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Article in *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* · November 2012

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A child-sensitive approach to social protection: serving practical and strategic needs

Keetie Roelen and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler

Social protection is increasingly considered a development success story. At the same time, it still does too little to account for social differentiation and to address vulnerability, as opposed to poverty. Child sensitive social protection has gained considerable momentum, particularly in a developing country context, raising questions about its concept and practical implications. We argue that three types of vulnerabilities call for more tailored thinking about social protection for children and discuss implications for social protection interventions on the basis of case studies. Child sensitive social protection requires a critical perspective and for context to guide its design and delivery.

Introduction

The last two decades have seen increased acknowledgement of the importance of issues surrounding child poverty, vulnerability and well-being and the need for a special focus within the development and poverty reduction debate to address these issues (Roelen, 2010; Ben-Arieh, 2000). Child poverty is widely recognised to have far-reaching short-term and long-term adverse impacts on income, education, health and other areas of well-being (see, for example, Haveman and Wolfe, 1995). With social protection having established itself as a core function of development policy (Devereux et al, 2011), it is increasingly being considered as an integral part of the response to child poverty and vulnerability in low- and middle-income countries. Child-sensitive social protection (CSSP) is the term used to summarise a wide range of policies and programmes. What, however, does CSSP actually encapsulate? What does the concept mean with respect to instruments and interventions? The interest in CSSP and the related body of research on social protection and its potential benefits has grown substantially in recent years but lacks a shared understanding of the meaning of the term. Guiding principles have been formulated by UNICEF and other development partners (UNICEF, 2009) to respond to the great interest in CSSP; but these err on the general side, and fail to provide detailed insight into what CSSP should or could look like.

The purpose of this paper is, first, to take stock of and evaluate the current agenda on CSSP. We recognise the importance of bringing a child-centred focus to the

Key words

social protection • child-sensitive • vulnerability • social differentiation • cash transfers

established social protection field of policy and research. However, we argue that the idea of CSSP is not to propose a new set of measures or interventions but rather to act as a tool to assess such interventions against the extent to which they respond to children's practical and strategic needs. Second, we identify three types of vulnerability that are pertinent to, or exacerbated for, children and require particular consideration within the remit of social protection. These are: 1) physical/biological vulnerabilities; 2) dependence-related vulnerabilities; and 3) institutionalised disadvantage (see also Sabates-Wheeler and Roelen, 2011). CSSP means that social protection must respond to these vulnerabilities by building in safeguards and instruments that minimise and counteract their impacts on children's lives. Building on these elements of a child-sensitive approach to social protection, we consider the degree of 'child-sensitivity' of current social protection measures, thus necessarily thinking beyond commonly held assertions about what is good or bad policy for children. In this way, this paper challenges some of the policy interventions and rhetoric that are widely acclaimed to benefit children and also considers those that have not been intentionally designed to benefit children but can actually have a positive impact on their lives.

Making the case for being child-sensitive

Recent decades have seen an increased recognition that children deserve a special focus within the debate on poverty reduction, both in developed and developing countries. There are a number of grounds on which one can argue for a special child focus within policies and programming, which hold across time and space.

First, it is now widely acknowledged that children have different basic needs from adults and are harder hit, both in the short and long term, when their basic needs are not met. Jones and Sumner (2011) point towards the 'differential experience' of poverty in childhood, setting their situation apart from adults (as well as from other children, depending on their life-stage). Children growing up in a poor or low-income family are more likely to receive poorer healthcare, to have lower educational outcomes and to reach lower levels of attainment in the labour market (Haveman and Wolfe, 1995; Esping-Andersen and Sarasa, 2002). Children living in poverty are also more likely to grow up to become poor adults (Corak, 2006). Furthermore, effects are more pronounced for those children who experience persistent poverty, that is, living in poor and vulnerable conditions for a number of consecutive years (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

