



Impacts of social protection on social cohesion and reconciliation

Theories, experiences and case studies



Livelihoods and Food Security Fund



Canada



HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.

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Executive summary

This report presents findings from a desk study on how national social protection programmes have promoted social cohesion and national reconciliation in post-conflict contexts internationally. The study documents and analyses the dynamics of how government-provided social protection programmes in a variety of contexts, with various design features, have contributed to national reconciliation and social cohesion.

Social protection has a documented impact on several dimensions of social cohesion

Social cohesion is a multi-dimensional concept, including political, social and economic dimensions. The international literature points to a number of ways in which social protection programmes have contributed to these dimensions of social cohesion in different countries.

The political dimension

- **Increasing state legitimacy:** social protection can contribute to strengthening state legitimacy, by increasing the ability of the state to meet the expectations of citizens. A particular value of social protection transfers is that they present a clearly visible function of the state for citizens (Godamunne, 2017). However, if services are delivered in a manner which does not demonstrate fairness and professionalism on the part of state representatives, it may instead contribute to decreased legitimacy of the state in the eyes of citizens (Cummings and Paudel, 2019). It is therefore essential to consider how processes of delivering social protection transfers are experienced by citizens (Slater and Mallett, 2017).

The social dimension

- **Preventing violence and unrest:** Studies from several countries show that social protection can be an effective tool for preventing violence and unrest. In India, social protection programmes are associated with decreased levels of civil unrest and violence (Justino 2011; Fetzter 2019). In Colombia, there is evidence that the Familias en Accion conditional cash transfer programme had positive effects on the demobilisation of combatants (Pena, Urrego and Villa, 2017). Similarly, in the Philippines, the 4P conditional cash transfer programme decreased conflict and insurgent influence at the village level (Croft, Felter and Johnston 2016). These micro-level effects are also reflected in cross-national analyses showing that higher investment in social protection leads to less risk of social unrest (UNESCAP 2015; Taydas and Peksen 2012).
- **Increasing social capital:** The social protection literature shows that social protection can enhance individuals' ability to share their income and participate in social activities (Attanasio et al. 2009; Owusu-Addo, Renzaho and Smith 2018; Babajanian, Hagen-Zanker and Holmes, 2014; Camacho, 2014). Social protection transfers increase citizen engagement in social networks and social activities. They can enable individuals to maintain or improve their economic status and thus increase their ability to participate in ceremonial, cultural and other social activities (Babajanian, 2012). Active social participation in turn can help foster and strengthen social capital – i.e. the relations of trust and reciprocity that bind together individuals in a society.
- **Reducing social exclusion:** There is a strong link between social exclusion, social cohesion and insecurity. Minority groups become more insecure if they are marginalised because of their ethnicity, gender, culture or religion. This can lead to insecurity in the wider society, if a marginalised group decides to use violence to seek to redress inequalities. People who are excluded may feel that they have little to lose by taking violent action (Stewart et al. 2006). Social protection can contribute to reducing social exclusion by reducing vulnerability, help overcome structural disadvantage, such as for example covering transport costs, as well as limitations in capability by for example improving access to education (Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker, 2012). Universal programmes are particularly well suited for signalling

equality between citizens, regardless of population group. The ability of social protection transfers to increase access to education is well documented, and this can have important effects on social inclusion (Bastagli et al. 2016). More equal access to education is associated with lower risk of conflict, with the likelihood of experiencing violent conflict twice as high in countries with high education inequality between ethnic and religious groups (FHI 360, 2015).

The economic dimension

- **Reducing poverty:** Poverty can be a contributing factor in violence and conflict, with poorer countries more prone to civil war (Marks 2016). The impact of social protection transfers on poverty indicators has been extensively documented (Bastagli et al. 2016). However, how large this impact is, and whether it can also be seen at a national level, depends on programme coverage and the adequacy of benefit levels.
- **Reducing economic inequality:** High levels of inequality has been empirically linked to outbreaks of violence, social conflicts and crime. Social protection programmes are enormously important for reducing inequality in high-income countries. In European countries, taxes and transfers result in reduction of inequality with an average of 15 Gini points. However, the redistributive impact of social protection on inequality depends on how much is invested in social protection transfers, and whether the combined effect of taxes and transfers is regressive or progressive (Lustig, 2018).
- **Protection against covariate shocks:** Covariate shocks refer to shocks that are felt by entire communities at the same time. Covariate shocks may be natural (e.g. drought, floods, typhoons, earthquakes), political (e.g. political crisis and armed conflict) or economic (e.g. economic downturns, price increases) (O'Brien et al. 2018; Nel and Richarts, 2008; Rezaeian 2013). Increases in the price of fuel and electricity as a result of energy subsidy reforms has been a cause of protests and violence in many countries, including Egypt, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan and Zimbabwe (Hossain, 2018). Climate related shocks and shocks resulting from fluctuations in international prices of main crops have also been shown to be a cause of violence (Fetzer 2019; Dube 2006). Social protection can be an important means of providing farmers with a safety net in the case of prolonged dry spells, droughts or flooding, and several countries, including for example Iran and Indonesia, have successfully used social protection transfers as a way of compensating poor households for the losses they incur as a result of energy price hikes, thereby avoiding unrest (Hossain, 2018; Salehi-Isfahani, Stucki and Deutschmann, 2014; World Bank, 2012).

Programme design matters for the effects of social protection on social cohesion

The existing research points to the importance of programme design in relation to many of the outcomes described above. Particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, it is important to take a 'do no harm' approach, paying attention to the quality of services, including strong systems for ensuring accountability, assessing how programmes work at the local level and taking grievances, unfairness and exclusion seriously (Slater and Mallett, 2017). From a peace building perspective, these factors should be of major concern to policy makers since perceptions of unfairness and exclusion have a strong influence on people's perception of government and may exacerbate grievances against the state and contribute to inter-communal resentment.

Targeting: targeting is crucial for determining whether social protection has a positive or negative effect on social cohesion (Idris 2017). Many studies find that poverty-targeting or targeting of minority groups, or groups such as ex-combatants, risks creating animosity between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and weakens social relations (Holmes & Slater, 2007; Chong et al. 2009; MacAusland and Riemenschneider, 2011; Camacho, 2014; Kardan et al. 2010; KC et al., 2014; Drucza, 2016; Schjødt, 2018a; Holmes and Jackson 2008; Holmes 2009; Willibald 2006). There are documented cases of the use of proxy means tests for targeting of cash transfer programmes leading to unrest in humanitarian contexts (Jacobsen and Armstrong, 2016; Guyatt, Della Rosa and Spencer 2016).

In addition, targeting approaches have important implications for accountability: simple eligibility criteria, such as age, facilitate accountability, while more complex or opaque criteria impede it (Ayliffe, Schjødt and Aslam, 2018). Research has in several cases found that relying on community committees to select beneficiaries result in high rates of leakage and abuse, discretionary and subjective selection of beneficiaries and manipulation and abuse of the selection process by local power holders (Osofisan, 2011; Shah and Shahbaz, 2015). These perceptions can be damaging to citizens' perceptions of state legitimacy (Dix et al., 2012).

Conditionalities: The use of conditionalities and sanctions in social protection programmes risks providing officials with a tool for sanctioning citizens, rather than empowering citizens to hold state representatives accountable for their actions (Fox, 2007; Jones et al. 2008; Cookson, 2016). In addition, ethnographic research from Peru has shown how conditionalities can add to women's workload and exacerbate gender inequality (Cookson, 2018).

Payments: the choice of payment mechanism affects the space for interaction between citizens and representatives of the state. For example, the manual delivery of cash payments by local officials in Nepal presents a rare opportunity for citizens to interact with government representatives (Drucza, 2016; Schjødt 2018a). On the contrary, where payments are contracted out to private service providers, there is no direct interaction between citizens and the government. Accountability relations are also less clear since grievances for payment issues will most likely have to be directed to and resolved by the private payment provider. When making choices on payment mechanisms, programme designers therefore have to balance the need for effectivity and efficiency with the opportunity for interaction between citizens and local officials.

Social accountability and grievance mechanisms: The ability to handle grievances is important for the experience that citizens have of a programme. The international evidence points to the need to put in place several different mechanisms for citizens to raise grievances, and systems to ensure that there is follow up and feedback provided to citizens. Combining complaints mechanisms with other mechanisms, such as for example social audits and community score cards, can provide better mechanism for bringing state representatives and citizens together to resolve programme issues (Ayliffe, Aslam and Schjødt, 2017; Nixon and Mallet 2017).

Introduction

This report presents findings from a desk study on how national social protection programmes have promoted social cohesion and national reconciliation in post-conflict contexts internationally. The study documents and analyses the dynamics of how government-provided social protection programmes in a variety of contexts, with various design features, have contributed to national reconciliation and social cohesion.

We show how national public services, including social protection programmes, has the potential to undermine or contribute to peace building and social cohesion: service delivery which is not conflict-sensitive risks contributing to conflict within and between groups, and exacerbate animosity between citizens and the state. On the other hand, improved provision of services can contribute to social cohesion and can form part of a strengthened social contract between citizens and the state.

The relationship between social protection and social cohesion

This chapter defines the key terms and describes the theoretical relationship between social protection and social cohesion, based on the existing literature. It describes the economic, political and social aspects of social cohesion, and how social protection programmes may theoretically influence each of these. While there has been very limited research specifically on the effects of social protection on social cohesion as such, there is by now a very large literature on the effects of social protection more generally. This literature also covers several components of social cohesion.

Key concepts

Social protection

There is not one specific definition of social protection. Some definitions are very broad, including for example DFID's definition of social protection as 'a sub-set of public actions that help address risk, vulnerability and chronic poverty'. However, social protection is also commonly defined more narrowly, and for the purpose of this report we define it as 'regular transfers, in-kind or in cash, paid to households or individuals'. This definition includes for example public works programmes, old age pensions, child benefits and conditional cash transfers, but excludes health sector policy. Social protection programmes include two main categories: contributory (social insurance) and non-contributory programmes. For the purpose of this report, we consider only non-contributory programmes.

