

Summaries

Editorial Introduction: Debating Social Protection

Stephen Devereux and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler

The introduction identifies two factors that explain the rapid rise of social protection up the development policy agenda: an ‘instrumentalist’ argument that social protection can contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth; and an ‘activist’ agenda that campaigns for social protection as a basic human right. Though complementary, these approaches reflect different world-views, which are debated in this *IDS Bulletin*. Five conceptual frameworks are presented and critiqued: Social Risk Management, Transformative Social Protection, ‘asset thresholds’, the OECD/DAC/POVNET approach, and the Universal Social Minimum. Three design issues in social protection programming are also debated – conditional vs unconditional transfers, cash vs food transfers, and targeting vs universal provision – as these practical choices also reflect fundamental differences in approach. Finally, two key sectors for social protection are considered – agriculture and health (HIV/AIDS) – and a case is made for social protection to be informed by a stronger analysis of vulnerability and for an integration of social protection with other pro-poor policies.

The Role of Social Risk Management in Development: A World Bank View

Robert Holzmann and Valerie Kozel

The World Bank’s work on risk and vulnerability is underpinned by the Social Risk Management (SRM) framework, which has been discussed widely in global forums and used extensively outside the Bank as well as within. This article discusses the SRM framework and its key contributions to the global development debate. It describes the rationale behind SRM thinking and the key elements of the SRM framework. It then outlines the major ways that SRM has helped the Bank in rethinking social protection programmes, stimulated a more dynamic view on poverty, and fostered concerns with vulnerable groups. The SRM framework has been

further developed and refined over time: the last section covers new challenges and work in progress, for example towards a more robust and operational definition of vulnerability, the importance of back-up plans in risk management, and exploring empirical links between risk and growth.

Social Protection for Transformation

Rachel Sabates-Wheeler and Stephen Devereux

The social protection response to the safety nets agenda bifurcates according to the vision of how long-term and sustainable poverty reduction will be achieved. The vision the authors promote and develop here argues that fundamental to long-term poverty reduction is a positive relationship between livelihood security and enhanced autonomy or empowerment. While understandings of ‘poverty’ have moved to incorporate social dimensions of wellbeing together with rights-based approaches, social protection continues to be conceptualised by many development agencies mainly in terms of public responses to livelihood shocks; the conventional economic ‘safety net’ function. The ‘transformative social protection’ approach emerges from a broader conceptualisation of vulnerability than economic risk alone, one that is based instead on an appreciation of structural inequalities. This article describes what we mean by the ‘transformative’ potential of social protection and concludes by asserting the case for social protection as supporting social as well as economic goals of development.

Asset Thresholds and Social Protection: A ‘Think-Piece’

Michael R. Carter and Christopher B. Barrett

This article uses the economic theory of asset thresholds and poverty traps to reflect on the nature of risk, vulnerability and the circumstances that make them especially salient. The authors argue that it is the combination of asset poverty and exclusion (market and social) that generates the poverty traps that allow ‘natural’ shocks to create the irreversibilities that make social protection so important. Knowledge of the nature and location of

asset thresholds is essential to effective design of productive safety nets and social protection. Over the longer term, policy needs to both reduce the impact of exogenous risk (through technological change or insurance devices) and to reduce exclusion from available social and market-mediated risk management devices.

Social Protection for Poverty Reduction: The OECD/DAC/POVNET View

Timo Voipio

The Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) is an arena where donor agencies endorse a common understanding of key development concepts. The OECD-DAC Poverty Network (POVNET) identified 'risks and vulnerability' as a major theme emerging from its work on pro-poor growth. Reducing the risks faced by poor people through reliable social protection instruments can help to stimulate economic growth by encouraging engagement in higher risk/higher profit activities and decreasing reliance on coping strategies that can lead to increased poverty. A new Task Team on Risk, Vulnerability and Social Protection was established to contribute to the POVNET's Overarching Paper on Pro-poor Growth. Analytical work commissioned by the Task Team illustrates the diverse concepts used by donors for social protection. The Task Team is now drafting DAC-Guidelines on social protection and social policy in development, while continuing to argue for broad-based economic growth that is employment-intensive and inclusive.

A Universal Social Minimum as a Foundation for Citizenship

Koy Thomson

This article is an argument for a 'universal social minimum', or a 'social floor' as a foundation for citizenship. The universal social minimum aims to serve a dual function. The first is to create a coherent framework that responds to the increasing social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities and risks heaped upon most of us but especially those living in poverty. The second is to frame the arguments as a political programme, wresting the issue from technocrats and creating the possibility for political vision and will. Obviously as a response to vulnerability and risk the idea of a social minimum impinges on the social protection agenda. For those with a comprehensive approach to social protection the universal social minimum could be seen as a

social protection framework; for those with narrower approaches it could provide a framework within which social protection sits. The critical thing is that the social policy measures aimed at addressing vulnerability and risk are shaped from a human rights and social justice perspective, and that they work together as a whole. This article lays out the justification for a social minimum in human rights and social justice theory, establishes and defines the social minimum and then explores the synergies between the social minimum and social protection.