The case for child-sensitive policies can also be made by appealing to rights- and efficiency-based arguments (Blank et al, 2011). Rights-based approaches have been at the heart of policy discourse around child poverty and have informed the response to it by organizations such as UNICEF and many NGOs (Jones and Sumner, 2011). Rights-based approaches resonate with the widely ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and build on the premise that poverty in itself is a violation of human rights. In addition, Blank et al (2011) argue that social protection in itself is a basic human right, as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as well as the CRC refer to social protection as an entitlement rather

than charity. Although these rights-based arguments are not particular to children and hold for all humans, the argument is reinforced by moral obligations related to children's 'innocence' and dependence on others for the provision of basic needs. Efficiency grounds for social protection emphasise its potential for the stimulation of productivity and economic growth (Blank et al, 2011), considering social protection as an investment rather than a mere welfare or protective measure. Alderman and Behrman (2006) estimate the economic gain at about \$510 for each infant that is moved out of low birth weight status, largely stemming from increased labour productivity and reduction of the costs incurred by infant illness and death. There is ample research pointing to the high returns from investing in children with broad social and economic gains, underlining the need to give children special consideration in policy processes to respond to their unique position in terms of needs and vulnerabilities as well as opportunities.

The remit of child-sensitive social protection

The rise of social protection as a central element in development policy has been accompanied by deserved criticism that popular instruments and programmes have not paid adequate attention to social differentiation and the differential opportunities that social or age-specific groups have for access to the variety of forms of social protection (Sabates-Wheeler and Roelen, 2011). Sabates-Wheeler and Feldman (2011) explore the contribution of a consideration of migration and migrants to social protection. Molyneux (2009) and Jones and Holmes (2010) bring a gender critique to social protection. Similarly, organisations and researchers with a mandate to advance children's wellbeing, particularly in developing countries, have increasingly advocated for child-sensitive social protection (CSSP). UNICEF has pushed the global agenda on CSSP, in terms of both the definition of the term and advocacy for its goals. It has initiated the *Joint Statement on CSSP* in 2009, which calls for consensus on a stronger focus on children in the social protection agenda, to which many international organisations and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) have signed up. So what is CSSP, and what does it add to a mainstream social protection agenda?

Definitions of the concept of CSSP are thin on the ground, but primarily emphasise the need for interventions addressing the particular vulnerabilities that children face, as well as human capital investment, and make reference to target groups and mechanisms. 'Child-sensitive social protection focuses specifically on addressing the patterns of children's poverty and vulnerability and recognizing the long-term developmental benefits of investing in children... In addition, interventions do not have to target children directly to be child-sensitive' (Yates et al, 2010: 210).

Temin (2008) refers to child-sensitive social protection as 'the range of economic and noneconomic social protection interventions that need to be strengthened if the most vulnerable children and [their] families are to benefit. These include (but are not limited to) cash transfers, social work, early childhood development centres and alternative care.'

In addition, Jones and Holmes (2010: 1) suggest that CSSP needs to be informed by 'an understanding of the multiple and often intersecting vulnerabilities and risks that children and their care-givers face'; and that children's experiences of such vulnerabilities and risks differ depending on their life-stage. Despite the various pointers provided in these definitions and guidelines, such as the complex and interlinked set of risks, long-term adverse consequences of poverty and potential interventions, we believe that they fail to provide a tangible idea of CSSP and its practical implications. UNICEF's guiding principles (UNICEF, 2009) go some way in providing guidance for the meaning of child-sensitive social protection, but fall short in terms of translating those conceptual guidelines into practical policy implications. Although the document lists a number of steps towards making social protection child-sensitive, these present widespread consensus rather than specific pointers. Examples of such steps include an increase in available resources, an increase in capacity and coordination and building the evidence base on CSSP. We do not dispute the relevance of these steps, but consider them imperative for achieving any kind of policy. Here we seek to elaborate a fuller understanding of the constituent elements of child-sensitive social protection, evaluating current policy interventions and their degree of 'child sensitivity'. In other words, we consider the remit of child-sensitive social protection to refer to outcomes rather than a set of inputs or instruments.

