction between external and domestic political economy variables, particularly prevailing macroeconomic factors such as high levels of aid dependence and indebtedness of states to the Bretton Woods Institutions and other bilateral donors, and the complex interaction of these macroeconomic conditions with the global context facing countries at the point that the CCTs were adopted. Specifically, global factors such as the supply of, and urgent demand for debt relief as well as the incentives offered for conformance to donors policy prescriptions and preferences under the HIPC II debt relief initiative; the monopolisation of the African aid industry by OECD donors; and the absence of alternative sources of development credits/finance for states were part of the factors that characterised the global context facing the highly indebted and aid recipient SSA states. This entails tackling such questions as how do external influences/pressures take place, what and who constitutes the external and domestic, and how do tensions resulting from the competing interests and power asymmetries among policy actors play out in social policymaking.

As I (re)problematised the drivers of the diffusion of CCTs across Ghana and Zambia, and the effect the adoption of CCTs is having on the entire social protection systems of countries, I also question the purported success of the schemes, which are implemented in tandem with the national poverty targeting system/social registry of poor households. Through extensive qualitative analysis of the social protection and fiscal systems, coupled with key informant

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interviews, I find evidence showing that CCTs implementation is (re)introducing and reinforcing selectivity and residualism into the broader systems of social protection in the country cases. These findings reveal the potential limitations of CCTs and other poverty-targeted schemes, for that matter, in encouraging or shaping integrated and equitable systems of social protection in these countries.

Mots-Clés: Social Protection, Conditional Cash Transfers, Political Economy, External Pressure