Understanding Conditions in Income Transfer Programmes: A Brief(est) Note

Armando Barrientos and

Superfluous, Pernicious, Atrocious and Abominable? The Case Against Conditional Cash Transfers

Nicholas Freeland

Conditional cash transfers are very much the 'flavour of the month' at the moment. They provide a regular and reliable injection of purchasing power, enabling the kind of investment in nutrition, healthcare and schooling which could lead to a sustained escape from poverty in the longer run. But for some they leave a nasty taste in the mouth. Unconditional cash transfers are rapidly gaining support as a response to chronic poverty, food insecurity and AIDS, particularly in high HIV-prevalence countries of east and southern Africa, where most governments lack the resources to implement comprehensive social security systems, and the coping capacities of families and communities are severely overstretched. The two articles presented here give both sides of the debate.

Two Cheers for CCTs

Maxine Molyneux

Conditional cash transfers such as PROGRESA/*Oportunidades* are being widely adopted in developing countries as an effective means of combating poverty and promoting human development. These programmes provide a cash subsidy to the mothers of school-age children conditional on their fulfilling certain requirements. This article argues that in reinforcing a maternal model of care, they not only deepen gender divisions but also establish a trade-off between children's and women's needs for long-term security. In assuming that women are exclusively responsible for fulfilling the requirements of the programme and are available to carry out the duties prescribed, they ignore women's economic vulnerability and can even contribute to it if women's

involvement in, and need for, income-generating work is undermined. Programme design could be improved by encouraging a more dynamic model of gender and generational cooperation which has the potential to generate more positive outcomes for all household members, including fathers who are otherwise marginalised from the responsibilities of care.

Cash-based Responses in Emergencies

Paul Harvey and

Food Transfers and Food Insecurity

Ugo Gentilini

Assistance to people in emergencies can sometimes be appropriately provided in the form of cash, enabling people to decide for themselves what they most need and to buy it in local markets. The debate around the appropriate use of cash in emergencies has often been framed as one between cash and food. It is important to remember that cash is not an alternative to food aid but to all forms of in-kind assistance. However, as food aid often dominates humanitarian responses, deciding when cash is appropriate as an alternative or complement to food aid is clearly important. In a recent article, Stephen Devereux noted that ‘... the “cash versus food” debate has become unnecessarily polarised; even acrimonious. It is also spurious and misdirected’. While there is some truth in this, the exchange between Harvey and Gentilini reveals that there is scope to make the debate productive – and even turn it into an opportunity – by adopting a more balanced, context-specific and evidence-based approach.

Social Protection: To Target or Not to Target

John Hoddinott

Targeting social protection programmes is a means to an end, where the end is ensuring that poor households are the ones who benefit from social protection programmes. This article argues that, on balance, existing evidence suggests that targeted programmes, as currently practised around the developing world do indeed deliver a greater share of programme benefits to poor households. Targeting makes, or should make, explicit who are the intended beneficiaries of a social protection programme. Targeting also provides a benchmark for assessing programme performance and an obvious question for both monitoring and evaluation is: ‘Are intended beneficiaries actually receiving benefits?’. However, while these arguments make a case for considering targeting social protection programmes, they do not

imply that all such programmes should be targeted. Decisions to target social protection interventions should be based on assessments of both the benefits and the costs of targeting.

Social Protection and Growth: The Case of Agriculture

Rebecca Holmes, John Farrington and Rachel Slater

This article discusses how and how far complementarities can be achieved between policies designed to promote agriculture and those providing social protection, so that desired combinations of growth and poverty reduction can be achieved more efficiently. It suggests that a framework distinguishing between shocks and stresses is likely to be of strong policy relevance. Those concerned with productive sectors such as agriculture generally perceive farmers as needing protection from shocks through insurance or related mechanisms. Yet some shocks, such as price crashes, are uninsurable, and vulnerability in the face of stresses, such as long-term decline in natural resources, needs to be reduced. Funds flow freely between domestic and productive spheres and this means that shocks and stresses in both need to be addressed simultaneously. Mechanisms for addressing stresses will tend to focus on the building of assets (broadly defined) and so are likely to differ from those addressing shocks.

Rethinking ‘Vulnerability’ and Social Protection for Children Affected by AIDS

Jerker Edström

Common conceptions of ‘vulnerability’ for social protection to meet the needs of children affected by AIDS are problematic. There are partial and divergent understandings of vulnerability in health and livelihood literatures. A common sense reconciliation of three dichotomies core to the concept is instead proposed. Understanding the vulnerability of children affected by AIDS requires an HIV-focused analysis. Children are also developing sexual agents and integral to the very dynamics of the epidemic. Transformative social protection should be well suited to this more balanced proactive understanding of vulnerability and agency but targeting has largely failed to capture full vulnerability. Labels such as ‘AIDS orphan’ are unhelpful, and targeting vulnerable households is a better way to reach vulnerable children. However, it is fundamentally inadequate to reach the most vulnerable and those key to the epidemic, such as the growing numbers living on the streets.