Social cohesion

Social cohesion has been described as 'the glue that holds a society together and enables its members to peacefully coexist and develop' (UNDP and SCG 2015). Arriving at a precise universal definition has proven difficult, and definitions vary between institutions and countries. However, most definitions refer in some way to the quality of social relations and people's perceptions and feelings of belonging together. For example, according to UNDESA, a 'cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, recognition and legitimacy' (UNDESA, n.d.) The international peace-building NGO Search for Common Ground sees social cohesion as comprising four key components: 1) social relations, 2) connectedness, 3) orientation towards the common good and 4) equality. Social cohesion is therefore linked to a broad range of issues that affects the way people relate to each other and to the state, including governance, human rights, social accountability, poverty, inequality and social exclusion. It is linked to the concept of conflict sensitivity in the sense that conflict sensitive programming means programming that contributes to social cohesion and avoids creating or exacerbating conflict.

Two sets of social relations are important in relation to social cohesion. 1) Relationships between citizens and the state. This is also sometimes conceptualised as state-society relations or a social contract, defined as ‘a dynamic agreement between state and society on their mutual roles and responsibilities’ (Babajanian, 2012). The social contract refers to people’s expectations from the state, and the state’s capacity and will to deliver public goods and services. 2) Relationships between citizens. This includes relationships between different social groups, communities, families and between individual citizens. It includes both social relations and distribution of resources.

Social cohesion is important for many reasons, including individual wellbeing, fulfilling basic human needs and increasing access to public services. It is important for economic growth, and for preventing crime and violence. It is therefore also an important concept for understanding the causes of peace and stability. Social cohesion also underlies efforts of state building, state legitimacy and good governance. It is important for allowing governments to implement efficient and equitable public policy (Babajanian, 2012).

Peace building and national reconciliation

Peace building is a broad concept relating to improving society’s ability to prevent violence at all levels. Peace building ‘aims to change or transform negative relationships and institutions while strengthening national capacities at all levels in order to better manage conflict dynamics, support the cohesiveness of society and build sustainable peace from the bottom up’ (UNDP and SCG, 2015). National reconciliation is often used to refer to the process of peace building at the national level. Increased social cohesion can be seen as the outcome of successful peace building and national reconciliation efforts.

Analysing the relationship between social protection and social cohesion

The fact that social cohesion is a complex and multi-dimensional concept means that it is most appropriate to examine the impact of social protection on distinct dimensions of social cohesion (Babajanian, 2012). For the analysis in this report, we draw on a conceptual framework developed by UNDP and Search for Common Ground for analysing social cohesion (UNDP and SCG, 2015). This framework includes the following dimensions of social cohesion:

1. **Political:** including voting, participation, levels of trust in government.
2. **Social:** including levels of trust within the group and of other groups, perceptions of belonging, participation in social activities, social inclusion/exclusion.
3. **Economic:** including perceptions of social mobility, satisfaction with living standards, levels of access to basic services, perceptions of economic inequality.

The framework also includes a fourth dimension of ‘cultural’ indicators, including stereotyping, preconceptions and prejudices, discrimination, contact with other groups and mechanisms for resolving conflicts between groups. For the sake of simplicity, we include these indicators here under the social dimension.

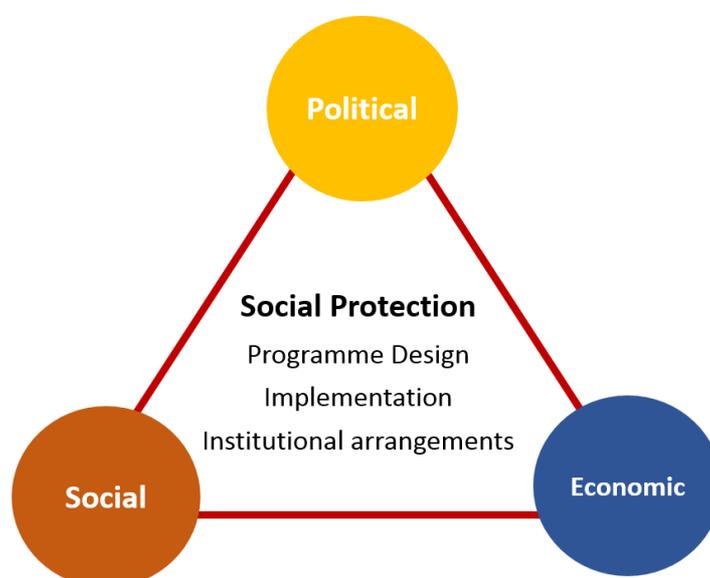
These indicators can form the basis for a detailed analysis of how and when social protection programmes influence different dimensions of social cohesion. This includes the impact of different aspects of social protection programme design, implementation and institutional arrangements. In addition, the political and social context will influence how these causal mechanisms work in practice, in particular the local power dynamics among citizens and between citizens and the state.

For each dimension, different theoretical frameworks are relevant for analysing the impact of social protection on social cohesion:

1. **Political:** this dimension is particularly important for understanding how social protection programmes affect the state-citizen relations aspect of social cohesion. In order to understand the causal mechanisms at play, our analysis draws on theories of accountability (in particular social accountability), state legitimacy and social contracts.

2. **Social:** this dimension is particularly important for understanding how social protection programmes affect relations between citizens. Our analysis draws in particular on theoretical frameworks of social exclusion and social capital.
3. **Economic:** this dimension is important for understanding how social protection affects social cohesion through poverty, vulnerability, inequality and insecurity. Here we can draw in particular on theories of the drivers and effects of poverty, vulnerability and inequality.

Figure 1: Different dimensions of social cohesion



Influence of social protection on political indicators of social cohesion

As mentioned above, an important aspect of social cohesion is the relationship between citizens and the state. This includes the nature of day-to-day interactions of citizens with state representatives, but also how these repeated interactions create expectations of rights and responsibilities and shape the wider social contract. Political indicators of social cohesion relate to participation of citizens in political processes (including elections and consultation mechanisms between elections), government responsiveness to people’s needs and levels of trust in government (UNDP and SCG, 2015). This includes whether state representatives are (perceived by citizens to be) accountable to citizens. Another important aspect is whether citizens perceive the government to be legitimate, which can also affect public support for political and economic reform (Babajanian, 2012).

Social protection and accountability of the state to citizens

Accountability of the state to citizens refers to ‘the extent and capacity of citizens to hold the state and service providers accountable and make them responsive to needs of citizens and beneficiaries’ (World Bank, 2013). The most common definition of accountability entails that state representatives have an obligation to provide information and justification for their decisions and actions to citizens, and that citizens have the ability to sanction any misbehaviour.

Social protection can play an important role in strengthening accountability. This is particularly the case in countries with limited state capacity and presence, where social protection transfers may be one of the only tangible services that governments provide directly to citizens. Social protection programmes can be an effective mechanism for making citizens visible to the state, by bringing citizens and government officials together in face-to-face meetings in relation to payments, or by increasing incentives for citizens to register themselves. For example, it is common for social protection programmes to require national ID cards, which can facilitate large increases in registration. This is important, as having a national ID means that people gain official recognition as citizens in the eyes of the state, and often access to various rights that comes with citizen status.

This is often also important for political participation, as national ID cards are often required in order to vote.

However, accountability requires that citizens are empowered to take action to claim their rights. To do this, they need to have information about their entitlements, and they need to be mobilised and enabled to interact with government representatives. Second, service providers need to have the incentives, information, authority and capacity to be able to respond to citizen demands (Ayliffe, Aslam and Schjødt, 2017).

Social protection and state legitimacy

State-building is a crucial element of peace building and improving social cohesion, since institutionalising and sustaining peace requires a state with the capacity and legitimacy needed to be able to prevent violence. State legitimacy can be defined as ‘people’s acceptance of a particular form of rule, political order, institution or actor as being legitimate’ (OECD 2010). State legitimacy is crucial to state-building, and conversely a lack of legitimacy contributes to state fragility, undermines state authority and thus capacity (Babajanian, 2012).

State repression and violence results in negative experiences of citizens with the state, a legacy of mistrust, and rejection of the legitimacy of state institutions. In situations of fragility, the inability or unwillingness of states to provide for the welfare of citizens and to improve standards of living has also undermined legitimacy and trust between the state and society. On the other hand, expanding delivery of services, including social protection, can potentially contribute to building state legitimacy (Haider and Mcloughlin, 2016). Gilley (2006) analysed statistically the determinants of state legitimacy for 72 countries, and found indications that the better that states do in providing quality governance, democratic rights, and welfare gains, the more they will be able to enjoy the support of their citizens (Gilley, 2006). A particular value of service delivery is that it is a clearly visible function of the state for citizens (Godamunne, 2017). However, if services are delivered in a manner which does not demonstrate fairness and professionalism on the part of state representatives, it may instead contribute to decreased legitimacy of the state in the eyes of citizens (Cummings and Paudel, 2019).

Other studies show that the causal relationship between service delivery and state legitimacy is not straightforward, but ‘is likely to be conditioned by shifting expectations of what the state should provide, subjective assessments of impartiality and distributive justice, the relational aspects of provision, how easy it is to attribute (credit or blame) performance to the state, and the technical and normative characteristics of particular services’ (Mcloughlin 2013). Building trust in the state can theoretically be achieved through (Godamunne, 2017):

- Increasing the *capacity* of the state to allocate resources in a manner which is responsive to the needs of its people.
- Ensuring that political, economic and social *processes* of state activities affirm inclusivity at all levels of society.
- Meeting the *expectations* of citizens through interactions with the state.

The role of social protection in strengthening the social contract

Social contract theory has been an important part of Western political thought since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The concept of a ‘social contract’ between citizens and the state is closely related to state legitimacy, as it refers to the expectations that the state have to conform to in order for citizens to perceive its authority as legitimate (Hickey 2011). One thing to note, in particular in fragile and conflict affected settings, is that there is not necessarily a single social contract within a particular society, but multiple kinds of social contract between various parts of the state and different parts of society. These social contracts are shaped by historical relationships between the state and different groups of society (Slater and Mallett 2017).

One of the propositions in the literature when discussing the role of service provision in building state legitimacy is the idea that welfare provision is an important aspect of the formation of the social contract between the state and its citizens (Mcloughlin, 2014). As noted above, an institutionalised social contract between the state and society emerges when a state is able to provide services to its

citizens by mobilising state resources and its *capacity* to fulfil the social *expectations*. These are subsequently mediated by the political *processes* through which the contract between the state and society is established or reinforced (GSDRC, 2011).