Elements of a child-sensitive approach to social protection

We argue that there are three distinct sets of vulnerability and asymmetry pertinent to children and call for more tailored thinking about social protection taking these into account. These are: 1) physical/biological vulnerabilities; 2) dependence-related vulnerabilities; and 3) institutionalised disadvantage (see Sabates-Wheeler and Roelen, 2011 for a more detailed discussion).

The first vulnerability refers to the fact that children at different ages are more susceptible to the negative impacts of malnutrition or disease by virtue of their immature immune systems and under-development. There is sound evidence that malnutrition, lack of healthcare and low levels of education during infancy and childhood have far-reaching and long-lasting detrimental consequences (Haveman and Wolfe, 1995; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997), which affect not only the child as an individual but also society as a whole (Esping-Andersen and Sarasa, 2002). Clearly this vulnerability changes as children grow but, in general, the physiological immaturity of children makes them more vulnerable than adults to negative outcomes of shocks (other things being equal). On a positive note, childhood can be considered as a unique window of opportunity in life for physical, cognitive and social development, with strong returns to investment in terms of nutrition, healthcare and education. Investments in micro-nutrients and food fortification are found to have high returns, especially for children (Horton et al, 2008). Research in Guatemala shows that higher pre-school cognitive ability is associated with higher secondary school enrolment and achievement scores. Similarly, research in Zimbabwe finds that

improved nutritional status of pre-schoolers is associated with school entry at an early age and higher numbers of completed grades (Alderman et al, 2006). These findings are underlined by studies in other contexts, all pointing towards the positive effect of early cognitive development on schooling outcomes in later years (Grantham-McGregor et al, 2007). Finally, early childhood development programmes can also be considered a unique opportunity for investing in children's cognitive development with immediate as well as long-term cognitive effects (Behrman et al, 2000).

The second type of vulnerability refers to the fact that children are by necessity dependent on adults for their wellbeing. Children are not supposed to be economic agents in their own right and are therefore highly dependent on adult members of the household, family or community for the distribution of resources in order to meet their physical, emotional and social requirements. Again, a caveat is in order here, as older children may be more economically and socially independent. Nevertheless, on the whole children are subject to asymmetrical relationships of dependence and have limited autonomy in their wellbeing decisions. As a result, relationships are open to misuse and abuse, thereby reinforcing children's vulnerability. Alternatively (or in addition), a child's carers may be mis-informed or may lack the resources for his or her adequate care, which increases his or her vulnerability. To ensure that children's needs are met within that wider structure, policies and programmes should keep a close eye on issues such as the intra-household distribution and allocation of resources (White et al, 2003). As Sabates-Wheeler et al (2009) argue, the risk of intra-household discrimination might be particularly pertinent when women have limited access to independent livelihoods or when the distribution of power and resources is highly inequitable. As a result, policies and programmes cannot simply rest on the assumption that resources will be equally distributed or prioritised towards those who are most in need (see UNICEF, 2009). Finally, it also has to be noted that some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of children live completely outside family and community structures and are self-reliant by necessity rather than by choice. A failure to recognise and acknowledge these groups would lead to their exclusion from policy efforts and exacerbate their disadvantaged position, pushing them into further isolation.

Lastly, institutionalised disadvantage, or what some sociologists refer to as 'cultural devaluation disadvantage' (Kabeer, 2005), refers to the devaluation of certain groups in society based on perceptions of who they are. As Lister (2004) pointed out in reference to the agency of people living in poverty, this is not only about their behaviour but also about how those in power act in relation to them. So, for instance, if society at large places little value on women or children, the vulnerabilities associated with this type of disadvantage present themselves in the form of voicelessness of these populations, lack of recognition, lack of representation and often entrenched inequalities that can provide fertile grounds for the deliberate abuse and exclusion of these groups. Group characteristics that commonly underlie cultural devaluation include gender, ethnicity, religion and age, as they are thought to denote persons of lesser worth following the dominant beliefs, perceptions and attitudes in a given society (Kabeer, 2005). Rather than such an asymmetrical relationship with the rest

of society being a natural or inherent result of physiological conditions leading to a lack of agency or limited autonomy, this type of disadvantage is a social and cultural construct that is maintained and reinforced by society. Children can be considered one of the groups in society which are culturally devalued in this way (Harper and Jones, 2008), thereby reinforcing and perpetuating their already weakened socio-cultural position resulting from the first two vulnerabilities.

