

AIU ASSIGNMENT

Social protection and economic development

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# **Executive Summary**

The essay explores the multifaceted impact of social protection policies on economic growth, productivity, and poverty reduction. Social protection programs are highlighted as crucial mechanisms that enhance resource allocation, market efficiency, and human capital development. The economic rationale for social protection is discussed, emphasizing its role in creating environments conducive to increased productivity and workforce efficiency. The essay also delves into the contribution of social protection to economic productivity, particularly in enabling low-income households to participate in the labor market and accumulate productive assets.

The role of social protection in income distribution is examined, with a focus on its significance in mitigating poverty and fostering inclusive growth. Various examples, such as cash transfer programs in Kenya and Mexico's Oportunidades program, illustrate how social protection measures positively impact local economies and household spending. The essay emphasizes the importance of social protection in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty through investments in human capital development.

Challenges facing social protection systems, including economic instability, demographic changes, and financial sustainability, are outlined. The involvement of stakeholders, particularly governments, international organizations, and NGOs, is discussed as crucial for the effectiveness and sustainability of social protection programs. The essay concludes by highlighting the essential role of social protection in promoting stability, social cohesion, and economic growth.

# **Introduction**

In the dynamic landscape of economic development, the role of social protection policies stands out as a crucial catalyst for fostering stability, enhancing productivity, and promoting inclusive growth. Social protection mechanisms encompass a spectrum of interventions aimed at ameliorating the adverse impacts of economic vulnerabilities and societal challenges. This essay delves into the multifaceted dimensions of social protection, exploring its profound influence on resource allocation, market efficiency, human capital development, and income distribution.

As societies navigate the complexities of economic globalization and rapid technological advancements, the imperative to create resilient frameworks becomes ever more apparent. The opening discourse on social protection unfolds by underscoring the transformative potential of targeted interventions, particularly in bolstering consumer spending, especially among economically marginalized communities. Drawing from the insights of Moore & Boothroyd (2023), we embark on a journey through the nuanced intersections of social protection and economic dynamism.

The foundation of this exploration is laid with a comprehensive understanding of how social protection programs transcend conventional welfare paradigms. Far from being mere safety nets, these programs are positioned as strategic instruments that not only alleviate immediate financial stress but also sow the seeds for long-term economic robustness. The narrative advances to elucidate the critical nexus between social protection policies and human capital development, underscoring their pivotal role in shaping a skilled and adaptable workforce, ready to confront the challenges of a rapidly evolving economic landscape.

Furthermore, the intricate relationship between social protection and economic reforms is highlighted, emphasizing how well-designed systems can create a stable environment conducive to the implementation of transformative policies such as market liberalization. The global recognition of targeted social protection as a linchpin for sustainable development, as advocated by influential entities like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, serves as a compelling backdrop to the ensuing exploration.

This introduction serves as a gateway to unraveling the economic rationale underpinning social protection. It invites scrutiny into the ways in which these policies transcend the traditional boundaries of welfare, becoming integral components of strategies to elevate labor efficiency, mitigate risks, and foster skills essential for adapting to market changes. The subsequent sections of this essay will navigate through the nuanced contours of social protection's impact on economic productivity, income distribution, human capital development, and the challenges and stakeholders shaping these vital frameworks. Through this exploration, we aim to gain a holistic understanding of the profound and transformative influence that social protection wields in shaping societies towards sustainable and equitable development.

**The Economic Rationale for Social Protection**

The economic rationale for social protection lies in its substantial impact on enhancing workforce productivity and advancing human capital development, crucial for economic competitiveness and growth. More than just a welfare tool, social protection is integral in elevating labour efficiency and fostering skills essential for adapting to market changes (Kidd, 2017). This concept is rooted in the ability of social protection policies to create environments conducive to increased productivity. These policies provide a basic level of financial security, alleviating the stress and anxiety linked to financial instability. For instance, workers free from the burden of immediate needs can focus more effectively, boosting productivity (World Bank Group, 2022). Additionally, programs like health insurance ensure a healthier workforce, reducing sick leaves and contributing to a more reliable and efficient labour force. Van Ginneken (2005) further says that social protection's influence on human capital is a crucial aspect of its economic justification. Investments in education, training, and healthcare enhance the value of a worker's skills and experience. Furthermore, access to such resources enables individuals to acquire new competencies, making them more adaptable to evolving market demands (Aleksandrova & Costella, 2021). Social protection also has long-term impacts, particularly in early childhood, by supporting nutrition and health, leading to better academic performance and more productive adulthood. Finally, social safety programs serve as automatic stabilisers during economic downturns, maintaining consumer spending and allowing the unemployed to pursue education or training, ultimately leading to a more skilled workforce.