Influence of social protection on social indicators of social cohesion

The other main aspect of social cohesion is social relations between citizens. This includes levels of trust and solidarity within groups (family, friends, neighbours, ethnic groups) and between groups (strangers, other ethnic/religious groups, etc.), perceptions of belonging, access to support from social networks, levels of activism and volunteerism, levels of giving/donating and levels of social interaction (UNDP and SCG, 2015). Social indicators of social cohesion also include stereotyping, preconceptions and prejudice in society.

The effect of social protection on social capital

The social protection literature suggests that social protection can enhance individuals' ability to share their income and participate in social activities. Social protection transfers can theoretically increase labour market participation and cash transfers can promote citizen engagement in social networks and social activities. They can enable individuals to maintain or improve their economic status and thus increase their ability to participate in ceremonial, cultural and other social activities (Babajanian, 2012).

Active social participation in turn can help foster and strengthen social capital – i.e. the relations of trust and reciprocity that bind different individuals in a society. Reciprocity is one of the defining features of social exchange and social life: people who have no, or very little income are not able to reciprocate and are therefore often excluded from social networks. This is for example often the case for older people, and old age pensions can provide the cash needed to contribute to family expenses and donating as a part of traditional or religious ceremonies. In a similar fashion, formal social protection can strengthen informal or traditional social protection mechanisms, by enabling otherwise marginalised people to participate.

The effect of social protection on social exclusion

The concept of social exclusion (and social inclusion) is closely related to social cohesion, as it also describes relationships between citizens and between citizens and the state. Social exclusion can be defined as 'the denial of full personhood and full citizenship to certain groups on the basis of who they are, where they live or what they believe' (Kabeer, 2010). It can be conceptualised as comprising three distinct but interrelated dimensions: exclusionary forces, structural disadvantage and limitations in capabilities. Exclusionary forces often derive from prejudices and are manifested in discriminatory practices, institutional blindness and cultural and social practices which all serve to exclude vulnerable groups. Structural disadvantage includes inadequate infrastructure, weak communication systems and the absence of public and private services. Finally, limitations in the capability to engage with public authorities and access services arise for example from disability, ill health, psychological wellbeing and self-confidence, as well as levels of education, literacy and numeracy (Kidd, 2014).

There is a strong link between social exclusion, social cohesion and insecurity. Minority groups become more insecure if they are marginalised because of their ethnicity, gender, culture or religion. This can lead to insecurity in the wider society, if a marginalised group decides to use violence to seek to redress inequalities. People who are excluded may feel that they have little to lose by taking violent action (Stewart et al. 2006).

Social protection can contribute to reducing social exclusion in several ways by reducing vulnerability (Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker, 2012). Social protection can help overcome structural disadvantage, such as for example covering transport costs, as well as limitations in capability by for example improving access to education. There is also likely to be an effect on social inclusion through enhanced social capital (Attanasio et al., 2008).

Typically, marginalised groups include youth, older people, women, people with disabilities and ethnic and religious minorities. Social protection can support these groups to overcome barriers they face to inclusion. For example, besides food, basic things such as soap, clothes and shoes are often mentioned by older people with no source of income as the things they prioritise when they first gain access to a pension. This is because these are things that are important for social status and dignity and for social inclusion. By improving dignity, social protection transfers can improve the social status of beneficiaries, thereby enabling them to improve their social capital, participating in social gatherings and benefitting from support from family and social networks. Similarly, it has been found that social protection programmes that have gender-sensitive design features can have important effects on women's empowerment (Holmes and Jones, 2010). Disability benefits play an important role in facilitating inclusion of people with disabilities to participate in social life, education and employment (Kidd et al. 2019).

Influence of social protection on economic indicators of social cohesion

Economic indicators of social cohesion include perceptions of social mobility (will my children be better off than me?), satisfaction with living standards, attitudes towards the future, levels of access to basic services and livelihood/employment opportunities, perceptions of economic inequality and satisfaction with the progress of development and economic opportunities (UNDP and SCG, 2015).

The effect of social protection on poverty

A key pathway of social protection effects on social cohesion is through reduction of poverty and provision of income security. For example, the ILO and IMF in a joint conference on Growth, Employment and Social Cohesion in 2010 agreed that economic hardship and unemployment threatens 'the stability of existing democracies and hinder the development of new democracies in countries undergoing political transitions.' As a result, the conference recommended strengthening social protection to provide populations with better protection against economic shocks and to reduce income inequality (Babajanien, 2012).

Social protection transfers have a direct impact on the income of recipients. However, how large this impact is, and whether it can also be seen at a national level, depends on programme coverage and the adequacy of benefit levels. It is worth noting that not only effects on poverty reduction are important, but also the sense of security that social protection programmes provide, including to those who are not currently receiving a transfer. For example, contributory social insurance programmes provide workers with the sense of security that comes from knowing that their families will not be ruined if they are involved in an accident at work. Similarly, universal old age pensions provide the whole population with the sense of security that comes from knowing that they will still retain some economic independence in old age.

The effect of social protection on economic inequality

Social protection programmes are enormously important for reducing inequality in high-income countries. In European countries, taxes and transfers result in reduction of inequality with an average of 15 Gini points. However, in most low- and middle-income countries, investments in social protection are still too limited to have a significant impact on aggregate inequality (Babajanian, 2012). The effects on inequality are important, as inequality has been empirically linked to outbreaks of violence, social conflicts and crime.

Inequality creates disparate social development opportunities and outcomes. Disparities in for example health, education and life opportunities undermine trust and weaken bonds of solidarity, contributing to higher levels of crime and social unrest. When inequality is present along ethnic lines, it can lead to polarization, extremism and in the extreme case the failure of the state (UNESCAP 2015). Research has emphasised horizontal inequalities, in particular between different ethnic/religious groups or geographic areas (as opposed to vertical inequalities between different income groups) as an important source of conflict (Stewart 2002; Langer 2004; Stewart, Brown and Mancini 2005; Mancini 2005; Østby 2006).

Not only economic inequality between individuals or population groups is important; geographic disparities also matter. A study by the Asia Foundation of 26 sub-national conflict areas across Asia and the Pacific found that the uneven development between conflict-affected areas and the rest of the country increased the widespread perceptions of injustice, unequal opportunities, and marginalization that fuelled animosity and conflict (Parks et al., 2013). Social protection transfers implemented in marginalised parts of a country can therefore play an important role in re-distributing resources within a country and contribute to national social cohesion.

Social protection as a tool for preventing unrest related to covariate income shocks

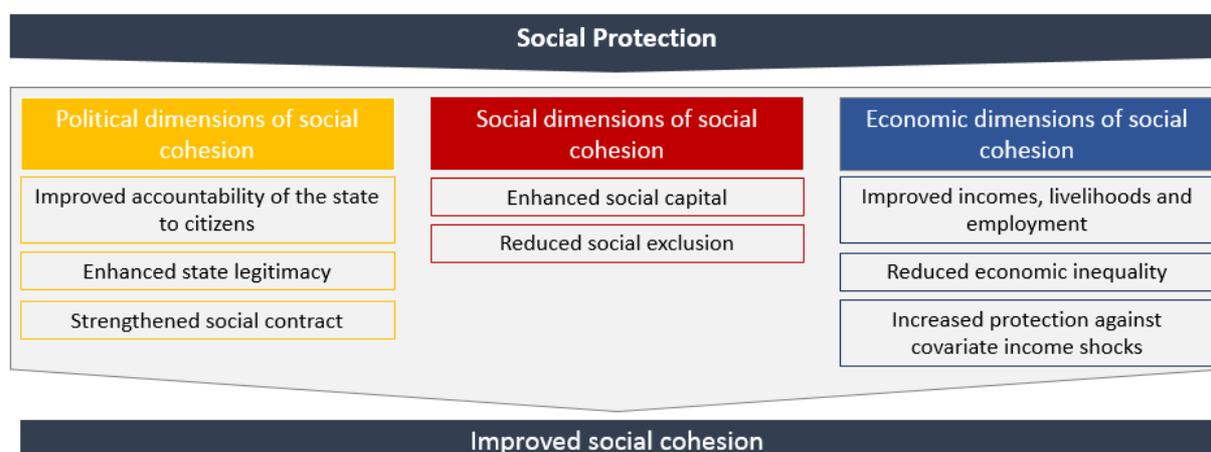
Covariate shocks refer to shocks that are felt by entire communities at the same time. Social unrest is often triggered by economic shocks. Covariate shocks may be natural (e.g. drought, floods, typhoons, earthquakes), political (e.g. political crisis and armed conflict) or economic (e.g. economic downturns, price increases) (O'Brien et al. 2018; Nel and Richarts, 2008; Rezaeian 2013).

In many low- and middle-income countries, the majority of the population relies on subsistence agriculture and are therefore very vulnerable to climate change. Social protection can be an important means of providing farmers with a safety net in the case of prolonged dry spells, droughts or flooding, which are likely to become much more frequent in the near future. Social protection transfers can also provide farmers with the means for adopting agricultural practices that are more resilient to climate change.

In recent years, a literature has developed on the topic of shock-responsive social protection, which describes when and how social protection programmes can aid responses to covariate shocks. O'Brien et al. (2018) describes five main approaches for social protection programmes to respond to covariate shocks: making small adjustments to the design of the core programme ('design tweaks'); using elements of an existing programme or system while delivering a separate emergency response ('piggybacking'); topping up support to beneficiaries ('vertical expansion'); temporarily extending support to new households ('horizontal expansion'); and aligning social protection and/or humanitarian interventions with one another ('alignment').

While most of the literature on shock-responsive social protection has considered responses to natural disasters, increases in prices of basic goods, especially energy, is also a frequent cause of violence and unrest, and social protection can be an effective tool for mitigating this. Several countries, including for example Indonesia and Iran, have successfully used social protection transfers as a way of compensating poor households for the losses they incur as a result of price hikes (Hossain, 2018; Salehi-Isfahani, Stucki and Deutschmann, 2014; World Bank, 2012).

Figure 2: Theoretical impact of social protection on political, social and economic dimensions of social cohesion



International experiences of using social protection as a tool for enhancing social cohesion and national reconciliation

Several countries have introduced or expanded social protection programmes to promote peace building, conflict prevention and inclusion of particular social groups, including ethnic minorities and indigenous populations.

In Latin America, **Argentina's** 'Jefes y Jefas', an unemployment benefit programme, was introduced as a response to rapidly rising unemployment and the threat of unrest, as a result of rising poverty levels following the 2001 economic crisis. In **Brazil**, rights to social protection formed a key part of the new social contract developed after the end of military dictatorship, as reflected in the 1988 constitution.

In **Mexico**, the large conditional cash transfer programme 'Progresa', which benefitted nearly 6 million families, was originally introduced in part to address the disaffection with the state that had fuelled the 'Zapatista' uprising among the indigenous people in the poor state of Chiapas. This uprising was in turn linked to the increase in inequality between different parts of the country that resulted from Mexico entering the NAFTA free trade agreement with the United States and Canada. The programme was especially directed at poorer regions such as Chiapas and Oaxaca, where the majority of the population was covered by the programme (UNDP, 2011).

In **Colombia**, the large conditional cash transfer programme 'Familias en Accion', which reaches 15 million people (30 percent of the population), was originally introduced as one component of the 'Plan Colombia' strategy for ending the war on narcotics trafficking and guerrilla groups. The programme has been effective in increasing school enrolment and eradicating child labour, and there is evidence that it has contributed to demobilisation of child soldiers from paramilitary groups (Pena, Urrego and Villa 2017).

In sub-Saharan Africa, **Kenya** has also used social protection transfers as a tool for promoting stability in the face of civil unrest (DFID, 2011). In **South Africa**, social protection transfers have been a key part of crafting a new and more inclusive social contract after the end of Apartheid. In **Rwanda**, expansion of social protection through the 'Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme' (VUP) has been a key part of the development strategy that aims to promote social stability and the legitimacy of the ruling coalition, following the 1994 genocide (Lavers 2016).

In Asia, **Indonesia** and **India** has used expansion of social protection (the conditional cash transfer programme 'Program Keluarga Harapan' (PKH) and the 'NREGA' public works programme respectively) as a key element in building and strengthening the social contract. The rapid expansion of **China's** 'Minimum Living Standards Scheme' has also been a key strategy for countering rising unemployment and inequality between population groups and regions, thereby mitigating the risk of spreading social unrest.

In the **Philippines**, the 'Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program' (4P) conditional cash transfer programme is partly targeted at conflict-affected areas, and there is experimental evidence showing that the programme has caused a substantial decrease in conflict-related incidents and reduced insurgent influence in the villages where it is present (Croft, Felter and Johnston 2014).

In **Sri Lanka**, the state's long-term commitment to social welfare is a key part of the social contract between the state and citizens. Following the civil war between 1983 and 2009, social protection has been an important tool for re-creating linkages between citizens and the state and rebuild trust after the war (Gunetilleke, 2005; Godamunne, 2015 and 2017).

This Chapter looks in more detail at the experiences of two Asian countries, **Nepal** and **Timor-Leste**, which have both in different ways used investment in universal social protection programmes as a tool for increasing social cohesion during and following civil conflict.

Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste acquired independence in May 2002 after about 275 years as a Portuguese colony followed by almost a quarter of a century of Indonesian occupation. Timor-Leste has experienced severe unrest and violence for extended periods of its recent history, both before and after independence.

In the lead up to Portuguese withdrawal conflict broke out between the two main Timorese parties, the Revolutionary Front for Liberation of East Timor (FRETILIN) and the Uniao Democratic Timorese (Valters 2015). Subsequently, during Indonesian occupation, the Timorese population was also subjected to wide-scale violence, with an estimated 102,800 to 183,000 conflict-related deaths (Valters 2015).

The withdrawal of Indonesian forces in 1999 in the aftermath of the independence vote led to around 1,400 deaths, and it is estimated that 300,000 people fled to the hills and forests near their homes, with 250-280,000 people deported to West Timor (out of a population of less than 1 million). 70 percent of the already poor country's infrastructure was destroyed and positions in the civil service, industry and service sector left vacant by the Indonesians (Valters 2015). As a result of this, the UN Security Council authorised the Australian-led International Force for East Timor to take over the administration of the country until independence was finally declared on 20 May 2002 (Valters 2015).

While there were sporadic incidents of unrest in the period following independence, Timor-Leste experienced relative peace until 2006 when a major crisis erupted again. A group of soldiers, later known as 'the petitioners', wrote a petition to the Prime Minister and President calling for an investigation into discrimination within the military against people from the west of Timor-Leste. The petition sparked conflict between different groups within both the military and police forces as well as between different neighbourhoods in the capital. The ensuing violence led to up to 200 deaths, 150,000 people displaced (10 percent of the population) and widespread destruction of infrastructure (Valters 2015).

The many years of Indonesian occupation and then civil unrest has had an impact on the young country's infrastructure, education, health systems, productive capacity and the population's wellbeing (ILO 2018). The causes of the 2006-crisis were complex, but among other factors observers have blamed the failure of the government to meet the high expectations of the population following independence, with persistently high rates of poverty and poor service delivery (Dale et al. 2014).

In order to address these issues, the government started investing significant parts of the budget in social protection transfers in the years after the 2006-crisis. The 26 programmes that make up the current social protection system added up to government investment of 15.5 percent of non-oil GDP in 2015 (8 percent of GDP including oil revenue) (ILO, 2018). This makes Timor-Leste one of the Asian countries which invests the most in its social protection system.

Social protection is a right defined in Article 56 of the Constitution of Timor-Leste. Furthermore, Articles 20 and 21 reinforce the right to protection for older persons and persons with disabilities (Bongestabs, 2016). Already in the first National Development Plan from 2002, social protection was seen as a way of ensuring stability. However, it was not until after the 2006 crisis that investment in tax-financed social protection was scaled up. Following the crisis, the Government changed its approach to social protection to respond to the causes of the conflict and to provide more visible benefits to the population, and thereby improving social peace and cohesion (ILO 2018).

Timor-Leste's Minister of Finance, Emilia Peres, explained the motivation for introducing social protection programmes by linking issues of poverty, social exclusion and security: 'In the immediate post-conflict period the poorest people are the most exposed to misinformation, corruption and disillusionment wilfully brought on by players interested in capturing the aforementioned power vacuum. Direct cash transfers to the most vulnerable groups can play a key role in counteracting those negative forces and securing stability' (Peres 2009: 18-19 in Babajanian, 2012).

As part of the National Recovery Strategy following the 2006 crisis, a range of new programmes were established, including:

- Pension for Older Persons and People with Disabilities (Subsídio de Apoio a Idosos e Inválidos, SAI), a universal social pension and disability benefit.

- Bolsa de Mãe (Mother's Purse). A social protection transfer to low-income families.
- Payments to veterans of the resistance to Indonesia's occupation of the country and their survivors.
- Payments to internally displaced persons (IDPs). These one-off payments targeted approximately 100,000 persons who were internally displaced during, and in the aftermath of, the 2006 crisis in order to cover the costs of damaged or destroyed houses and lost possessions.
- 'Petitioner' payments. This was a demobilisation program consisting of payments of USD 8,000 to each of the 591 disgruntled soldiers which helped instigate the 2006 crisis in order to reintegrate into civilian life.

The tax-financed universal Pension for Older Persons and People with Disabilities (Subsídio de Apoio a Idosos e Inválidos, SAI) was introduced by law in 2008. The programme is universal for everybody above the age of 60 and everybody above 18 with a disability. It currently provides 30 USD per month (14.6 percent of GDP per capita) paid twice a year – corresponding to about 8 percent of average household income. The total cost is about 1.1 percent of total GDP (1.8 percent of GDP excluding oil income). The first payments were made in August 2008 and the programme was rapidly rolled out thereafter. As of 2016 it was delivering benefits to 86,974 older persons (100 percent of the target group) and 7,313 people with disabilities (18.2 percent of the target group) (Bongestabs, 2016).

Although older persons make up only about 6 percent of the population in Timor-Leste, almost one in three households have a person aged above 60, so the programme reaches a significant part of the population. There is a strong intergenerational transfer, with an average of 28.1 percent of the transfer being spent on grandchildren's education. As in other countries, older people contribute to the overall household economy and invest a significant share of their resources into the improvement of the family earning capacity (Bongestabs, 2016).

The SAI and Bolsa de Mãe have wide coverage, but provide relatively low benefit levels. In contrast, the programmes aimed at veterans cover a very small part of the population, but provide very high benefit levels (ILO, 2018). As a result of the very generous benefits, programmes for veterans consume more than half the total investment in social protection. Given budget limitations, this puts pressure on other social protection budgets (ILO 2018). These priorities underscore the fact that securing stability by providing payments to potential 'spoilers' of the peace (veterans) has been more important than poverty reduction in the prioritisation of social protection spending by the Timor-Leste government.

In line with these priorities, the most important impact of the social protection programmes has arguably been its role in peace building. Transfers has been important for returning and resettling IDPs, resulting in a largely peaceful return of people to communities (Wallis, 2015). Similarly, the payments to veterans and the 'petitioners' have been an effective way to deal with the risk that these veterans posed to the stability of the state, encouraging former soldiers to demobilise and re-integrate into society (Wallis, 2015).

Overall, the initiatives in the National Recovery Strategy appear to have been effective in securing peace in Timor-Leste. Instances of violence has declined since 2008, the numbers of homicides are now lower than the pre-crisis average and relatively low for a conflict-affected setting (Valters, 2015). International indicators support the hypothesis that, relative to its violent history, Timor-Leste has made strong progress on security since the 2006 crisis. Of course, attributing this to the social protection investment is difficult. Analysts point to several things that have played a role in the improved security situation, including peace keeping interventions and international support, a relatively stable political settlement, development of a national police force, effective state responses to security threats and local responses to violence.

However, there is broad agreement that social protection cash transfers have contributed significantly to improvements in personal security (Valters, 2015). Many stakeholders argue that compensating veterans has been key to ensuring the stability of the country. The National Recovery Strategy, including cash transfers to IDPs, has been praised as a *'remarkably efficient and effective way of ending a displacement crisis in what, so far at least, appears to be durable manner'* (Van der Auweraert 2012 in Valters 2015).

However, there are also challenges related to the large payments to veterans, including resentment among those not benefitting, and the creation of pressure groups that are lobbying for more payments to these particular groups. Universal programmes with broader constituents and a potential for strengthening the broader social contract are in this respect preferable to benefits targeted at specific pressure groups. The latter risks politicisation of payments to veterans in return for political support, and can be seen as strengthening clientelist forms of state-society relations rather than the social contract between the general population and the state. Analysts worry that the approach of paying veterans risks creating a sense of entitlement among these actors and deepen inequalities that could lead to conflict in the future (Valters, 2015).

Another challenge is that the prioritisation of a small group of veterans is taking resources away from the broader programmes. The result is that poverty and inequality remain relatively high, and the income from oil and gas extraction may not be sufficient to address them (Valters, 2015). This is particularly troubling as a wealth of research highlights the potential for inequality to lead to conflict (Stewart, 2008 in Valters, 2015).

‘Solutions that encourage patronage and centralise political power with individuals are likely to be effective only in the short term. Beyond that, it is critical that citizens experience a development dividend in order to ensure grievances are not fomented that could undermine peace in the longer term. This means shifting to inclusive development, in which the peace dividend is shared widely and not just with elites or those that pose a threat.’ (Valters, 2015)

Micro-simulation of the impact of social protection on poverty levels in Timor-Leste shows impacts that are comparable to other countries in the region, but that are not commensurate with the higher level of investment (Dale et al. 2014). This is because of the disproportionate amount of spending on veterans’ payments, and low benefit levels of the old age and disability pension and family benefit. The family benefit currently has almost no impact on the national poverty rate because of the low coverage and low benefit level (Dale et al. 2014).

In summary, Timor-Leste spends a comparatively large amount of GDP on social protection programmes, with the purpose of ensuring stability and peace. However, the majority of spending goes to a small group of veterans, with benefit levels of programmes with broader coverage relatively low. Transfers to veterans who are potential ‘spoilers’ in the peace-building effort have so far been effective in securing political stability. However, in order to ensure stability in the long-term and build an inclusive social contract, it will be necessary to direct more resources to the social protection programmes with broader coverage, such as the old age pension which reaches a third of the population, so that the general population also benefit from the peace dividend.

Nepal

Nepal experienced a violent conflict between 1996 and 2006, when the government fought a violent Maoist insurgency. During the ten years of conflict about 17,000 people were killed and hundreds of thousands internally displaced. In 2006, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, but it was only after a prolonged process and severe political instability that a new constitution finally took effect in 2017. Although the new constitution is a major milestone on the country’s path towards peace and stability, periodic unrest and violence continues to flare up. Violence in Nepal is closely linked to social exclusion, which happens along lines of geography, ethnicity, language, caste, gender, age and ability, and these issues have also dominated discussions to agree on the new constitution (Bennett 2006; Adhikari 2014). The constitution introduces very significant changes to the administrative and political structure of the country, with the establishment of a federal state with seven provinces.

Social protection has played a key role in successive governments’ efforts to forge a more inclusive social contract in Nepal (Holmes and Uphadya, 2009). In particular in the period after the peace agreement, and especially since 2008, social protection programmes have expanded greatly, focused on fostering social inclusion, in the realisation that this is a prerequisite of peace and stability (World Bank, 2011).

As in Timor-Leste, the post-conflict process in Nepal has also included support to families of martyrs, those affected by conflict and the wounded, and providing payments to de-mobilising ex-Maoist

combatants (World Bank, 2011). However, the foundation of the social protection system was already laid before the conflict, with the introduction in 1995 of a universal old age allowance. The backbone of the social protection system today consists of a range of universal or categorically targeted tax-financed social protection programmes.

Already the Nepalese Constitution of 1990 aimed to create a more inclusive society, and cash transfers were seen as a form of affirmative action for marginalised groups. The 1996-2006 violence highlighted the issue of social exclusion, which was seen as a major cause of the conflict and is also outlined in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the civil war (Drucza, 2016).

During the armed conflict, many government offices were closed and one of the first challenges in the post-peace agreement period was therefore to restore government services in the areas affected by conflict (Jones, 2012). For successive governments, cash transfers have been seen as a very visible and direct way for the government to extend services to the people, many of whom will not otherwise come into contact with the state (Holmes and Upadhyaya 2009).

The first programme to be introduced was the tax-financed universal old age pension in 1995. This was followed by a widow's allowance and a disability allowance, and later a child allowance targeted at Dalit children. The child grant for Dalits can be seen as an affirmative action, and it was introduced by the Maoist government in 2009 in recognition of the exclusion of lower caste groups. But also, coverage and spending of other programmes were expanded, and under the Maoists expenditure on social protection increased from 0.6 percent of GDP in 2008 to 3 percent in 2010 (Drucza, 2016).

Evaluations of the impact of Nepal's programmes show that benefit levels are generally too low to make a significant impact on poverty and inequality in the country, although recent increases may change this (Drucza, 2016; KC et al. 2014; Adhikari et al. 2014). However, even though they have limited impact on material well-being, some research shows that Nepal's social protection programmes are in fact effective in meeting their objectives of contributing to peace building and state legitimacy (Holmes and Uphadya, 2009).

Social protection transfers allow recipients to participate more in community activities, increase their access to information and social networks and enhance the social contract and people's relationship with the state (Drucza, 2016). A survey carried out by Adhikari et al. (2014) found that 93 percent of beneficiaries felt the introduction of the Child Grant was an indication that the government cared about their socioeconomic situation and 85 percent said it had improved their opinion of the government.

'Giving excluded citizens access to government benefits enables them to feel part of the system of the state and to have a relationship with the government. It gives them a sense of citizenship, rights consciousness, and of feeling included, respected, and cared for.' (Drucza, 2016)

The research by Drucza (2016) shows that the relationship that people have with the state is important, not just for state legitimacy, but also for people's sense of inclusion and well-being. Schjødt (2017) also found a clear difference in the level of trust expressed by beneficiaries of the social protection programmes and non-beneficiaries without any opportunity for direct contact with local officials. There are important effects on social indicators of social cohesion as well, with recipients of the old age allowance reporting increased self-esteem. The programme also contributes to strengthening family bonds, as recipients have increased capacity to contribute to the household, for example through small gifts for grandchildren such as snacks or stationary items (KC et al. 2014). One survey found that almost half of spending of the old age allowance is on family needs (HelpAge International, 2009).

The payments can also enable recipients to participate in social activities. A survey carried out by the government in 2012 found that 75 percent of beneficiaries of the social protection benefits reported that they used part of the allowance for social and religious activities, and qualitative research by HelpAge International similarly showed how older people had increased social interactions and were proud to be able to donate during religious ceremonies (HelpAge International 2009; Government of Nepal, 2012).

Nepal's experience shows the importance of the principle of universality in a post-conflict context with multiple lines of divisions and social exclusion. The social protection transfers provide a social mechanism that publicly demonstrates equality, something which is closely associated with the

universality of transfers, as transfers directed at ‘the poor’ would not provide the same message of equality.

The simple eligibility criteria and high levels of coverage mean that information levels are generally high, and that programmes are more effective in reaching the intended beneficiaries than would be expected given the low capacity of the Nepal administration and the challenging geography of the country (Schjødt 2017). Social protection programmes, like most public programmes, have the potential to entrench local power structures if cash is leveraged for patronage or for vote-buying purposes. This is especially the case in weak states such as Nepal, where accountability mechanisms are limited (Harland 2011 in Drucza 2016). However, in practice, research indicate that social protection is not widely used for patronage in Nepal, something that is most likely associated with the simple and transparent eligibility criteria of universal or categorically targeted programmes (Samson, 2012; Schjødt 2017).

On the other hand, the fact that Dalits have a lower age of eligibility for the Old Age Allowance and that they receive the Child Grant contributes to exacerbating existing animosities between Dalits and high caste Hindus (Schjødt, 2017; KC et al. 2014; Drucsa 2016).

Another important design element is the fact that transfers are delivered manually in cash by government officials to citizens. This personal interaction with a government representative is very rare for many people in Nepal (Drucza 2016; Schjødt, 2017). Drucza (2016) suggests that ‘in a post-conflict country with severe social exclusion, maintaining a relationship between citizens and the lowest tier of government official and finding ways to make the latter locally accountable could have important effects.’ The manual delivery of cash transfers offer a ‘sighting of the state’ and payments provide a form of interface between beneficiaries and officials that would otherwise be missing (Drucza 2016; Corbridge et al. 2005).

Nepal shows how universal social protection programmes can function as tools for social inclusion and strengthening of state-society relations even in low-income countries. From this perspective, the strategy of successive Nepalese governments has been to prioritise programmes with broad coverage but (until recently) low benefit levels. This means that large parts of the population can be reached without programmes becoming prohibitively expensive. Programmes may not have a large effect on poverty levels in the beginning, but a sound institutional and political foundation have been established for the gradual expansion of programmes as fiscal space becomes available (Samson, 2012). Nepal also shows that high benefit levels are not necessary for cash transfers to contribute to social inclusion, citizenship and well-being, but that even small amounts of transfers can have an impact on social exclusion (Drucza 2016).

International evidence on the effects of social protection on indicators of social cohesion

This chapter reviews the empirical evidence for the theoretical pathways outlined in Chapter 3, drawing on the country experiences described in Chapter 4. We consider general programme effects, as well as the importance of programme design.

General programme effects

Political indicators of social cohesion: strengthening state-citizen relations

There is evidence that social protection can contribute to strengthening accountability of government officials to citizens and increase state legitimacy.

Strengthening accountability

A prerequisite for strengthening state-citizen relations is that the state recognises people as citizens with rights. This requires that the state has a way to recognise citizens through some form of national

identification. It is common for social protection programmes to require national ID cards, and this has in several cases led to large increases in registration. This has for example been the case in the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) in Northern Kenya (Osofisan, 2011). In Brazil, Bolsa Familia has been an important vehicle for women in remote areas to access national identity cards and gain a greater understanding of citizenship rights (Hunter and Sugiyama, 2014). In Pakistan, an estimated four million women have registered in the national identity card registry after the introduction of the BISP cash transfer programme (Jamil nd). In Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Nepal, programmes have led to significant improvements in birth registration (Owusu-Addo, Renzaho and Smith, 2018; Schjødt, 2018).

This registration is important, since it is often a requirement for accessing other public services. For example, in Pakistan, having a national identity card is a prerequisite for *de jure* citizenship, granting basic rights such as marriage, divorce, issuance of a passport, registration of childbirth and voting. Experiences from countries such as Brazil suggests that *de jure* rights are not sufficient, but are a necessary first step towards a wider process of rights claims, particularly in states with emergent democratic systems and a long history of authoritarian rule (Jamil nd). In some cases, social protection programmes have explicitly had as a goal to strengthen citizenship, for example in El Salvador's conditional cash transfer programme, where payments were combined with trainings on gender equality, participation and community organisation, and the establishment of community and municipal committees (Adato et al. 2016).

As noted above, there is theoretically a risk that social protection transfers can reinforce existing clientelistic relationships between citizens and the state by providing more resources for powerful individuals to distribute to their supporters. On the other hand, social protection transfers could theoretically contribute to undermining this kind of clientelism by distributing resources according to set rules, rather than through personal networks, and by making citizens more independent of resources from powerful patrons (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; De La O 2015; Hunter and Sugiyama 2014; Garay 2017).

There is evidence that social protection transfers increase support for the incumbent in elections (Labonne, J. 2013). This can theoretically be a result of either vote-buying (with negative implications for accountability) or an expression of voter support for popular programmes (with positive implications for accountability). For example, in Nepal the expansion of social protection programmes has been a result of competition for voters between different parties. This can be seen as a case of political competition in a democracy bringing forth programmes supported by voters. On the contrary, there is no indication that social protection programmes in Nepal are being used for clientelistic purposes to buy support for political actors. The empirical evidence generally indicates that whether social protection transfers have a positive or negative impact on accountability depends on programme design and implementation (Jamil nd; Zucho Jr. 2010, De La O 2013, Weitz-Shapiro 2012, Stokes et al 2013). These factors are discussed in more detail below in relation to programme design.

Increasing state legitimacy

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) has since 2011 provided much needed empirical evidence on the linkages between service delivery, including social protection, and state legitimacy. The research provides evidence from eight fragile and conflict-affected countries: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda. The SLRC has used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine the links between people's experiences with service delivery and their relationships with the state (Nixon and Mallet 2017). The SLRC research generally shows that many other factors than service delivery are important for how citizens perceive state legitimacy. The research also confirms that *how* services are provided is just as, or even more, important for their ability to strengthen state legitimacy than *what* is delivered. SLRC's qualitative research shows that 'perceived unfairness, corruption or exclusion are important factors influencing how people connect their experience of services to their views of government' (Nixon and Mallet 2017).

The connection between service delivery and state legitimacy is therefore empirically much more complex than is often assumed, with perceptions varying according to people's previous experiences and also differing in relation to different levels of government (Maxwell et al. 2016). When the state

fails to meet expectations of fair and respectful treatment, its legitimacy is weakened. For state legitimacy to be strengthened, the state must engage with citizens fairly and with respect. This concerns how citizens participate in and experience state functions, but also how citizens see their social identity represented in state discourse and actions (Cummings and Paudel, 2019).

Slater and Mallett (2017) therefore recommend that social protection programme implementers should not just be concerned with getting the right amount of money to the right people at the right time, but also with how these processes are experienced by citizens:

‘Start thinking about service-delivery programming less in terms of tangible assets and structures – service-delivery facilities, human resourcing, payroll systems – and more in terms of the relationships and behaviours through which people experience service delivery... How are users being treated? Is the nature of that treatment potentially undermining not only the quality of the service but also their views towards the state?’ (Slater and Mallett 2017).

For social protection specifically, the SLRC research found that the simple receipt of a payment was generally not associated with changes in perception of government. One exception is Pakistan, where beneficiaries of social protection transfers had more positive perceptions of the government (Nixon and Mallett 2017).

Another study from Tanzania also found positive effects. The study exploited the randomized introduction of a conditional cash transfer programme to examine the effects on trust in local leaders. The results indicate that, two and a half years after start of implementation, the transfers had significantly increased trust in elected local leaders among beneficiaries of the programme (the study did not ask non-beneficiaries). The effect was larger in communities where more information was available to citizens through more frequent village meetings. Perceptions of government responsiveness to citizens’ concerns and perceptions of the honesty of local leaders also increased (Evans, Holtemeyer and Kosec, 2018).

There is also evidence from Peru showing that the ‘Juntos’ conditional cash transfer programme increased trust among beneficiaries in the government institutions directly related to programme conditions (e.g. health services). However, among non-beneficiaries, the poverty-targeted programme led to less trust in the ombudsman’s office, which was responsible for receiving grievances about targeting, but was not able to address these grievances by changing eligibility status (Camacho, 2014).

Social indicators of social cohesion: strengthening relations between citizens

There is evidence from the literature that social protection transfers can contribute to preventing violence and unrest, improving social inclusion and strengthening social capital.

Preventing violence and unrest

Studies from several countries show that social protection can be an effective tool for preventing violence and unrest at the micro level. Comparing levels of social transfers over time in fourteen Indian states, Justino (2011) finds that higher levels of redistributive transfers are associated with decreases in civil unrest across India. She finds that social protection transfers are a more effective and efficient way of reducing civil unrest than policing, and that policing may actually trigger further social discontent in the long run (Justino, 2011). Similarly, Fetzner (2019) finds that the large Indian cash for work programme NREGA, by mitigating income shocks, has been successful in lowering levels of violence (Fetzner, 2019).

In Colombia, one study found evidence that the Familias en Accion conditional cash transfer programme had positive effects on the demobilisation of combatants (Pena, Urrego and Villa, 2017). Similarly, in the Philippines, the 4P conditional cash transfer programme decreased conflict and insurgent influence at the village level (Croft, Felter and Johnston 2016). The authors explain this finding by the programme weakening the ability of insurgents to recruit combatants from villages that received the programme. A study from India similarly found that the NREGA cash for work programme increased cooperation by the local population with police against Maoist insurgents (Khanna and Zimmermann 2014).

These micro-level effects are also reflected at the macro-level in cross-national analyses of the relationship between investment in social protection and social unrest. There is a correlation between levels of investment in social protection and levels of social unrest in Asian countries, with those investing more in social protection also less likely to experience social unrest (UNESCAP 2015). Ascertaining whether there is also a causal effect of social protection on unrest is more difficult. However, analysis by Taydas and Peksen (2012), examining cross-national data for the 1975-2005 period, found similar results: as the level of government investment in welfare policies (education, health and social protection) increases, the likelihood of civil conflict onset declines significantly. The study controlled for several other possible explanations of internal conflict. On the contrary, general public spending and military expenditures did not have any effect on the probability of civil unrest (Taydas and Peksen, 2012).

The literature on 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration' (DDR) describes how social protection programmes have often been involved in providing transitional assistance to ex-combatants in the form of cash payments, in-kind assistance, and vocational training, among others. DDR programmes in several countries including Sierra Leone and Liberia have been implemented in conjunction with longer-term social protection instruments such as social funds in the effort to rebuild war-torn communities, reintegrate displaced populations, and help ex-combatant find jobs and livelihoods (World Bank 2012).

In Liberia, The Sustainable Transformation of Youth in Liberia (STYL) programme, combined behavioural therapy and unconditional cash transfers. This included an eight-week programme of cognitive behaviour therapy developed by a local community organization. The therapy, led by reformed street youth and ex-combatants, aimed to foster self-control and a new self-image. The therapy programme led to persistent falls in crime, drug use, and violence, especially in the group receiving cash in addition to therapy (Jung, 2017).

There is evidence that the use of cash transfers during reintegration of ex-combatants can have a positive impact on local and national security. For example, lower levels of violence have been reported in parts of Liberia where the Danish Refugee Council was implementing a cash transfer programme for ex-combatants. Sierra Leone's relatively low crime rate is also often attributed to transitional cash transfers to ex-combatants.

DRR can be seen as a social contract specifically between combatants and the government. Combatants surrender their weapons in return for assistance from the government to find new livelihoods. Re-integration programmes often include temporary social protection transfers, lasting 6-12 months. This has, however, in some cases caused tensions with other community members (for example in Liberia and Sierra Leone), who resent ex-combatants being rewarded and civilians being excluded. This risks creating the basis for new hostilities. The precondition of handing in a weapon to receive a cash benefit can create loopholes that may be exploited, which also highlights the potential advantages of using broader eligibility criteria (Willibald, 2006).

Addressing social exclusion

The ability of social protection transfers to increase access to education is well documented, and this can have important effects on social inclusion (Bastagli et al. 2016). For example, Mexico's Oportunidades has contributed to closing the education gap between indigenous and non-indigenous children (Holmes & Slater, 2007). In turn, more equal access to education is associated with lower risk of conflict. A large study of the relationship between education inequality and conflict across nearly 100 countries and a 50-year timespan found that the likelihood of experiencing violent conflict doubles in countries with high education inequality between ethnic and religious groups. The findings hold when controlling for other possible explanations of conflict (FHI 360, 2015). An ODI research project carried out between 2011 and 2014 examined the potential for social protection to contribute to social inclusion in four countries in South Asia (Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Afghanistan). The synthesis report from the project shows that social protection programmes can be designed and implemented in ways that addresses the outcomes and drivers of social exclusion (Babajanian, Hagen-Zanker and Holmes, 2014). As described above, Nepal is an example of a country which has explicitly used social protection transfers to counter social exclusion. On the one hand, there is some evidence that the universal transfers provide a sense of equality for marginalised groups. On the other hand, benefit levels are too low to be able to compensate for structural barriers

to inclusion, for example in terms of access to employment, land and services, and indicators of social exclusion remain high (Koehler, 2011). In addition, some research has found that the targeting of the child benefits to Dalits only exacerbates existing prejudice and discrimination.

Increasing social capital

Studies from several countries show that social protection transfers increase social capital by enabling participation in social events. Attanasio et al. (2009) provides evidence from an experiment in two poor neighbourhoods in the city of Cartagena in Colombia, showing that measures of social capital, in the form of cooperation among neighbours, was higher in beneficiary than in non-beneficiary neighbourhoods.

The systematic review of the impact of cash transfer programmes in sub-Saharan Africa carried out by Owusu-Addo, Renzaho and Smith (2018) found four programmes that evaluated their impacts on social capital, with three of these (in Lesotho, Tanzania and Uganda) reporting significant improvements. In addition, ten qualitative studies found that cash transfers improved the social capital of beneficiaries by enabling reciprocity and increasing networks and civic engagement. Two studies showed that cash transfer significantly enhanced involvement of beneficiaries in community decision-making and six qualitative studies found that cash transfers increased beneficiaries' involvement in decision-making, facilitated reintegration into community life and increase the perception of state institutions being accountable to citizens (Owusu-Addo, Renzaho and Smith 2018).