Although children have become increasingly visible on the development agenda and in debates around poverty reduction, they remain a highly invisible population with a lack of voice who are hard to reach. It is important to note here that the degree of invisibility cannot be considered as homogenous across all children, and that particular characteristics or conditions, including disability, HIV infection, orphanhood or living on the streets, might add to and aggravate children's voicelessness. The widespread lack of institutional visibility is further underlined by the fact that children's issues are by and large represented by the weakest ministries in government. As Jones and Sumner (2011) point out, 'Many developing countries lack a dedicated children's ministry'; and, where they do exist, 'they are typically among the least influential and under-resourced' (p. 67). A response to the strategic need for children to be more visible thus does not only pertain to a stronger involvement of children themselves in policy processes but also a strengthening of the institutions that speak on their behalf.

The implications of these three vulnerabilities suggest that an appropriate social protection response for children requires particular elements that constitute the degree of child-sensitivity of the intervention. Child-sensitive social protection interventions should cater for both the practical and the strategic needs of children, their carers and the community. Moser (1989) describes practical [gender] needs as 'those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience', while strategic gender needs are 'those needs that are formulated from the analysis of their subordination to men' (p. 1803). We apply these concepts to the needs of children, leading to the interpretation that children's practical needs are apparent from the concrete conditions they experience given their stage in life, while children's strategic needs are observed from an understanding of their limited autonomy and their relative invisibility within the population at large. Both needs should be addressed by social protection to ensure that policies and programming are indeed child-sensitive. For example, while a conditional cash or food transfer may ensure that particular nutritional and health (that is, practical) needs of children are met, it may also require birth registration or proof of identification (that is, strategic needs) for children to actually access that transfer. As such, the first vulnerability referring to children's particular biological and physical conditions can be largely translated into practical needs that need to be met, while the (natural and constructed) asymmetrical relationships that come into play in the second and third areas of child vulnerability translate instead into strategic needs.

Child-sensitive social protection in practice

Although it is useful to consider the extent to which theory can guide and support the notion of CSSP, it is also important to review how the notion of CSSP can be applied to social protection programming in practice. In this section, we discuss a number of social protection interventions and consider the extent to which they can be considered child-sensitive when assessed against children's practical and strategic needs. This illustrates the use of the notion of CSSP as an assessment tool rather than a programmatic response per se. Interventions discussed here include those that have been claimed to benefit children, including conditional cash transfers and targeted orphan benefits, as well as those that are not widely considered to be particularly child-sensitive, such as old age pensions.

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs)

The role of cash transfers in development and the recognition of their potential for stabilising income, reducing income poverty and food insecurity and increasing levels of well-being have gained unprecedented momentum in recent years (Adato and Bassett, 2008; Hanlon et al, 2010). Especially in relation to children, CCTs are now considered an important programme for their role in human capital development by linking the receipt of transfers to school enrolment and/or health check-ups (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009). This type of social protection intervention can thus be considered to meet the practical needs of children by responding to children's multiple physiological and biological requirements. Where services are available, conditional transfers are considered a particularly appropriate tool for reaching the most vulnerable children and increasing their level of well-being and access to services (de Janvry and Sadoulet, 2006; Fiszbein and Schady, 2009). An increasing body of evidence from CCTs in such contexts is now available, primarily in Latin America, and confirms those positive impacts (for example, Das et al, 2005; Fiszbein and Schady, 2009).