# **Role of social Protection in Economic Productivity**

Social protection programs effectively enable low-income households to expand labour market participation and accumulate productive assets by overcoming barriers related to credit and savings. For instance, Mexico's Oportunidades program enabled participating households to invest approximately 26% of the cash transfers received (Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012). As a result, agricultural revenues notably rose by nearly 10% after just 18 months of subsidies, indicating strong returns empowering beneficiaries' economic progress beyond immediate relief. Moreover, regular aid can strengthen creditworthiness and access to the financing required to fund investments and ventures (Ulrichs & Roelen, 2012). Additionally, transfers facilitate vital job search activities. Brazil's Bolsa Familia program distinctly increased labour market participation, especially among women. Female participation rose 4.3% while male participation grew 2.6% amongst beneficiaries versus non-beneficiaries, highlighting social protection's role in advancing gender workplace equality alongside broader economic engagement (Piachaud, 2017). These programs, if well implemented, empower economically disadvantaged households to build assets and engage more actively in the labour market, thereby reducing financial vulnerabilities and enabling investments in various economic activities. This leads to broader economic development and poverty reduction.

Figure : Shows the Contribution of Social Protection to Productivity, Growth and Poverty Reduction (Dercon, 2011).



According to Arjona et al., (2003), social protection and risk management are pivotal to reducing poverty by shielding people from frequent external shocks that can have disastrous consequences for the economically vulnerable. This strategy centres on social protection programs like health insurance, unemployment benefits, and pensions that provide a critical safety net, enhancing stability and resilience (Grosh et al., 2008). Pensions, for instance, ensure financial security for the elderly, preventing them from facing poverty in their later years. This offers peace of mind to older citizens and alleviates the financial burden on younger generations who might otherwise support their aged relatives. A case in point is the Prêvidencia Rural in Brazil program that sought to provide coverage for informal workers and their households. The regular pension benefits enabled beneficiaries to access loans from banks by showing their magnetic pension access cards. A study looking at the impact of the pensions on recipient households observed that there was a high rate of investment in productive capital from the funds (Dercon, 2011).

Health insurance is another critical element, protecting individuals and families from the high costs of medical care. These programs contribute to better health outcomes by facilitating access to healthcare without financial hardship. Unemployment benefits are also a significant part of this framework. These programs offer temporary financial support to those who lose their jobs, helping them navigate challenging times while seeking new employment (Tirivayi et al., 2016). This support stabilises consumer spending during economic downturns, maintaining overall economic stability. This view is affirmed by Ouma (2020), who says these social protection measures extend beyond mere poverty alleviation. They empower people with low incomes by improving their negotiation capabilities. As per Muluka (n.d.), the assurance of support in times of need encourages individuals to undertake calculated risks, such as investing in education or starting new ventures, potentially leading to long-term economic benefits.

A growing body of evidence suggests that cash transfers enable low-income households, particularly those in poverty, to invest in livelihood strategies with higher returns. Typically, such investments carry significant risks for these households, with potential losses threatening their very survival by pushing them below necessary consumption levels (UNDESA, 2021). An illustrative example of this effect is in Maharashtra, India, where small-scale farmers have been able to invest in higher yielding but riskier crop varieties thanks to their involvement in the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (Alderman & Yemtsov, 2012). The assurance of regular cash transfers from the program reduced the perceived risks associated with these new agricultural methods, enabling a shift to more profitable farming practices that were previously too risky or unaffordable. These cash transfers create conditions where low-income households can afford to explore and engage in more lucrative livelihood options. This could involve diversifying crops, investing in small businesses, or acquiring new skills for better employment. Additionally, Berry (2013) says these transfers play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty by providing a steady income, allowing households to plan for the future and save rather than just live daily. For instance, recipients of Mozambique's food subsidy program used the money they received to generate additional income. Specifically, the funds served as working capital for petty trading endeavors. Recipients also used the money to rear chickens and sell the eggs. Some recipients made and repaired clothes using the capital from the subsidies.

In Kenya, cash transfers have become a vital tool in reducing poverty and boosting overall economic output, with significant impacts on local economies and household spending. These transfers directly support families in meeting essential needs and have a multiplier effect, generating an additional 30 to 80 shillings in the local economy for every 100 shillings disbursed (Kabare, 2015). Households use this financial aid to increase expenditure on critical sectors like food, healthcare, and education, contributing to long-term human capital development. The enhanced financial stability also enables investment in income-generating activities, bolstering productivity and economic resilience (UNDESA, 2021). This influx of cash stimulates local economies by raising the demand for goods and services, benefiting local businesses and vendors, and potentially leading to job creation and further regional investments. The multiplier effect of these transfers is significant, as the initial financial input circulates through the community, amplifying the initial investment and underscoring the broader economic benefits of such programs (Tirivayi et al. 2016). Besides the economic boost, these transfers are crucial for social welfare, providing a safety net for vulnerable groups, reducing poverty, mitigating the impact of economic shocks, and potentially enhancing social cohesion and mental well-being in communities.

# **Human Capital Development**

Social protection is crucial in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty by tackling the financial barriers that often prevent households from investing in human capital. This investment is critical for enabling future generations to rise out of poverty, and social protection schemes are crucial facilitators in this process. For example, the child support grant and old age pension in South Africa have notably improved children's lives. Study by Dercon (2011) have highlighted significant improvements in children's health, height, and nutrition due to these programs. These early improvements were vital as they lay the groundwork for better health and education outcomes.

Further evidence of social protection's positive impact on human capital development is seen in countries like Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Turkey through conditional cash transfers (CCTs). These programs have been shown to increase school enrollment rates by 2 to 13 percentage points (Piachaud, 2017). They ensure that children from low-income families attend school and receive the support necessary for their education. This rise in school enrolment was essential for breaking poverty cycles. Plagerson & Ulriksen (2016) reaffirms this perspective by stating education equips children with the skills needed for better job opportunities in the future, potentially increasing their lifetime earnings. Educated individuals are also more likely to adopt healthier lifestyles and provide better care for their children, perpetuating a cycle of positive outcomes.

Social protection is also crucial in shielding individuals and communities from the adverse effects of broad shocks like economic downturns, natural disasters, health crises, or joblessness. According to Aleksandrova & Costella (2021), social protection programs act as a barrier, preventing the loss of productive assets and the depletion of human capital during such events. An example is Indonesia's response to the East Asian financial crisis, where the government implemented targeted support like rice subsidies, healthcare price discounts, and scholarships for disadvantaged children. These measures effectively slowed the decline in service utilisation and were vital in maintaining expenditure patterns and reducing the prevalence of child labour, which often spikes during recessions (Kidd, 2017).

Additionally, social protection programs can preserve and even enhance productive assets in times of crisis. A perfect example are programs initiated to support small-scale farmers during natural disasters or economic downturns that help prevent the loss of crops or livestock. This is evident through Kenya’s livestock offtake Programme in Kenya, which buys livestock during the dry season to cushion farmers from the effects of hunger. (Moore & Boothroyd, 2023) According to the world vision, the government purchases emaciated livestock from drought-affected farmers with support from World Vision. This provides farmers with a market to sell cattle before losing them to drought, enabling families to meet basic needs. The cash procured is then used to purchase food and other necessities amid the drought. Conversely, the purchased livestock are slaughtered for meat, which World Vision and the county government distribute to severely malnourished, poverty-stricken families.

Mexico's Oportunidades program is another perfect example of social protection aimed at uplifting people economically. This success is reflected in Ulrichs & Roelen (2012) study that highlights Oportunidades’s economic impact. Per the study, after eight months in the program (three payment cycles), recipients invested 14% of the Oportunidades transfers they received. Notably, investments were made in farm animals (starting with small animals and eventually larger draft animals) as well as land for agricultural production and micro-enterprises. These investments yielded a 1.9% increase in consumption for each peso of transfers received. Estimates indicate the investments had an estimated 15.3% rate of return in terms of income earned and 13.2% in terms of consumption. This allowed recipients to raise their consumption by about one third after five and a half years in the program, with an estimated 17% rate of return overall.

# **Income Distribution**

Social protection measures, including health insurance, pensions, cash transfers, and unemployment benefits, are crucial for mitigating poverty and its duration, a concept recognized by the World Bank since 2005. These measures act as a safety net for vulnerable populations, providing stability in income and expenditure during economic downturns and shielding against unforeseen events such as sickness or job loss. Additionally, social security systems play a vital role in fostering economic growth by facilitating investments in small businesses, healthcare, and education (Lustig, 2010). These investments spur economic development and can create jobs, primarily through cash transfers that enhance buying power and market demand. Moreover, these programs contribute to fairer wealth distribution, tackling economic disparities that are key to achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. They also boost worker productivity by offering income security, encouraging innovation and risk-taking, and motivating investments in education and health, heightening productivity and job prospects.

Kenya's 2011 National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) adopts a three-pronged approach to social protection, comprising social assistance, social security, and health insurance, aimed at managing risks, reducing the impacts of shocks, and helping cope with various social and economic challenges. Social Assistance includes programs like food distribution, voucher transfers, and direct cash payments to support the most vulnerable, often funded by the government or external donors, with the Hunger Safety Net Programme as a critical example (Piachaud, 2017). These are demand-driven initiatives providing immediate aid to those in need. In Social Security, Kenya adheres to International Labour Organization (ILO) Employment Conventions, offering a safety net for all workers, including those in informal sectors, with schemes that support individuals during unemployment, disability, old age, or other life events impacting earning capacity. Health Insurance, a central policy element, aims to make healthcare affordable and accessible to all, particularly the underprivileged, through contributory or non-contributory schemes covering a broad spectrum of medical services (Ouma, 2020). Additionally, Kenya invests in cooperatives and microfinance initiatives as risk mitigation tools for the poorest, offering small-scale financial services and support to foster income-generating activities and economic improvement.

# **Financing Social Protection**

Government revenues, primarily sourced from taxes such as value-added tax (VAT), corporate taxes, and income taxes, are a major funding source for social safety programs. Typically, governments often earmark a certain percentage of their budget for these programs, indicating their priority within national policies (Tirivayi et al., 2016). According to OECD report, on average, countries invest 12 percent of GDP into social protection programs, making social protection one of the highest areas of public spending. Some developing countries invest quite a bit as well - over 3 percent of their GDP.

This includes countries like South Africa, Mauritius, Brazil and Georgia. In Kenya, political leaders have shown a strong commitment to investing in and financially supporting social protection programs through multi-year budget allocations and periodic social budgeting. For example, over the past four years, the Kenyan government has dramatically increased funding for cash transfers from 7.9 billion Kenyan shillings (Ksh) to approximately 19.5 billion Ksh, amounting to a total of 80.5 billion Ksh over that period (Kenya Social Protection Sector Review, n.d). This surge in funding has directly led to an expansion in the number of beneficiary households able to receive cash transfers through Kenya's National Safety Net Programme. By June 30, 2016, around 813,381 total households were benefiting from the government-funded cash transfers, indicating a rapid expansion in coverage and scope compared to just a few years prior.

Social insurance schemes like health insurance, unemployment benefits, and pensions are usually funded by contributions from employers, workers, and independent contractors, linking contributions directly to benefits. However, this can be challenging to implement in economies with a significant informal sector (UNDESA, 2021). In many developing countries, social protection financing relies heavily on external funds and donor support, which, while potentially substantial, may lack long-term sustainability due to varying donor priorities. Some governments also resort to domestic or international borrowing to fund social safety services, especially during fiscal deficits or economic downturns, which can lead to increased national debt and future financial issues (Protection,2013). Specialized levies and taxes, such as those on tobacco and alcohol or lottery earnings designated for social spending, provide another funding avenue. However, they are subject to shifts in government agendas and consumer trends. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) offer a collaborative approach, combining public and private sector resources for financing and managing social protection initiatives. However, ensuring equal access and aligning objectives can be complex.

The Nordic model is a perfect example of a government funded study. These services are primarily tax-funded and aim to provide high social security and reduce inequality, ensuring all citizens have access regardless of economic status. Key benefits of this approach include enhanced social cohesion and collective responsibility, reduced poverty and income disparity, a more equal society, and increased public trust in government institutions responsible for these welfare systems. However, sustainability concerns exist, particularly with the need to support extensive services without excessively high taxes and the impact of demographic shifts like ageing populations (Devereux, & McGregor, 2014). Critics also point out that universal access might lead to overutilization and strain the system. In Sweden, this model has led to excellent health outcomes and social mobility through universally accessible healthcare and education funded by taxes. Nevertheless, Sweden faces the challenge of maintaining the quality and availability of these services without further tax increases. The recent increase in immigration has also put additional pressure on these systems, raising questions about long-term sustainability.

# **Challenges in Social Protection**

Social protection systems grapple with economic instability, demographic changes, and financial endurance. Effective management of these systems involves navigating various factors, including funding demands, dependence on external aid, the prevalence of informal economies, shifts in population age and urban demographics, and the impacts of economic downturns. Particularly in developing countries, government finances are often stretched thin, struggling to meet these programs' substantial funding requirements consistently (Moore & Boothroyd, 2023). The dependence on foreign aid introduces an element of uncertainty as donor interests and global economic conditions fluctuate. The challenge is heightened in informal economies, where many workers are not part of the tax or social insurance systems, reducing domestic resource generation.

Demographic shifts such as ageing populations and increasing urbanization also pose challenges. Ageing populations lead to higher demands for healthcare and pensions, while urbanization raises questions about the adaptability of these systems to meet the diverse needs of city dwellers (Aleksandrova & Costella,2021). Additionally, economic downturns pose a significant threat to sustainability, as they often lead to increased demand for social protection services when government revenues are diminishing, making it difficult to bridge the funding gap. The influence of global economic volatility, including fluctuating commodity prices and financial crises, further affects the capacity to fund these programs.

# **Stakeholder Involvement in Social Protection**

Stakeholders, with governments at the forefront, are critical in the effectiveness and sustainability of social protection systems. Government responsibilities include:

* Policy development,
* Aligning with international standards like those of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and national goals and
* Identifying and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

This involves extensive planning, considering economic and demographic trends, and broad consultations with various sectors to ensure more comprehensive support and contextual appropriateness. Following policy development, governments are tasked with enacting relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks to guide social protection programs' implementation, eligibility, benefit delivery, and grievance procedures, establishing a robust legal foundation.

Moreover, governments are pivotal in securing and managing funding, necessitating transparent and effective financial management (Dercon, 2011).They also oversee the administration and execution of these programs, ensuring efficient delivery, operational management, and adherence to goals like timely and precise benefit distribution. Monitoring and evaluation by the government are essential for continual assessment and adaptation of programs. Finally, governments play a crucial role in public awareness and capacity building for social protection programs, involving staff training, partnerships, and outreach to ensure that potential beneficiaries are well-informed and can access the services they need.

Another key stakeholder in social protection is international organisations and NGOs. These organizations are pivotal in enhancing global social protection, extending beyond mere assistance to being leading advocates for comprehensive social protection laws and practices. They engage in diverse activities such as funding, program implementation, lobbying, and policy influence, vigorously promoting social protection to reduce inequality and poverty. Through advocacy, they shape governmental policies towards more inclusive social protection agendas, contributing to more robust legislative frameworks (Grosh et al., 2008). These entities bring substantial technical expertise, aiding in policy development, program management, and disseminating best practices, particularly crucial in areas lacking local government resources or expertise. They also engage in capacity-building and training activities to ensure effective program management. Research conducted by these organisations assesses program outcomes, highlights issues, and recommends improvements while facilitating knowledge-sharing forums for countries to learn from each other. Often, they directly implement social protection programs in regions with limited governmental capacity, providing essential services and managing distributions (Plagerson, & Ulriksen, 2016). Funding is a critical role they play, especially in resource-poor countries, ensuring program sustainability. In emergencies, they are typically the first responders, offering vital social protection services to mitigate the immediate effects of crises. Additionally, they champion the inclusion of marginalised groups in social protection programs, advocating for accessibility and equity for all, including women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

# **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the imperative role of social protection in fostering stability and social cohesion emerges as a linchpin for unlocking the full potential of economic growth and productivity gains. The diverse avenues through which social protection achieves these outcomes, from correcting market failures to encouraging strategic investments and preventing detrimental coping strategies, underscore its transformative impact on societies.

Safety net programs, as integral components of social protection, serve as bulwarks during economic downturns, ensuring continued access to vital resources and effectively preventing the onset of poverty. This security not only empowers individuals to make investments in health, education, and entrepreneurship without the immediate fear of consequences but also contributes significantly to decreasing inequality and supporting disadvantaged groups. The result is a bolstering of social stability and sustainable growth, as the expanded consumer base becomes a testament to the success of fostering unity and security.

As a poignant realization of the practical implications of this research, I find resonance in the work undertaken at Arise Kenya, a volunteer organization and Community-Based Organization (CBO) where I actively contribute. The insights gleaned from this exploration of social protection policies have a tangible impact on our endeavors to address policy gaps inherent in government institutions. Notably, our focus on social protection strives to bridge the gaps in targeting vulnerable communities, ensuring that cash transfers and education scholarships are directed to those who need them the most.

Arise Kenya, through advocacy efforts, has successfully engaged communities in understanding and questioning the policies implemented by the government. By holding leaders accountable and demanding transparency in the targeting of beneficiaries, we have catalyzed policy changes that prioritize the most vulnerable. These efforts not only rectify systemic flaws but also instill a sense of community involvement and ownership in the social protection process.

The transformation of Arise Kenya from a volunteer organization to a recognized Community-Based Organization stands as a testament to the credibility and impact we have achieved among stakeholders and communities. This journey exemplifies the potential for grassroots initiatives to influence and shape social policies, creating a ripple effect that resonates with the principles of social protection outlined in this essay. In subsequent discussions, we will delve deeper into the multifaceted efforts undertaken by Arise Kenya in the realm of social policy, underscoring the organization's commitment to sustainable and equitable development.

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