Research in Nepal and Bangladesh also found support for the hypothesis that social protection can enhance social participation. Beneficiaries have increased financial means to buy gifts and better clothing and participate in ceremonial activities. In Nepal, the process of applying for and collecting the transfer facilitated interaction and dialogue between different community members, mostly women. While these interactions usually happened within existing ethnic groups, in Bangladesh the research found that beneficiaries also perceived their confidence in dealing with community members of another ethnicity/religion or talking to local government officials to have increased (Babajanian, Hagen-Zanker and Holmes, 2014).

Research on the effects of conditional cash transfers in South America highlights how they provide opportunities for social interaction. In the case of Mexico's Progresa, for example, bonds between participants have been strengthened by participation in monthly meetings, health education talks, and community work activities. In the case of Peru's Juntos, one study indicates that mothers of beneficiary households tend to form organisations that provide opportunities for interaction as well as support for members in the event of unexpected shocks such as illness (Camacho, 2014).

There is also evidence that social protection can strengthen informal or traditional social protection mechanisms, by enabling otherwise marginalised people to take part. On the contrary, there does not seem to be any empirical support for the notion that social protection transfers 'crowd out' or replaces traditional modes of support (Evans, Holtemeyer and Kosec 2018).

Economic indicators of social cohesion: more equitable distribution of resources

Decreasing poverty

Poverty can be a contributing factor in violence and conflict, with poorer countries more prone to civil war (Marks 2016). The impact of social protection transfers on poverty indicators has been extensively documented. The review by Bastagli et al. (2016) analysed 44 studies, with the majority finding an increase in total household expenditure and increases in food expenditure. Where this is not the case, the explanations are related to design and implementation features such as low level of transfers, delays in disbursements, as well as changes in household behaviour. Fewer studies have looked at the impacts on aggregate poverty levels, but these also highlight the importance of transfer levels and duration of programmes for impact on national level poverty rates. In addition, it is important to consider the combined effects of taxes and transfers on poverty levels. For example, in Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Uganda and Tanzania, the combined effects of taxes and transfers is to *increase* poverty. This is a result primarily of high consumption taxes on basic goods

(e.g. VAT) combined with insufficient investment in social protection transfers. It is important to note, however, that efficient regressive taxes such as VAT combined with generous transfers can result in a combined positive effect on poverty levels. The recommendation is therefore not to avoid or reduce such taxation, but rather to invest more in social protection transfers (Lustig, 2018).

Decreasing inequality

As mentioned above, the combination of taxes and social protection transfers play a key role in decreasing inequality in high-income countries. However, comprehensive analysis by the Commitment to Equity research project shows that, in low- and middle-income countries, the effects are more heterogenous. The redistributive impact of social protection on inequality depends on how much is invested in social protection transfers, and whether the combined effect of taxes and transfers is regressive or progressive (Lustig, 2018).

Protection from covariate shocks

Increases in the price of fuel and electricity as a result of energy subsidy reforms has been a cause of protests and violence in many countries, including Egypt, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan and Zimbabwe (Hossain, 2018).

Violence can also be triggered by shocks resulting from fluctuations in international prices of main crops: in Colombia, a drop in coffee prices by 73 percent between 1998 and 2003 has been linked to increased conflict in the country's coffee growing regions, as a result of increased poverty (Dube, 2006). Finally, climate related shocks have also been linked with violence: in India, Fetzer (2019) shows a strong correlation between rainfall and agricultural production, income and violence.

In order to prevent this, several countries have successfully used social protection transfers as a way of compensating poor households for the losses they incur as a result of price hikes, and protecting them from the negative impact of income shocks.

Examples of countries that have used social protection transfers successfully to compensate the population for energy price increases include Iran and Indonesia. In 2010, Iran started an ambitious programme to reduce energy subsidies, which increased prices on bread and various energy products by two to nine times. However, because a universal social protection transfer was at the same time introduced to the whole population, poverty and inequality actually *decreased*, despite the price increases (Salehi-Isfahani, Stucki and Deutschmann, 2014).

In Indonesia, reductions in energy subsidies in 2005 led to gasoline and price increases of between 150 and 185 percent. In order to mitigate the shock to the poorest households, a temporary targeted unconditional cash transfer was distributed to 19 million low-income households in four transfers. The programme was repeated in connection with further price hikes in 2008 and 2013 (World Bank, 2012). The government has since continued reductions of energy subsidies, and have at the same time gradually increased investment in permanent social protection transfers (TNP2K, 2018).

In India, the government introduced the large NREGA cash for work scheme in 2005, which provides an alternative source of income in the face of climate shocks by providing a right to 100 days of work. The programme appears to have completely removed the previously strong relationship between the extent of Monsoon rain and conflict, and have contributed to lowering conflict levels (Fetzer, 2019).

Finally, social protection transfers can also support people to cope with shocks as a result of violence. For example, the Child Development Grant Programme (CDGP) in Northern Nigeria helped people cope with the loss of assets as a result of frequent raids by bandits in conflict-affected areas (Sharp, Cornelius and Gadhavi 2018).

Programme design

The existing research points to the importance of programme design in relation to many of the outcomes described above. Particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, it is important to take a 'do no harm' approach, paying attention to the quality of services, including strong systems for ensuring accountability, assessing how programmes work at the local level and taking grievances, unfairness and exclusion seriously (Slater and Mallett, 2017). From a peace building perspective, these factors should be of major concern to policy makers since perceptions of unfairness and

exclusion have a strong influence on people's perception of government and may exacerbate grievances against the state and contribute to inter-communal resentment.

Targeting

The choice of how to select beneficiaries for participation in the programme is one of the most important decisions in social protection programme design.

Social protection programmes can be divided into universal programmes, which provide benefits to everybody within a certain group, such as older people, children or people with disabilities, and poverty-targeted programmes, which provide benefits to a selected group on the basis of criteria of poverty or vulnerability. Poverty targeting in low- and middle-income countries is usually done using either community-based targeting, where 'communities' decide who should participate, or proxy means-tests, where data on income, assets etc. are used in a mathematical formula to decide who will receive payments. In addition, programmes are often targeted at specific geographic regions. Finally, less common is targeting of specific population groups, such as for example Nepal's child benefit targeted at Dalits.

What is common to the countries where social protection has been perceived as a tool for increasing state legitimacy, such as in Nepal and Timor-Leste, is investment in universal programmes. This has been the case even if it has been recognised that programmes would not have large impacts on poverty because of low benefit levels. Whether social protection is seen mainly as a tool for building state legitimacy or as an anti-poverty intervention can therefore drive different approaches to programme design.

Effects of different targeting mechanisms on social relations

A review of the literature carried out in 2017 found that targeting is crucial for determining whether social protection has a positive or negative effect on social cohesion (Idris 2017). Many studies find that poverty-targeting create animosity between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and weakens social relations, as beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries see themselves as having less in common and non-beneficiaries refuse to take part in community activities (Holmes & Slater, 2007; Chong et al. 2009; MacAusland and Riemenschneider, 2011; Camacho, 2014; Kardan et al. 2010). This is particularly the case because there is, in most contexts, very little material difference in living standards between those selected to participate in a programme and non-beneficiaries (Ellis, 2008).

The same risk exists when targeting specific population groups: the fact that Nepal's child benefit is only available for Dalits, and that Dalits receive the old age pension at an earlier age, has been found to exacerbate animosities between Dalits and high-caste Hindus (KC et al., 2014; Drucza, 2016; Schjødt, 2018a). As mentioned above, there are also concerns among analysts that the practice of 'buying the peace' in Timor-Leste by targeting cash transfers to veterans is not a sustainable route to lasting peace. This concern is supported by research from other countries, including Sierra Leone, where findings indicates that focusing on specific groups may create social tensions and can be detrimental to the peace process and social cohesion (Holmes and Jackson 2008; Holmes 2009; Willibald 2006).

There are documented cases of the use of proxy means tests for targeting of cash transfer programmes leading to unrest in humanitarian contexts. In Turkey, an assessment of an e-voucher programme implemented by the Danish Refugee Council faced difficulties because of the 'widespread, strong negative reaction among households who were assessed by DRC but not selected for monthly assistance – culminating in protests outside DRC offices and harassment of staff' (Jacobsen and Armstrong, 2016). Because of the high levels of exclusion errors, a report on refugee vulnerability and targeting in Kakuma refugee settlement in Kenya concluded that proxy means testing would not be in line with a 'do no harm' principle (Guyatt, Della Rosa and Spencer 2016).

Particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, Slater and Mallett (2017), based on the comprehensive SLRC research, recommends thinking carefully about whether to target support: 'Churning in people's livelihood and wellbeing status suggests we need to be careful about trying to find ever more complex criteria to identify vulnerable households. In many cases, it would be better

to find simple targeting methods that are locally understood and perceived as fair. In others, there could be credible arguments for providing blanket support.’ (Slater and Mallett 2017).

While universal benefits convey a perception of equality, poverty targeting conveys social stigma attached to being labelled as ‘poor’, and stigma has been acknowledged as one of the main social and psychological costs of targeting (Mkandawire 2005; Coady, Grosh and Hoddinot, 2004). Stigmatised individuals may not only be rejected or excluded from social interactions but also refrain from engaging others due to low self-esteem. Stigmatisation can contribute to severing existing social ties and hinder the development of new ones (Idris, 2017).

Effects of different targeting mechanisms on state-citizen relations

Accountability in social protection programmes requires that citizens have information about who should and should not benefit from the programme. Simple eligibility criteria, such as age, facilitate accountability, while more complex or opaque criteria impede it (Ayliffe, Schjødt and Aslam, 2018).

Use of quotas to limit access to programmes also makes it very difficult for citizens to know who should and should not benefit from the programme. This opens up space for power holders to allocate resources according to their discretion. For example, in the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), which uses quotas, local government officials have admitted to removing from the programme those citizens that were considered to be ‘difficult’ (Ayliffe, 2018). If not designed to facilitate accountability, social protection transfers may instead become a tool of clientelism and repression, contributing to negative relations between citizens and the state.

Research by HelpAge International in Sierra Leone found that relying on community committees to select beneficiaries for the poverty targeted Social Safety Net resulted in high rates of leakage and abuse, discretionary and subjective selection of beneficiaries and manipulation and abuse of the selection process by local administrative and political authorities. This led to lower trust in public institutions and state actors (Osofisan, 2011). Similarly, in Pakistan, qualitative research found a strong perception of politicisation and favouritism in the delivery of social protection, as a result of the community-based targeting approach (Shah and Shahbaz, 2015).