Despite the overwhelming positive evidence of the impact of CCTs, however, there is also evidence of less preferential outcomes for children. Evidence suggests that CCTs do not unequivocally respond to children's physical and biological situations and meet their practical needs. A study of Brazil's Bolsa Alimentação finds that children receiving benefits conditional on regular contact with the health system have a lower weight than those receiving unconditional benefits. Instead of promoting improved nutrition practices for children, these findings suggest that the programme provides an incentive for keeping children at low weight to ensure the receipt of benefits (Morris et al, 2004). In Colombia, Ospina (2010) finds that CCTs can act as insurance for the schooling of poor children but are not able to prevent child labour as a coping strategy. A study by Barrera-Osorio et al (2008) suggests that CCTs may even increase labour market work, while decreasing school attendance for siblings or peers living in the same household but not enrolled in the programme. It shows that although the peer effects of CCTs at school or community level are

largely positive (see also Lalive and Cattaneo, 2009), such results cannot be used to draw inferences about spillover effects at the household level. Children's voicelessness and lack of autonomy limit their ability to counteract decisions made on their behalf, underlining their strategic needs for more equitable power relationships. These examples show that, rather than meeting children's strategic needs, CCTs can perpetuate and reinforce children's dependent and marginalised position. More generally, the imposition of conditionalities raises concerns with respect to paternalism and people's freedom to choose appropriate services (Adato and Bassett, 2008; Standing, 2011) and various scholars have argued that poor people know best how to allocate their resources (Hanlon et al, 2010).

In sum, the claim that CCTs are a particularly child-sensitive instrument is far from evident. Although the theory of CCTs has the potential to respond to those vulnerabilities deemed crucial for children and thereby to address their practical and strategic needs, their potential to positively affect children's lives is highly context-specific. In itself, the intervention is well-equipped to respond to the multidimensional nature and age- (and gender-) specificity of child poverty. Nevertheless, the degree of child-sensitivity should be considered on a case-by-case basis and issues related to the transfer of power and creation of perverse incentives should be monitored closely. This should include a concern for the effect of CCTs on children who are not enrolled in the programme, comparing their situation at community, group and household level. Finally, as Lund (2011) argues with respect to the Child Support Grant (CSG) in South Africa, the design of social protection interventions in favour of conditionality should not be misdirected by shifts towards more conservative approaches and the rising popularity of the notion of 'co-responsibilities'.

Child-targeted programmes

Categorical targeting of social protection might be a preferred option in resource-constrained contexts (Coady et al, 2003). Findings by Coady et al (2004) suggest that the targeting performance of programmes targeted towards children is better in terms of transferring benefits to those in poverty when compared to targeting towards elderly people. Child-targeted programmes are also found to lead to improved outcomes for children (see Samson et al, 2011). In a context of growing numbers of orphans due to HIV, and against a backdrop of eroding traditional care and support structures, cash transfers are increasingly being considered as an intervention to help families to cope with increased dependence rates and safeguard the development of orphans (Stewart and Handa, 2011). In addition, they are increasingly being considered as a mechanism to incentivise foster care, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Roelen and Delap, 2012). The use of cash transfers for such purposes would imply explicit targeting of children whose parent(s) have died or of other vulnerable children.

In the light of children's specific vulnerabilities, the availability of cash or in-kind transfers targeted to orphans and/or other vulnerable children has the potential to meet both practical and strategic needs. The first objective of such transfer schemes

is to provide for children's basic and immediate requirements such as nutrition and shelter, thereby fulfilling physical and biological requirements. Findings from Kenya's OVC Cash Transfer Programme indeed suggest that orphan-targeted transfers lead to increased expenditures on food and health (Kenya OVC-CT Evaluation Team, 2012a). Impact evaluations of the same programme also show that the transfers improve school enrolment, particularly in secondary school (Kenya OVC-CT Evaluation Team, 2012b). Although narrowly targeted cash transfer programmes may thus meet short- and long-term practical needs, they are likely to undermine strategic needs, however. Strategically, the incentivisation of foster care strongly recognises children's dependence on adults to fulfil those basic needs. Nevertheless, in consideration of the distinct disadvantaged position of children whose parent(s) have died, particularly orphans, the question arises as to whether interventions should be particularly targeted towards these groups or rely on broader targeting of poor and vulnerable children (Subbarao et al, 2001). With reference to children's dependent positions and asymmetric power relationships in relation to adults, the implementation of a transfer payment to accompany care for orphans might lead to 'commodification' of children and undermine rather than meet this strategic need. Such an effect is likely to be stronger if other transfer programmes are not available, more difficult to access, or offer lower benefits. Furthermore, the narrow targeting of orphans might give rise to issues of stigmatization and equity in terms of the exclusion of other groups of poor and vulnerable children and perpetuate their lack of voice in society by further 'cultural devaluation'.

