

Politics, Interests and Social Security: Key Drivers of Social Policy in Africa

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Abstract:-Social policy in Africa is seen to be driven by diverse factors, a close assessment of the different waves of social policy, from colonial Africa to present day social policy shows a provision that is discriminatory; through all eras of African social policy development the common denominator was a non-inclusive provision. A variety of factors have determined the provision of social policy in Africa in different eras from the colonial era, through the era of decolonisation, nationalism, democratisation and decades that followed. Provision of social policy was driven by attempts to pre-empt uprisings, ideologies of nation building, political elite interests and poor social conditions on the continent. This paper aims to investigate the main drivers of social policy in Africa from the colonial era to the post-colonial era, and present day development of social policy.

Key Words: Social Policy, Politics, Interests, Social Security, Africa.

I. INTRODUCTION

Africa's state of development has remained a source of concern to all stakeholders, and requires the concerted efforts of its governments in addressing the issues that confront it. Doing this requires an examination of the issues that affect it and suggesting practical ways of synergizing the political economy of such issues to arrive at policies that will advance the continent. This paper examines the effect of politics, interests and social security on the activities and guidelines of governments of Africa in the quest to achieving the welfare or quality of life for its people. Social policy can be described as "the collective interventions to directly affect social welfare, social institutions and social relations. It is concerned with the redistributive effects of economic policy, protection of people from the vagaries of the market and the changing circumstances of age, the enhancement of the productive potential of members of society, and the reconciliation of the burden of reproduction with that of other social tasks." Mkandawire (2010: 11).

The aim of this paper is to indicate what has driven social policy in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) from the colonial era through the post-colonial era-at independence, and what drives social policy development in the present day. Here we look at social policy provision in the colonial era, the development of social policy at independence and decades after and what drove these developments. We also look at what drives social policy in SSA democracies. Limited literature on SSA social policy development exists, literature that exists, albeit not extensive relates to Southern African

social policy development. The development of social policy in this region in the colonial era was more advanced than in other parts of SSA most likely because it was a settler colony; it continued to advance even after apartheid as it was more established in these states. This has created a gap in understanding what drives social policy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

What makes this research important is the existence of a wide disparity of economic and social conditions within African states. Social policies (formal social protection) in African countries have been selective, excluding a significant proportion of the society, precisely the most vulnerable group within a society. This seems to be the case from the colonial era when it was first introduced through eras that followed independence. This paper, therefore, focuses on SSA excluding southern African states. An understanding of social policy development and its drivers in Africa might be key to an effective and inclusive provision of social services and social protection. Social policy development in Ghana, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Nigeria has been selective and partial. Favouring selected groups of society, thereby highlighting the differences in social provision in SSA.

Africa remains a concern to the world, particularly in the contexts of its political, economic and social human development. At the heart of this concern is its obvious failure to address the social, economic and political problems bedeviling the second largest continent of the world, which has earned the continent the ignoble rating as the poorest and least developed of the continents of the world. For instance, a typical example is the reality that SSA underperforms relative to world averages on almost every social indicator (Luiz, 2013). Also, in SSA, over 70% of the poor live in rural areas where opportunities and access to social benefits are seen to be limited and urban poverty is growing rapidly due to a decline in wages and decline in employment opportunities (Mkandawire, 2010). There have been some improvements, driven by high economic growth, political stability, improved state capacity and deliberate social policy (Luiz, 2013). Despite these improvements, there is still a sizeable disparity in comparison to other regions like Asia that have seen dramatic improvements, one can argue that social and economic conditions have deteriorated in relative terms.

II. COLONIAL ERA POLITICS AND SOCIAL POLICY: FRENCH VERSUS BRITISH POLICIES

There are clear peculiarities in the factors that drove social policy within Africa's colonies, with a major disparity seen between French and British colonies. The major difference is in the impact the colonial administration and form of settlement had on the development of welfare systems in some African colonies like Senegal, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Tanzania and Liberia.

Iliffe (1987:193) argues that the "institutions created to assist the poor during the colonial period generally embodied the traditions, preconceptions, concerns and circumstances of the foreigners who devised them." As such, there are clear differences between the experiences of African states as a result of their colonial exposure. This has been seen in the differences of experience in social policy development and provision in Anglophone and Francophone African states. Devereux and Lund (2010:154-155) explain that the French African colonies were ruled as extensions of France, with power centralised in Paris. In terms of social security, they provided more generous benefits than those introduced by the British administration, and benefits were extended sooner to local workers in French colonies than in British colonies. The French were more open to a broader conception of the family wage and family allowances, influenced by the 1946 general strike in Senegal, which demanded that workers in the colonies should have identical work conditions and social benefits to the workers in France. The British had a more limited approach, and emerged in the 1950s as a response to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions on family wages and allowances for member countries. Britain's indirect rule "led to more local control, but often with more racial rules of inclusion and exclusion, and with more categories of workers being excluded." (Luiz, 2013:115). As different as social policy provision was in the French and British protectorates, factors that drove the provision of these policies remain the same. Deterring unrests and disturbances was of utmost importance in this era, due to the liberation and independence movements by African groups at that period. It can be argued here that what drove social policy in this era was the tactical move to avoid uprisings, this informed social policy development and provision by the colonial powers.

III. INDEPENDENCE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE POLITICS AND SOCIAL POLICY

After independence, social policy was used as the bond, which held African states together; where social services were used to consolidate the new states (Kpessa et al., 2011). This phase of social policy development was significant to most of the newly independent countries in Africa. It was marked by a series of developments with milestones that paved the way for the current social policy most African countries are currently experiencing. A critical point to note is the difference in developments among the Anglo and

Francophone countries in the same period. For most of these countries nationalism and pragmatism acted as the push forces for social policy. The driver was eradicating extreme poverty, illiteracy and disease among its populace. National leaders from Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya to Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and other nationalists marshalled their toddler governments to advocate for changes in the existing policies. In the words of President Nkrumah (1967:52-53),

'...Socialism would allow governments to establish a society in which men and women will have no anxiety about work, food and shelter, where poverty and illiteracy no longer exist, and where diseases are brought under control...'

However, these nationalist leaders' efforts to "nationalise" their states were short-lived in the absence of required physical, financial and human capacity to sustain the momentum for these policies. A more convincing argument is that of weak institutions. Authors, such as Mkandawire, 2010, De Waal 1997, Hickey, 2007 have argued that the reason behind this failure is the absence of well-established, strong institutions to run these programmes. The newly created institutions were overwhelmed, the need for a skilled workforce, which was crucial to their success was lacking, creating institutional processes with innumerable inadequacies.

A consequence of the above failure was the deepening of inequality and poverty levels all across the continent. The worst affected were the rural poor and those living in poor informal settlements in now urbanizing settlements across the different countries (Mkandawire, 2010). The failure in the take-off of these policies created a gap that was 'filled' by non-government actors now referred to as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These institutions, mainly originating from the West, acted as conduits of foreign aid to these countries. Although, aid was intended for the improvement and revival of the disintegrating state of the social policy environment, often the imperfect and irregular tool failed to address vulnerability issues which was supposed to be its primary object and focused on food relief as a form of aid.

The struggling governments invested in measures to remedy the situation through drastic policies to reduce the growing imbalance, policies such as government grants for businesses seemed promising at the time. The imbalance was as a result of the new policies formulated after independence that only favoured labour in the formal sector. Mostly in SSA urban areas, while the majority living in rural areas and those working in the informal sector were ignored (Mkandawire, 2010). These reformed policies did not do any better to address these challenges since they concentrated in developing human capital for industrialisation to take-off instead of tackling issues of poverty and disease in the rural areas to ensure balance between rural and urban areas. This deepened the issues in the rural areas and it soon began to spread to the urban areas through rural-urban migration that stretched the infrastructure and resources in the urban centres.

The ensuing scenario necessitated multinational institutions to intervene in the developing countries' policy struggle. For example, the World Bank implemented the famous growth and equity strategy focusing on rural poverty in the late 1980's in countries like Guinea, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Mali. As a result, African governments prioritised the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and other 'priority' agendas of the International Financial Organisations (IFOs) (Mkandawire, 2010). Embracing these agendas and policies led to a miserable scenario. The social policy agenda along with poverty eradication plans were disregarded. Instead user-fee programmes like Ghana's cash-and-carry systems were introduced in healthcare, education and other areas that were previously covered under the states social policy. With increasing inequality and extreme poverty, the mandate of providing social services was unofficially handed over to non-state actors, mostly Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The withdrawal of government spending towards the provision of far reaching social services especially through investment in basic services such as education and health for the poor led to major issues such as political unrest in various proportions, civil wars (Nigeria 1967-1970, Ethiopia 1974-1991, Sierra Leone 1991-2002, Guinea-Bissau 1998-1999) and military coup d'états (Nigeria 1976, 1983, Ghana 1966, Liberia 1980, Ivory Coast 1999). This was followed by a post Washington consensus, seeing social services back on the policy agenda. (Luiz, 2013).

In this stage the fundamental driver of social policy was "nationalism". The need for nation building was the focus and ideology of the leaders. The socialist movement that was adopted by a number of African countries such as Ghana, Mali, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Benin, in this stage was created from the need to unite the African people and develop African states. Poverty and inequity also played a large part in the development of social policy in this era. Addressing inequity and poverty in African states was key to achieving nationalism. In the post-war era (World War II, 1939-1945), decolonization took precedence. Nationalism began to sprout in African states and social programs became important components of ethno-territorial mobilisations and nation-building projects. Kpessa et al (2011) argue that social programs can be key components of nation building in Least Developing Countries (LDCs).

Judging by the creation of the Millennium Development Goals and most recently, the more extensive Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) poverty, inequality, hunger and education it might be correct to argue that there is a need for a more holistic approach to poverty eradication, reducing inequality, and demanding government spending on social programmes. These goals cover all aspects of human development that can provide functioning's and create opportunities needed for well-being.

IV. DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL POLICY

According to Bangura and Hedboerg (2006), democracy and social policy can be mutually reinforcing. Democracy promotes rights and facilitates participation in the policy process. Governments periodically have to renew their mandates to citizens, who may reward or punish contestants through the exercise of voting, depending on how well they perform on welfare. Although it may seem that power is concentrated solely with the voters, it has been found that this power is shared, albeit not equally, with voters holding more power especially as elections draw closer. Politicians in African states use selective social service programmes to secure their political futures as a system of reward and punishment; including their supporters, which are likely to vote in their favour in the next election cycle while excluding those that did not support their mandates as punishment.

Hickey (2008) stated that health care, education and income support programmes involve mechanisms for inclusion and exclusion that allow them to build the 'in-group' of national community. Welfare programmes do not necessarily target the penurious segments of the population but rather the ones critical of the regime's political survival. Hence, politicians use money and other material incentives to induce voters, and when that relationship defines democratic politics (as the case is in Nigerian politics and some other African states) then the general public is isolated from democratic gains (Suleiman, Onyeonuru & Egharevba, 2016). In Kenya, food aid was distributed selectively, on partisan basis, in order to secure Daniel Arap Moi in power (Hickey, 2008). Certain forms of party system are arguably more likely to deliver on social protection. This is evident in democracies with stable party systems and elected authoritarian systems, which are likely to be more progressive, semi-authoritarian regimes with dominant parties; with non-elected systems and democracies characterized by fragmented party systems being the least likely to deliver social protection policies (Hickey, 2008). This might be due to the belief that they do not need the support of voters to gain or remain in power.

V. CONCLUSION

The importance of social policy cannot be over emphasized, the need for poverty eradication, reducing inequity and providing well-being all lie within it. We have seen how and why social policy was developed at different eras in African states and the shortcomings of the policies within each era. It all began with the intent to pre-empt an uprising during the colonial period, nation building, eradicating poverty and reducing inequity at independence and decades after independence in democratic African states social policy was driven by interests of political elites to promote their agendas through paternalism.

In recent times, poverty and human development are drivers of social policy as at the independence, evident of sluggish development in this region. It is apparent from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that poverty eradication through an all-inclusive human development approach is at the top of

the social policy agenda of African governments and their international partners. Taking into consideration functioning's, well-being and capabilities, with a conviction that it is only by addressing poverty holistically that it can be eradicated. The attainment of the SDGs by most African states at the end of the programme might be more challenging than forecasted, taking into consideration the role politics has been seen to play in influencing social policy on the continent, as evident in the case of its predecessor, the MDGs, although some strides were made in poverty and hunger reduction, increasing literacy levels and gender equality, not a single goal was fully achieved in any SSA counties, with only a few countries making any strides.

We find that social policy in every stage was driven by different events and circumstances. In the colonial era it was driven by the need to suppress uprising and rebellion, while its drivers at independence and post-independence were found to be nation building, the menace of poverty and growing inequality. We also find that democracy can drive social policy, although politicians have been seen to use it in the interest of realizing their mandate, which in some cases can increase inequality.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

An inclusive social policy should be at the forefront of African social policy development. The government in developing social policy should ensure that the needs of all groups are included in the formulation of social policy development. All groups should have access to social programmes; the key to achieving this is to develop social projects that can benefit all groups and also put certain controls in place through strong institutions to ensure all groups within a society take full advantage of these programmes.

Policy makers in African states should investigate the bottlenecks that were experienced during the MDG's to avoid such constraints to social security provision and to address these issues in achieving the SDGs. They should also use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a platform for addressing social issues. There are already outlined goals and targets provided by the SDGs. African states should ensure these goals and targets are achieved, especially in ensuring that they are inclusive and the programmes must be sustainable.

African democracy, although fledgling, is developing and improving at impressive rates, but these improvements might not be enough to guarantee social policy provision that are comprehensive and inclusive. This makes it imperative for African states to strengthen institutions that will ensure the sustainability and protection of social programs from the whims of politicians.

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