These perceptions can be damaging to citizens’ perceptions of state legitimacy: qualitative research in Liberia, Nepal, and Colombia found that unequal or exclusionary access to public goods was detrimental to citizens’ views of the state’s right to rule (Dix et al., 2012).

Conditionalities

Conditional cash transfer programmes usually require beneficiaries to ensure that their children attend school and health check-ups. However, programmes enforce these conditions in different ways, and many now employ so-called ‘soft conditionalities’, where there is no sanction for not complying with the requirements. This is usually a result of a recognition of the administrative difficulties involved in monitoring compliance, as well as the fact that education and health attendance is often hindered by a lack of availability of services, rather than a lack of demand.

In relation to social cohesion, some research shows that the use of conditions risks providing officials with a tool for sanctioning citizens, rather than empowering citizens to hold state representatives accountable for their actions (Fox, 2007; Jones et al. 2008; Cookson, 2016). In addition, ethnographic research from Peru has shown how conditionalities can increase women’s work burden and exacerbate gender inequality (Cookson, 2018).

A special case of conditionality are public works programmes, where participating in work is a condition for receiving payments. Research from the large public works programmes in India and Ethiopia has shown that the complexity of implementing a public works programme, including procurement of materials, means that there are larger risks of leakage and corruption than in simpler cash transfer programmes (Subbarao et al. 2013). The many ways that officials and politicians can divert funds in public works programmes, make these particularly vulnerable to elite capture (Schjødt, 2018b).

Payments

The primary concern in relation to payment mechanisms is usually to ensure that the right amount of money is paid to the right people at the right time. This is obviously important, also for citizens' perceptions of the state, with research showing that irregular and unreliable payments can affect beneficiaries' assessment of the programme.

However, the choice of payment mechanism is also important because it affects the space for interaction between citizens and representatives of the state. For example, the manual delivery of cash payments by local officials in Nepal presents a rare opportunity for citizens to interact with government representatives (Drucza, 2016; Schjødt 2018a). On the contrary, where payments are contracted out to private service providers, there is no direct interaction between citizens and the government. Accountability relations are also less clear since grievances for payment issues will most likely have to be directed to and resolved by the private payment provider. When making choices on payment mechanisms, programme designers therefore have to balance the need for effectivity and efficiency with the opportunity for interaction between citizens and local officials.

Management Information Systems

An effective programme management information system can be an important mechanism for ensuring effective programme implementation, and for accountability. For example, the effective implementation of social audits as a social accountability mechanism in NREGA in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh has been enabled by the development of a management information system with records of all beneficiaries, payments, time worked etc. (Schjødt 2018b).

Adequacy of benefits

On the one hand, even low benefit levels can have positive effects on perceptions of the state (Drucza 2015). On the other hand, there is also some evidence showing that *too* low benefit levels can have negative effects on people's assessment of a programme. In Nepal, research indicated that the initially low value of social protection programmes, combined with irregular delivery and the difficulty of accessing payments undermined views of the programme. This finding was consistent with studies reporting that receipt of the Child Grant by Dalit households had no impact on perceptions of government for similar reasons (Adhikari *et al.*, 2014; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2015).

Social accountability and grievance mechanisms

The ability to handle grievances is important for the experience that citizens have of a programme. Unfortunately, few social protection programmes in low- and middle-income countries have effective grievance mechanisms. In most cases, the mechanisms that exist are able to collect grievances, but are not effective in addressing them. The international evidence points to the need to put in place several different mechanisms for citizens to raise grievances, and systems to ensure that there is follow up and feedback provided to citizens. Combining complaints mechanisms with other mechanisms, such as for example social audits and community score cards, can provide better mechanism for bringing state representatives and citizens together to resolve programme issues (Ayliffe, Aslam and Schjødt, 2017).

Based on the comprehensive research by the SLRC over many years in eight conflict-affected and fragile contexts, Nixon, H. and Mallet, R. (2017) found that social accountability is particularly important for shaping how service delivery influence the way people think about government. International evidence shows that social accountability mechanisms cannot make up for poor programme design, and cannot solve all accountability issues, but *can* contribute to more positive experiences of the interaction with the state (Ayliffe, Aslam and Schjødt, 2017).

Conclusions

The research reviewed here shows how social protection can contribute in important ways to peace building and national cohesion. In general, countries that invest more in social protection also have less risk of social unrest.

Political dimensions of social cohesion

Social protection, in particular universal programmes with broad coverage and a high level of public awareness, can play an important role in showing the population that the government is responsive to their needs, and thereby increasing perceptions of the government's legitimacy. And, as the case of Nepal shows, high benefit levels are not necessary for cash transfers to contribute to social inclusion and a perception of citizenship: even small amounts of transfers can have an impact on social exclusion (Drucza 2016). These findings provide support for strategies of prioritising universal programmes with high coverage over more narrowly targeted programmes.

The international research also shows that *how* services are provided is just as, or even more, important for their ability to strengthen state legitimacy than *what* is delivered. Social protection programme implementers should therefore not just be concerned with getting the right amount of money to the right people at the right time, but also with how these processes are experienced by citizens. Social protection should be conceived as a way for the state to signal values of fairness, inclusion and recognition. In practice this means putting in place systems for monitoring how citizens experience accessing social protection programmes, and embedding social accountability mechanisms in programmes.

Social dimensions of social cohesion

Research in Nepal and Bangladesh also found support for the hypothesis that social protection can enhance social participation. Beneficiaries have increased financial means to buy gifts and better clothing and participate in ceremonial activities. In Nepal, the process of applying for and collecting the transfer facilitated interaction and dialogue between different community members, mostly women. While these interactions usually happened within existing ethnic groups, the research did find some evidence that beneficiaries have increased confidence to dealing with community members of another ethnicity/religion or talking to local government officials had increased (Babajanian, Hagen-Zanker and Holmes, 2014).

The international experience shows that targeting specific population groups risks increasing social exclusion: the fact that Nepal's child benefit is only available for Dalits, and that Dalits receive the old age pension at an earlier age, has been found to exacerbate animosities between Dalits and high-caste Hindus (KC et al., 2014; Drucza, 2016; Schjødt, 2018a). There are also concerns among analysts that the practice of 'buying the peace' in Timor-Leste by targeting cash transfers to veterans is not a sustainable route to lasting peace. This concern is backed by research from other countries, including Sierra Leone, where findings indicates that focusing on specific groups may create social tensions and can be detrimental to the peace process and social cohesion (Holmes and Jackson 2008; Holmes 2009; Willibald 2006).

Economic dimensions of social cohesion

Social protection is not only an important tool for reducing economic inequality between individuals or population groups, but also for reducing economic disparities between ethnic groups and geographic areas within a country. This type of 'horizontal' inequalities has been shown to correlate strongly with violence and unrest. Social protection transfers implemented in marginalised parts of the country can play an important role in redistributing resources and contribute to national social cohesion.

Inequalities in access to education between population groups or geographic areas has been found to be particularly strongly correlated with the risk of conflict (FHI 360, 2015). The ability of social protection transfers to increase access to education is well documented and social protection programmes have been used in other countries to reduce inequality in access to education (Bastagli et al. 2016). For example, Mexico's Oportunidades contributed to closing the education gap between indigenous and non-indigenous children (Holmes & Slater, 2007).

A comprehensive social protection system is also essential for protecting the population from covariate shocks. Covariate shocks refer to shocks that are felt by entire communities at the same time, and may be natural (e.g. drought, floods, typhoons, earthquakes), political (e.g. political crisis and armed conflict) or economic (e.g. economic downturns, price increases) (O'Brien et al. 2018; Nel and Richarts, 2008; Rezaeian 2013). Increases in the price of fuel and electricity as a result of energy subsidy reforms has been a cause of protests and violence in many countries, including Egypt, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan and Zimbabwe (Hossain, 2018). Climate related shocks and shocks resulting from fluctuations in international prices of main crops have also been shown to be a cause of violence (Fetzer 2019; Dube 2006). Social protection can be an important means of providing farmers with a safety net in the case of prolonged dry spells, droughts or flooding, and several countries have successfully used social protection transfers as a way of compensating poor households for the losses they incur as a result of energy price hikes, thereby avoiding unrest (Hossain, 2018; Salehi-Isfahani, Stucki and Deutschmann, 2014; World Bank, 2012).

Social protection programme design

Accountability in social protection programmes requires that citizens have information about who should and should not benefit from the programme. Simple eligibility criteria, such as age, facilitate accountability, while more complex or opaque criteria impede it (Ayliffe, Schjødt and Aslam, 2018). Research by HelpAge International in Sierra Leone found that relying on community committees to select beneficiaries for the poverty targeted Social Safety Net resulted in high rates of leakage and abuse, discretionary and subjective selection of beneficiaries and manipulation and abuse of the selection process by local administrative and political authorities. This led to lower trust in public institutions and state actors (Osofisan, 2011). Similarly, in Pakistan, qualitative research found a strong perception of politicisation and favouritism in the delivery of social protection, as a result of the community-based targeting approach (Shah and Shahbaz, 2015).

However, the choice of payment mechanism is also important because it affects the space for interaction between citizens and representatives of the state. For example, the manual delivery of cash payments by local officials in Nepal presents a rare opportunity for citizens to interact with government representatives (Drucza, 2016; Schjødt 2018a). On the contrary, where payments are contracted out to private service providers, there is no direct interaction between citizens and the government. Accountability relations are also less clear since grievances for payment issues will most likely have to be directed to and resolved by the private payment provider. When making choices on payment mechanisms, programme designers therefore have to balance the need for effectivity and efficiency with the opportunity for interaction between citizens and local officials.

The ability to handle grievances is important for the experience that citizens have of a programme. Unfortunately, few social protection programmes in low- and middle-income countries have effective grievance mechanisms. In most cases, the mechanisms that exist are able to collect grievances, but are not effective in addressing them. The international evidence points to the need to put in place several different mechanisms for citizens to raise grievances, and systems to ensure that there is follow up and feedback provided to citizens. Combining complaints mechanisms with other social accountability mechanisms, such as for example social audits and community score cards, can provide better mechanism for bringing state representatives and citizens together to resolve programme issues (Ayliffe, Aslam and Schjødt, 2017; Nixon and Mallet 2017).

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