The Orphan Care Programme (OCP) in Botswana presents an illustration of the way in which a targeted programme fails to meet its objectives, despite good intentions. Botswana's current orphan care programme is narrowly targeted towards children who have lost one or both parents and provides a response to their material needs in terms of food vouchers and provision of clothing (Ellis et al, 2010). Eligibility for the programme is exclusively based on whether or not the child is registered as an orphan, or with one parent who has died, regardless of living conditions or other criteria. Other social protection interventions in Botswana include programmes for the destitute and for those who live in remote areas and are generally a lot more stringent in terms of eligibility, applying means testing or proxy means testing. Roelen et al (2011) find that these two very different approaches towards targeting of benefits have led to a number of perverse incentives, exacerbating orphans' vulnerable positions rather than alleviating them. The discrepancy in targeting mechanisms between the orphan care and other programmes has led some orphans to be considered 'assets' and a gateway for foster families to access food vouchers and other benefits. In other words, rather than the programme giving children more voice and a degree of autonomy, it builds on and reinforces asymmetrical power relationships. Although clearly recognizing the dependent position of orphans, the orphan programme seems to provide perverse incentives and in some cases even to 'commodify' children.

Old age pensions

Old age or social pensions have been introduced in a number of Sub-Saharan African countries and they are under consideration in other developing countries (Holmqvist, 2010). Despite elderly people being the prime target group for old age pensions, the potential positive effects of such pensions for other demographic groups are widely recognized. Especially in contexts where there are extended family and multi-generational households, old age pensions do have the potential to reach not only the direct recipients but also working-age adults and children (Bertrand et al, 2003; Ardington et al, 2009). As Kakwani et al (2006) point out, the proportions of children living in poverty are much higher among those children living in households headed by elderly people. Old age pensions are thus likely to reach children in poverty and thereby make a considerable contribution to the reduction of child poverty. For instance, in Namibia, an estimated 28% of social pension money is spent by pensioners on themselves, but 78% is spent on other individuals or on the household (for example, on buying food and groceries for the whole household) (Devereux, 2000). It has to be noted, however, that the extent to which intra-household distribution is to the benefit of children cannot simply be assumed and needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Considering the particular case of old age pensions in South Africa, the largest social pension scheme in Sub-Saharan Africa, a number of studies have pointed to their beneficial side-effects for children. South Africa's old age pension scheme was put in place to support those who were out of the labour force due to age and could not access a private pension (Bertrand et al, 2003). Edmonds (2005) finds that the mere anticipation of a substantial and regular cash transfer to elderly people is associated with higher school enrolment rates and reductions in the hours worked by children. Actual receipt of an old age pension augments these effects and goes hand-in-hand with an increase in educational attainment and primary school completion rates. Duflo (2003) finds similar positive associations between old age pension and child outcomes, albeit with a considerable differential in terms of their gendered effect. Old age pensions in South Africa improved health and nutritional outcomes for girls living in households with pension recipients. Pensions received by women were found to particularly improve nutritional outcomes for young girls. In this way, old age pensions respond to children's practical needs in terms of their physiological and biological requirements and the fulfilment of those by other members in their household. Credit constraints are lifted and allow for access to and provision of nutrition, healthcare and education. Furthermore, the intra-household distribution of resources appears to benefit children, with a substantial allocation of resources directed to the improvement of children's outcomes. Strategic needs, however, are hardly addressed, as the old age pension policy measure does nothing to lessen children's institutional disadvantage by either increasing their own visibility or strengthening the institutions that speak on their behalf.

Obviously, the positive outcomes of pensions for children have to be considered within a larger context, bearing in mind that the pension benefits also have an impact

on labour supply and the migration decisions of prime-age household members (often the children's parents), as well as fertility decisions. Nevertheless, evidence does suggest that programmes not designed specifically to meet the needs and vulnerabilities of children do have the potential for a degree of child-sensitivity.

Discussion

This review of practical examples of social protection interventions shows that context is of the utmost importance in terms of the claim that social protection can alleviate child poverty and improve the lives of children. Although the three sets of interventions described above all have the potential to meet children's practical and/or strategic needs, their particular context, design features and delivery methods can undermine and perpetuate rather than alleviate those needs. Even the most obvious example of an intervention that claims to be child-sensitive – child-targeted transfers – does not unequivocally benefit children. By the same token, social protection measures designed to protect a different group in society, such as old age pensions, have the potential to address practical needs of children and carry a degree of child-sensitivity. As Duflo (2003) pointed out, with respect to the old age pension scheme in South Africa, it is difficult to generalize findings across Sub-Saharan Africa or the developing world as a whole, as the South African scheme is of such a nature and scale that this makes it unique and difficult to replicate. Hence, for social protection to address children's physical and biological requirements and to be child-sensitive (thereby addressing their dependent position and institutional voicelessness and invisibility), it should be noted that context matters and that the degree of child-sensitivity of social protection interventions cannot be generalised across place and time.

Conclusion

In this paper, we argue that there is a need for a more concrete and clearer understanding of child-sensitive social protection in order for social protection to meet both the practical and the strategic needs of children. Such an understanding is currently not provided by existing definitions and guidelines, such as UNICEF's Joint Statement, given their generalist and all-purpose nature. In this paper, we elaborate on three particular elements of child vulnerability that social protection should address in order to be labelled child-sensitive. These three elements pertain to children's practical needs, being their biological and physical requirements, as well as their strategic needs, referring to children's limited levels of autonomy and their dependence on adults for receiving care and support, as well as to children's institutional invisibility and lack of voice in the larger policy agenda.

The practical examples, and their degree of 'child-sensitivity' in terms of their response to children's practical and strategic needs, show that no set of interventions can be considered child-sensitive across the board. Claims about what makes social protection child-sensitive and concurrent claims of child-sensitivity are often made

on (widely agreed) assumptions rather than sound and firm evidence about what works for children in a particular situation. There are no universal truths about how to design and deliver child-sensitive social protection and the degree to which a policy, instrument or intervention meets children's practical and strategic needs is highly context-, design- and delivery-specific. Despite overwhelming evidence for the positive effects of certain instruments on child well-being, we should not be tempted to generalise and turn a blind eye to those contexts or groups of children for which those findings do not hold true. The term 'child-sensitive' should be used with caution in order to avoid it becoming a misnomer and to ensure that it denotes policy initiatives that truly aim to improve children's lives. Although the examples used in this paper are primarily from a developing country context, this message also holds with respect to developed countries. The suggestion by Standing (2011) that the expanding popularity of CCTs from developing countries to countries such as the US and UK hinges on 'libertarian paternalism' rather than evidence of improved outcomes makes a deeper and evidence-based understanding of CSSP very pertinent.

On a more positive note, children's unique risks also make for unique opportunities. The practical examples in this paper suggest that CSSP need not be a separate stream or form of social protection. All types of interventions have the potential to carry a degree of child-sensitivity, responding to one or more of children's practical and strategic needs. Further research is required to investigate the extent to which measures and interventions can respond to all needs simultaneously without undermining their initial objectives or exacerbating the needs and vulnerabilities of other social and demographic groups.

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Keetie Roelen

k.roelen@ids.ac.uk

Rachel Sabates-Wheeler

rsabates-wheeler@ids.ac.uk

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK