Social policy is shaped by politics, but it also influences politics. Social safety nets are no exception: the political dimensions of policies need to be considered in conjunction with technical decisions.

The scope of social safety nets depends on political appetite, that is, acceptability and desirability, which depends on social norms and ideological factors, such as the perceived causes of poverty and the preferences for redistribution. Evidence on the impact of programs can be harnessed to change political appetite. Periods of rapid economic or social change offer a window of opportunity, wherein the political appetite for social safety net programs can evolve quickly. International platforms and development partners can catalyze the political support for social safety nets.

The choice of program and design parameters is political. Program design features, such as conditionalities, recertification processes, or a productivity focus, may be important in rallying program support. Political realities may require the targeting of groups beyond the poorest to attain political support. In some cases, while a focus on specific geographical areas may make sense from a poverty perspective, nationwide coverage may be preferred.

There is also a feedback loop: the implementation of social safety net programs shapes the political environment. Politicians and citizens adjust their preferences and incentives and redefine their relationships as social safety net programs are implemented. Social accountability mechanisms can strengthen this political feedback loop. Grievance redress and community and beneficiary participation can help maximize program potential by contributing to greater empowerment and voice among beneficiaries.
Political processes shape the extent and nature of social policy. Decisions about the scale of social safety nets and other forms of redistribution toward the vulnerable are the subject of debates and struggles between competing interests with different incentives.

The staggering expansion of social safety nets across Africa in the past decade demonstrates that ideas, preferences, and political platforms change, even in places where the political environment was initially unsuitable (see chapter 1). Political dynamics evolve, and windows of opportunity open and close. Unpacking and learning from these processes represents a chance to build sustainable social safety net systems. The technical work of designing these systems should also engage with the political dimensions of social policy. Understanding and addressing the political processes and political economy behind social policy are as relevant and necessary as any technical assessment in crafting and implementing ambitious programs.

Bringing social safety nets to scale should encompass recognizing and leveraging the associated politics. Beyond the theoretical or historical discussions on the multiple ways in which political, social, and cultural factors determine social policy (on which there is a large literature), specific examples across Africa of ways political processes have shifted to shape, expand, and sustain social safety net programs can help provide guidance to social policy practitioners and advocates.

There are three main points of interaction between politics and social safety nets (figure 3.1). First, the scope of social safety nets is contingent on political acceptability and desirability, which depend on social norms, the prevalence of poverty, and ideological factors, such as the perceived causes of poverty and the preferences for redistribution. It is important to examine the conditions under which political preferences may shift to reveal space for greater commitment to redistributive policies. Second, the choice of program and design parameters is a mediating factor.
Often influenced by political preferences and incentives, it may influence the level of commitment to social safety net programs. The design process should be a factor in these preferences to maximize buy-in without undermining program impacts. Third, there is a feedback loop. The implementation of social safety net programs shapes the political environment. Politicians and citizens adjust their preferences and incentives and redefine their relationships in the presence of social transfers.

The politics of social policy is often analyzed in terms of social contracts rather than political regimes (box 3.1). The adoption and expansion of social safety nets are not highly correlated with the nature of political regimes. While democratization may promote the greater participation of the poor in the political process, the voice of the poor may be distorted because of narrow electoral participation among vulnerable citizens, low expectations, limited information on government policies, vote buying or patronage, and the salient role of non-economic issues such as ethnicity or religion (Roemer 1998; van de Walle 2014; Weyland 1996). Meanwhile, because they face the threat of popular uprisings or divisions in ruling coalitions, autocratic regimes also have incentives to secure support from and stability for the majority of the population (Lavers and Hickey 2016). Understanding political commitment to the poor is not as simplistic as

**BOX 3.1**

**Social Contracts and Social Safety Nets**

A social contract involves the interplay between a society's expectations that the state will provide services to and secure revenue from the population, backed by the will of policy makers to direct public resources and the capacity of governments to fulfill social expectations (OECD 2009; Rousseau 1968). The deployment of social safety net programs, similar to other government interventions, depends on the social contract between the government and citizens (Hickey 2011). In most African countries, the social contract is mostly founded on intragroup solidarity rather than on the government-led provision of benefits. Support for the poor and vulnerable is predominantly provided through private solidarity networks shaped by kinship (Hill and Verwimp 2017).

Social contracts evolve as a result of changing contexts. During the period of strong economic growth in the 2000s, social contracts in many Latin American countries changed and led to increased social spending. Public resources were used to promote education and health care spending, as well as transfers to the poorest population groups (Breceda, Rigolini, and Saavedra 2008). Social contracts also shifted rapidly in the Arab world in the early 2010s as a result of growing discontent over limited political accountability and voice from a burgeoning middle class, especially youth, whose aspirations were not being met (Silva, Levin, and Morgandi 2013; World Bank 2015).

Social safety nets have emerged in response to changing social contracts, but their existence also likely modifies the social contract as a growing number of individuals become familiar with the programs and as the programs demonstrate effectiveness.
differentiating between democratic and autocratic institutions, even though the progress of democracy in Africa opens space for greater representation of the interest of the poor (World Bank 2016).

The political economy of social safety nets in Africa is evolving, and policy has a big role to play in changing political preferences and incentives. By recognizing this process, stakeholders may harness rather than lament the politics of building and sustaining social safety net systems.

The Political Appetite for Adopting and Expanding Social Safety Nets

Analysis of the evolution of social safety nets in many African countries suggests that the appetite for the adoption or expansion of social safety net programs evolves in response to three main factors: beliefs and perceptions about redistribution, a volatile socioeconomic environment and shocks, and the influence of external actors, including development and humanitarian partners.

Shape the Policy Dialogue to Change Misconceptions

Preconceived ideas on social safety nets may constitute a barrier to political buy-in and adoption. Commonly held preconceptions include the belief that the poor and recipients in social safety nets are undeserving of assistance and may become dependent on handouts and that social safety net programs do not have productive impacts and are therefore a waste of public resources. This reflects a general lack of understanding of social programs that, in the long run, should be addressed through the introduction of relevant curricula in tertiary education. Thus, dealing with concerns carefully in the process of policy dialogue is critical to promoting the adoption of social safety nets (box 3.2).

The belief that government support is likely to make people lazy and dependent on assistance is deep-rooted. Analysis in the United Kingdom and the United States suggests that attitudes toward people who are poor influence the support for programs (Alesina, Glaeser, and Sacerdote 2001; Baumberg 2014; Graham 2002). According to van Oorschot (2000, 43), “whether people in need can be blamed or can be held responsible for their neediness seems to be a general and central criterion for deservingness.” This holds true in Africa, too. Ideas about deserving groups have played a critical role in shaping domestic political imperatives and have often proven more significant than programmatic platforms or external pressure (Seekings 2015). In Zambia, for instance, the social safety net agenda was opposed most strongly by a minister of finance who denied the existence of poverty in the country by claiming that the poor were really only lazy (Pruce and Hickey 2017). Government officials in Mozambique raised concerns
Changing Beliefs Are Part of Changing the Governance Landscape

Governance—the process of designing and implementing policy—underlies every aspect of how countries develop and how their institutions function. However, quite often, the governance process fails to deliver. Though they are armed with national development strategies, governments may fail to adopt pro-growth or pro-poor policies, or, if these are adopted, the policies may fail to achieve their intended goals. Putting governance front and center in the development debate is essential to fostering sustained economic growth and encouraging more equitable and peaceful societies. It is also critical to successfully bring social safety nets to scale.

Despite the sizable challenges, countries have succeeded in enhancing rules, institutions, and processes that have helped them approach development goals. Change occurs not only by reshaping the preferences and beliefs of the powerful, but also by altering incentives and taking into account the interests of previously excluded participants, thereby increasing contestability.

The preferences and beliefs of decision makers are critical in determining whether the outcome of the bargain will enhance welfare and whether the system will be responsive to the interests of those who have less influence. Changes in preferences can help jump-start coordination to reach a result that is better for all. Accumulating evidence on the positive impact of social safety nets can change the views of decision makers on social safety nets.

Incentives are fundamental to encouraging commitment in the policy arena, including policies that benefit the poor. The low quality of public services, such as schools and health centers, may prompt the more well-off to utilize private services, which weakens the willingness and the incentives of these individuals to contribute fiscally to supporting public services. Appropriate incentives can spur change: The first antipoverty programs in England and Wales in the 19th century were promoted by wealthy landed gentry who were eager to keep labor in rural areas, against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution, which was drawing labor to the cities, as well as the threat represented by the French Revolution.

Contestability—who is included or excluded from the policy arena—is determined by the relative power of actors and the barriers to entry. If the procedures for selecting and implementing policies are more contestable, the policies are perceived as fair and induce cooperation more effectively—that is, they are considered legitimate. Participation and ownership in the design of rules can also increase voluntary compliance. However, entrenched social norms may make the participation of poor and disadvantaged groups in policy discussions and policy formulation more difficult; participants in civic activities tend to be wealthier and better educated.

about social safety nets in light of what they argued was an absence of a work ethic and a prevalence of lazybones in the country (Buur and Salimo 2017).

The distance between decision makers and the poor may account for these and other enduring preconceptions. Economic and social distance between groups can undermine support for social policies, while proximity results in greater support for redistribution (Graham 2002; Luttmer 2001; Pritchett 2005). African societies are highly unequal. The urban/rural divide and educational gaps represent the largest and most persistent sources of inequality (Beegle et al. 2016; Bossuroy and Cogneau 2013). Decision makers are socially, geographically, and psychologically distant from the poor, and they are less likely to make social safety nets a priority. Sen (1995, 21) makes an analogy with infectious diseases, which receive greater attention than noninfectious diseases because of the risk of contagion. “I sometimes wonder whether there is any way of making poverty terribly infectious,” he writes. “If that were to happen, its general elimination would be, I am certain, remarkably rapid.”

The emphasis on self-reliance and individual responsibility may fuel this perception of the poor and depress the interest in social safety nets. The ability to provide for the needs of one’s family is usually considered an aspect of human dignity. In countries where relevant data exist, a majority of the population declares that it is humiliating to receive money without having to work for it (figure 3.2). This notion may be even more prevalent among well-educated

Figure 3.2 Receiving Money without Working for It Is Considered Humiliating in Africa

Source: Data of waves 4 (Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe) and 5 (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Rwanda, South Africa, Zambia) of the WVS (World Values Survey) (database), King’s College, Old Aberdeen, United Kingdom, http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp.
segments of the population who were trained in the fundamentals of neoclassical economics, which emphasizes individual endeavor much more than the structural conditions that underpin poverty and vulnerability.

There are also widespread concerns that transfers to the poor are wasted resources. Even though most social safety net programs represent a very small percentage of gross domestic product (GDP, chapters 1 and 5), governments tend to use affordability as an argument against adopting or expanding such programs. This is usually accompanied by a stated preference for investing in programs that are perceived as more productive or better aligned with the small government model, which is focused on producing public goods, fixing market failures, and regulating free competition. The low-cost criterion of social safety net programs is thus associated with political, normative, and ideological factors rather than simply an assessment of the available fiscal space (Seekings 2016a).

Fears of dependency on social safety nets can be partly addressed through the dissemination of rigorous evidence (see chapter 2). There is growing experience with the positive impact of social safety nets on a range of indicators. The claim that social safety nets may represent a work disincentive among beneficiaries has been largely disproven (Banerjee et al. 2015a, 2015b). Similarly, it has been found that beneficiaries do not tend to use social transfers to purchase temptation goods, such as alcohol and tobacco, but rather to smooth consumption and raise human capital expenditures (Evans and Popova 2014; Handa et al. 2017).

Growing evidence also shows that cash transfers have productive impacts. These impacts mostly become manifest through investments in human capital through greater expenditures on nutrition and education among children (Alderman and Yemtsov 2013). Social safety nets may be considered an investment in future generations, with potentially large impacts on productivity and growth (Gertler et al. 2014). The strong productivity impacts of combinations of cash transfers and productive interventions—such as training, savings, and insurance—have been demonstrated (Argent, Augsburg, and Rasul 2014; Banerjee et al. 2015a, 2015b; Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez 2014; Premand and del Ninno 2016). This accumulating evidence is shifting the policy dialogue away from the preconception that social safety nets promote an alleged culture of dependency and is helping make the case that social safety nets foster poverty reduction and economic advancement.

The evidence should be presented in the policy dialogue early in the design stage, with particular attention to the relevance and relatability of the programs discussed. Evidence gathered within the country or neighboring countries carries more weight because decision makers may question the validity of results drawn from distant contexts. The results of randomized controlled trials are often easier to convey to a nonexpert audience and may be better received if one
assumes the audience has a more general background in experimental methods of evaluating social programs. The capacity to bring forth meaningful, contextualized, and robust information is a key factor in fostering evidence-based policy making.

Perceptions of social safety nets may shift dramatically following study tours and other forms of direct learning from similar programs around the world. In Ethiopia, the integration of social protection objectives in a rural development program partly drew on a 1990s study tour by government officials to the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, in India, for inspiration (Lavers 2016a). Senegal’s Programme National de Bourses de Sécurité Familiale (national conditional cash transfer program) reflects the influence of the Brazilian and Mexican experiences, to which a senior official had been exposed in a previous position (Ndiaye 2017). Study tours by government officials from Kenya and Uganda to a pilot social cash transfer scheme in Zambia helped spread the model of cash transfers stripped of conditionalities (Hickey and Bukenya 2016; Pruce and Hickey 2017; Wanyama and McCord 2017). Visits to Ethiopia by government delegations from Mozambique, Rwanda, and Tanzania convinced key decision makers of the appeal of the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) (Buur and Salimo 2017; Lavers 2016b; Ulriksen 2016). Study tours have helped persuade some erstwhile opponents, as in the case of Uganda (Hickey and Bukenya 2016). In Mozambique, one of the key turning points in the government’s decision to embrace social safety nets was a study tour to South Africa, where key officials realized that social safety nets would be a useful means of maintaining stability (Buur and Salimo 2017).

Given the importance of direct exposure to programs, pilot projects can help convince constituencies of the merits of a social safety net program. In Zambia, the main mechanism of fresh awareness has been rigorous evaluations of the effects of cash transfers at the pilot stage, which created a viable evidence base that civil servants could use later, once a political opening arose. In Uganda, an important factor in stimulating political support for the social safety net agenda has been the rollout of the Senior Citizens Grant Program. The promotion of the program as a success story through field visits, media story placements, and an evaluation seems to have created sufficient support to make the program a political reality that can no longer be challenged (Hickey and Bukenya 2016).

The importance of evidence and exposure to programs has stimulated the creation of groups of practitioners across countries that serve as sustainable platforms for sharing experiences and knowledge. Communities of practice on social safety nets have emerged across Africa, often facilitated by a development partner or an international agency. They have proved meaningful and efficient in promoting learning across programs, disseminating study results, and establishing a stable regional coalition of skilled technicians and advocates.
Carefully countering misconceptions and shifting beliefs is critical in shaping the policy dialogue around social safety nets. There is accumulating evidence that addresses the main causes of resistance, such as the notions that social safety nets may represent work disincentives and promote a culture of dependency, or that they do not have productive effects and should therefore be allocated a minimal share of public resources. Monitoring, disseminating the resulting evidence, and supplying direct exposure to existing social safety net programs may be fruitful in confronting misconceptions and demonstrating that social safety nets generally do not discourage, but rather promote, productive behavior.

**Identify Windows of Opportunity in Rapidly Changing Environments**

While transforming perceptions and priorities is a long process, crises and shocks have often provided momentum for the establishment of social safety net programs. The political appetite for social safety net programs may evolve quickly during periods of rapid economic or social change or crises (climate shocks, economic downturns, social conflicts), especially if the ruling coalition perceives the evolution as a potential threat to power. Incentives to create or strengthen social safety nets arise not only from the need to assist the vulnerable households most affected by the change or crises, but also from the political need to defuse the risk of political unrest and broaden support.

The appetite for expanding social safety nets evolves quickly during looming political crises. In Senegal, rising fuel and food prices following the 2008–09 financial crisis, alongside the decline in the key peanut and fishing economies, contributed to political demands for regime change and President Macky Sall’s emphasis on social programs following his 2012 election (Ndiaye 2017). The 2005 electoral crisis and subsequent large-scale urban protests in Ethiopia alerted the ruling coalition to the threat posed by urban unemployment and poverty and were a major driver of the urban PSNP launched in 2016. A second impetus emerged after the 2007 elections, when the program came to be viewed as a means of resolving the political crisis associated with postelection violence.

A similar political mechanism also contributes to shaping responses to humanitarian crises. Emergency responses to conflicts or famines have become the basis of sustained social safety net systems in many countries across Africa. In Ethiopia, a major food crisis in 2002–03 exposed the limitations of the prevailing agricultural development strategy and led to the adoption of the PSNP (Lavers 2016a). A large number of programs were launched or expanded in the wake of the food, fuel, and financial crises of 2008–09. Droughts, such as in Botswana or Mauritania, and conflicts, such as in Mozambique and Sierra Leone, have spurred governments to establish emergency programs and lay the foundations of social safety net systems. Social funds, such as the social action
funds in Malawi and Tanzania, were initially launched to provide community infrastructure in response to economic crises, but evolved into social safety net programs.

Similarly, major health crises have played a significant role in raising interest in improving social safety nets. The disruption of solidarity and protection mechanisms caused by the spread of HIV/AIDS, which led to the incapacity or death of many parents, was an important driver of the establishment of social safety nets in Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, and Zambia (Granvik 2015; Hamer 2016; Pruce and Hickey 2017; Wanyama and McCord 2017). The impact on family structures shaped the design of social safety net programs. There was a shared emphasis on supporting the elderly, given their additional care burdens, and sometimes also orphans and vulnerable children. Rapidly expanding social safety nets involving cash transfers also formed a key pillar of the response of the government of Sierra Leone to the widespread socioeconomic impacts of the Ebola outbreak in 2014. A cash transfer program was being introduced at the time of the outbreak. Other social safety net programs were limited to labor-intensive public works. As the epidemic unfolded, the authorities became concerned that the disruptions in economic production and the potential for a drop-off in agricultural outputs would result in food shortages and other adverse socioeconomic impacts. In response, the rollout of the cash transfer program was accelerated and expanded to cover four times more beneficiaries; the benefit level was doubled; and the targeting mechanisms were rendered more agile and adapted to confront the vulnerabilities associated with the Ebola virus. The urgency of the situation also prompted the government to strengthen the quality of program implementation and harmonize delivery by governmental and nongovernmental institutions through the adoption of standard operating procedures. The expansion and consolidation of the program have been partially sustained since the Ebola epidemic, and the government has devoted a line to social safety nets in the domestic budget for the first time.

In many cases, emergency response programs established outside the sphere of social safety nets have created the political buy-in and delivery infrastructure on which programs have been developed. Food aid programs have often been the foundation of social safety net programs. Social safety nets in Botswana, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe have been built directly on long-standing emergency drought relief programs involving public works and food aid components (Chinyoka and Seekings 2016; Hamer 2016). In Mozambique, the development partner promotion of social safety nets sought to build on an existing government program, the Food Subsidy Program. In such cases, governments and development partners have leveraged the continuity in public provisioning. This has not only helped secure political support for new initiatives, but has also facilitated implementation by enabling programs to build on existing delivery mechanisms and administrative systems. In some
contexts, however, strong opposition has developed between stakeholders in humanitarian responses and supporters of social safety nets, resulting in duplication.

The links between crisis response mechanisms and social safety nets are also manifest in the recent development of adaptive social protection programs. These programs strive to embed mechanisms for rapidly expanding the coverage of social safety nets to include households or geographical areas as soon as they are hit by a shock, as in the multicountry Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program launched in 2014. By building on social safety net delivery systems, these mechanisms boost the efficacy of emergency programs.

Economic reforms, which are often a response to shocks, may also raise the political support for social safety nets if there is an anticipated need for compensation among certain categories of people and more generally for garnering support for the reform. In Mozambique, the urban protests and riots that began in Maputo and spread across the country in 2008 and 2010 focused on the government’s removal of subsidies under pressure from development partners and the rising costs of food and fuel. The disturbances constituted existential threats to the Mozambique Liberation Front, the dominant political party. The protests provided the impetus for the adoption of social safety net policies, notably the Productive Social Action Program launched in 2013 (Buur and Salimo 2017).

Social safety nets are becoming an explicit part of macroeconomic policy reforms. In the current context of fiscal tightening, many countries are looking for ways to rationalize and target schemes more effectively. Terminating universal subsidies—often regressive and expensive programs—may save public resources, but also negatively affects segments of the population. In Sierra Leone, the first wave of a removal of subsidies in October 2016 resulted in a price rise that would be potentially harmful to the poor. This prompted the government and the International Monetary Fund to discuss linking any further wave of subsidy removal to additional expansion of the social safety net program. In some countries in Asia, programs have also been broadened as part of an effort to stimulate economic growth. Examples include the enlargement of social pension systems in China and Thailand during the global financial crisis (ADB 2009; Kidd and Damerau 2016; Suwanrada and Wesumperuma 2012).

If they are established or expanded to respond to a particular crisis or source of tension, social safety nets generally have a broader range of objectives than merely poverty reduction. In addition to providing support to the poor, programs may aim at containing migration flows, preserving social peace, or temporarily mitigating the impact of a shock on population groups beyond the poor. For example, an objective of Ethiopian government policy has been to
limit the rate of urban migration because of concerns that uncontrolled migration, in the absence of adequate urban employment opportunities, is likely to lead to social and political instability. Faced with a direct threat to its power, the ruling coalition attempted to use the PSNP to slow out-migration from rural areas, while augmenting the urban PSNP to provide greater incentives for people to move to or stay in small towns and cities, rather than migrate to Addis Ababa (Lavers 2013, 2016a).

Thus, because the political incentives to adopt or expand social safety nets may shift during periods of rapid change, especially if there is a perceived threat to the ruling coalition, stakeholders should monitor windows of opportunity to bring programs to scale. The rapid change may be caused by any one of numerous factors: climate stress, natural disasters, social tensions, economic crises and reforms, or political conflicts. In providing a clear rationale for direct support to populations, stakeholders may alter the incentives facing decision makers and open the space for shifts in the status quo. It is critical that the decision and policy makers involved in responding to crises or shocks have a good understanding of the potential of social safety net systems to help achieve policy and political objectives.

The Role of International Platforms and Partners
Regional and global organizations in which the large majority of African countries participate provide a normative framework for social safety nets and social protection more generally. The growing enthusiasm for social safety nets throughout the world has resulted in initiatives such as the African Union’s Social Policy Framework, the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and associated targets, and the United Nations–wide Social Protection Floor Initiative. Social safety nets figure prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 1.3 calls for the implementation of “nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors” and, by 2030, the achievement of “substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable.”1 In 2006, the African Union issued the Livingstone Call for Action on Social Protection in Africa, which notes that “the guarantee of basic social protection strengthens the social contract between the state and citizens, enhancing social cohesion” and appeals for the expansion of social transfer programs.2

Most governments have signed agreements to advance human rights, as presented in the universal declaration of human rights, among which are the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to security and protection in case of shocks. Except for Botswana, the Comoros, Mozambique, and South Sudan, all countries in the region have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. As of February 2017, the African
Charter had been ratified by all countries, except South Sudan. The core values of human rights are enshrined in the constitutions of most countries, which identify particular groups as worthy of support (chapter 4; table 3.1). Most countries are also parties to regional or global organizations that provide a normative framework for social safety nets, including the African Union's Social Policy Framework, the Social Protection Floor Initiative, and the Sustainable Development Goals. While rights-based arguments may not have been a significant incentive in the adoption or expansion of social safety nets in the region, social safety nets can help governments fulfill their human rights missions by promoting social and economic rights and broader political rights. Human rights principles can also help promote the sustainability of programs (box 3.3).

It is unclear whether regional organizations and the related commitments of their members contribute to shifting incentives among policy makers. The various rights agreements are not mentioned in most case studies, and, for example, decision makers behind the Vision 2020 Umurenge Program (VUP) in Rwanda were unaware of the African Union framework, although Rwanda is a signatory (Lavers 2016b). On the other hand, this framework was mentioned as a factor in the expansion of social safety nets in Mozambique (Buur and Salimo 2017).

Development partners may influence the adoption and expansion of social safety nets through financing, but also by providing technical assistance, funding study tours and training, amassing and sharing knowledge, and piloting interventions (Chinyoka and Seekings 2016; Siachiwena 2016; Ulriksen 2016).

**Table 3.1 Constitutions Cover Vulnerable Groups**

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<th>Ethiopia</th>
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*Source: World Bank data review.*
Social Safety Nets and Human Rights Reinforce Each Other

Social safety nets can help ensure the social and economic rights of the poor. They are anchored in international standards, particularly the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under these standards, states are obligated to work toward the realization of a series of rights, including the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to security in case of shocks, and the right to health care and education. In this framework, individuals are rights-holders who may make legitimate claims, and states and other actors are duty-bearers that are responsible and can be held accountable for acts or omissions.

Laws and covenants recognize that governments may require time to safeguard these rights among entire populations, and they provide for the progressive realization of the rights. They highlight the special importance of safeguarding the rights of the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups and prohibit retrogressive measures.

Social safety nets may be central to recognizing these rights. Indeed, in practice, many governments face challenges in reaching the poorest population groups and supplying them with basic health care, nutrition, and education services. Because they usually cover groups, including those living in remote areas, characterized by limited contact with government programs, social safety nets may offer a way for governments to bring these people into the realm of public policy and thus help the most marginalized gain access to health care, education, and markets, in addition to providing them directly with support. This underlines the need to enhance the coverage and outreach of programs among the poorest and to respect the fundamental principle of equality in service delivery: establishing interventions among the poorest that are equal in quality to services and interventions among other population groups.

Social safety nets can promote other rights among the poor and, in particular, empower the poor to participate more broadly in societies and to demand other rights. By bringing the poor into the realm of public policies, offering them benefits, and covering them through public services, including identification systems, social safety nets may help the poorest realize other social, economic, and political rights. In small but significant ways, social safety net programs not only protect the poor and vulnerable; they also build democracy from the bottom up by strengthening political rights and contributing to the achievement of social justice.

Human rights also provide guiding principles for the implementation of programs, especially through the principles of equality, participation, and accountability. The principles of equality and nondiscrimination call for designs that avoid discrimination based on criteria other than poverty or vulnerability. They also demand a proactive

(continued next page)
Box 3.3 (continued)

approach in addressing obstacles that individuals or groups may face, for instance, by deploying outreach. Meaningful and effective participation requires an engagement with civil society in program design and implementation. Transparency and accountability can be realized only through mechanisms to promote adequate public awareness and options for expressing grievances and seeking redress. In practice, following these key principles fosters program support in civil society because the principles are fair and well understood, and failures and omissions can be challenged. This ultimately contributes to program expansion and long-term sustainability.

Source: Prepared by Eva Kloeve.
Note: For a detailed discussion of relevant issues, see Sepúlveda and Nyst (2012).

Development partners finance an average 55 percent of program spending; the shares are typically higher in lower-income countries, fragile and conflict-affected states, and nations experiencing humanitarian crises (figure 3.3; appendix G, table G.8). Analysis of programs in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, and Zambia suggests that international development partners tend to assign weight to existing national civil society and public sector proponents of social safety nets, help strengthen institutions entrusted with the delivery of programs, and encourage the adoption of mechanisms for more transparent and accountable delivery systems (Cherrier 2015). However, the multiplicity of partners and programs with distinct agendas and priorities may also create fragmentation and prevent the formation of a coherent policy framework (see chapter 4).

Development partners have been shown to influence the policy agenda through the dissemination of high-level strategic reports and normative frameworks, along with the policy dialogue and technical assistance provided to recipient countries. In many countries, these initiatives have been critical in developing the policy frameworks and instruments for social protection that have been adopted among bureaucrats and advocates in civil and political society.

Development partner involvement alone is not sufficient to achieve a shift toward the political adoption of social safety nets, which often results from attempts to secure or expand existing power in the face of changing
Figure 3.3 Development Partners Support a Large Share of Social Safety Nets


Note: AFD = Agence Française de Développement; CERF = Central Emergency Response Fund; CGAP = Consultative Group to Assist the Poor; DFID = UK Department for International Development; ECHO = European Community Humanitarian Aid Office; Enabel = Belgian development agency; ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross; IFAD = International Fund for Agricultural Development; KOICA = Korea International Cooperation Agency; OFDA = Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance; SHF = Somalia Humanitarian Fund; SIDA = Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme; UNTF = UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women; USAID = US Agency for International Development; WFP = World Food Programme.
circumstances (Hickey and Lavers 2017). For example, in Rwanda, the VUP originated in internal government debates over the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the identification of a need for a poverty reduction program, for which the government later approached partners for support (Lavers 2016b). Similarly, in Ethiopia, various development partners had long voiced their concerns about the dysfunctional emergency food system constructed beginning in the 1980s and proposed a shift to cash and longer-term, predictable support. The policy agenda was set at a technical level. However, only when this coincided with government concerns precipitated by a series of crises did the government begin to take development partner proposals seriously (Lavers 2016a). In Senegal, while development partners had been involved in social protection for some time, the adoption of the national conditional cash transfer program appears to have been an internal decision by the Sall administration—notably, on the recommendation of a key adviser who had been exposed to the Brazilian and Mexican conditional cash transfer schemes (Ndiaye 2017). In general, decisions to expand social safety nets have tended to occur within broader government strategies, even if they are largely financed by development partners (Cherrier 2015).

**Program Parameters Are Political**

Politics is important in program design. Program parameters must take prevailing preferences, incentives, and perceptions into account. The best designs are those that are technically sound, administratively feasible, and politically savvy as they increase political buy-in while maximizing impacts. The elements of technical soundness and administrative feasibility are often addressed during program design, but the politically palatable aspect is frequently underestimated or dealt with reluctantly (Pritchett 2005). At the extreme, a perfect technical design that ignores the politics of support for social safety nets could eventually be the worst option for those it means to serve. In the words of Pritchett (2005, 5–6), policy makers who “ignored electoral politics would not just not do the ‘optimal’ thing for the poor, but would do the ‘pessimal’ thing for the group they were trying to protect,” as becomes clear if support for the program decreases and the budget shrinks accordingly.

Political obstacles can be overcome to some degree by, for instance, choosing the characteristics and parameters of the programs so as to factor in political preferences or adapting targeting to make it compatible with political incentives. However, political tweaks need to be introduced as a last resort, kept to a
minimum, and mitigated by a careful focus on inclusiveness and program transparency to avoid risks of capture.

**Prevailing Preferences Should Be Factored In during the Selection of Programs**

Several types of programs can be implemented as social safety nets, and various parameters can be included in the design. These encompass public works, cash transfers with or without conditionalities, accompanying measures, program duration, and graduation criteria. Decision making about these parameters is primarily technical and is taken to maximize the anticipated impact, but political considerations often come into play to maximize buy-in.

Among the features of programs that have a political nature are conditionalities. Conditionalities could be introduced with the technical motivation of boosting the impact of programs. They can also be proposed to address perceptions related to deservingness by requiring beneficiaries to undertake extra efforts. To promote investments in the human capital of household members, especially children, some programs condition the receipt of benefits on participation in information sessions on good practice behaviors or on actual behavioral changes, such as school registration and attendance or regular visits to health care facilities. These conditions, in addition to contributing to investments, can help address perceptions related to deservingness by requiring beneficiaries to undertake extra effort (see chapter 1, box 1.5).

Work requirements may help overcome concerns about the alleged laziness of transfer recipients. Labor-intensive public works are used for a range of reasons, including the embedded self-targeting mechanism or the need for community infrastructure (see chapter 1, box 1.2). For example, in Rwanda, the VUP officially has two objectives: to provide support for the poorest, and to make an economic contribution by building community infrastructure (health care and education facilities and roads). But work requirements also ensure that beneficiaries exert visible effort to receive benefits. Concerns about dependency have been dealt with in Ethiopia and Rwanda through a strong focus on public works carried out by all able-bodied beneficiaries, while unconditional support is provided only to those beneficiaries who cannot work.

To promote a productive impact, social safety net programs are sometimes cast as a component of a larger productive or developmental program. In several cases, complementary initiatives, such as credit and extension programs, supply a potential route toward graduation (box 3.4). The emphasis on self-reliance shows that social safety nets are expected to make an economic contribution or, at least, limit future government financial exposure. Ethiopia’s PSNP and Rwanda’s VUP are intended to be much more than transfer programs, but are explicitly framed as rural development programs, linking protective and
productive functions through transfers, credit, extension programs, and public works. As a result, while development partners framed the PSNP as the largest social safety net program in Africa, the government continued to describe it as a food security and agricultural program, omitting social protection entirely from national development strategies in 2006 and 2010. In Tanzania, the productive orientation of the PSSN was a major factor in convincing the government and securing political support because it linked the program to general concerns about dependency and the importance of self-reliance, an idea that goes back to Nyerere, but also to the vision of development advocated by contemporary governments (Ulriksen 2016). Having a broader productive focus can help a larger range of stakeholders relate to programs and appreciate their value. Similarly, humanitarian interventions are increasingly complemented by resilience-building programs, which focus on helping households raise their ability to face future shocks through increased productivity and diversity in income-generating activities.

The fear of promoting a culture of dependency may also be addressed by including clear time bounds in social safety net programs. In some cases, beneficiaries are only eligible to receive benefits for a fixed period (typically between 2 and 5 years). The main rationale is generally that, within a restricted budget, limiting duration is a condition for expanding coverage and therefore  

**BOX 3.4**

**Graduation in Social Safety Net Programs**

Social safety nets are designed to support the poor and vulnerable, but usually not on a permanent basis. Ideally, as households acquire resources and improve their ability to provide for themselves, they should graduate from the programs. To complement modest transfers, programs sometimes offer expanded social safety nets to enhance livelihoods, strengthen resilience, and lift people out of poverty (Daidone et al. 2015). The graduation components often include skills training, coaching, asset transfers, and the promotion of savings, in addition to the basic cash transfers. Evidence on the impacts of pilot interventions of a graduation model in six countries shows positive results, and many programs have incorporated elements of graduation in their design (Banerjee et al. 2015a, 2015b).

The VUP in Rwanda provides an example of a coordinated graduation system. The program design allows for (a) a reduction of income poverty through direct support involving cash transfers and public works wages; (b) facilitation of access to basic services for all beneficiary households, together with access to vocational training; and (c) streams of income generated from livelihood projects supported through financial services and other means (Gahamanyi and Kettlewell 2015). Participants along each of these pathways are expected to graduate to another pathway or exit the program after receiving one or a combination of these benefits over a significant period of time.
maximizing the impact and fairness of the program. However, imposing a clear time limit has also been used as a way to reassure decision makers nervous about encouraging long-term reliance on government-provided support. For example, in 2010, a combination of these reasons led Ethiopian development strategists to adopt the very ambitious target of graduating approximately 80 percent of PSNP participants by 2015 (Lavers 2016a). Recertification processes can be considered a flexible time limitation. For instance, in Senegal, the national conditional cash transfer program covers households for five years, after which a recertification process is planned to evaluate whether households should stay in or exit the program. Recertification does not automatically push beneficiaries out of social safety nets, as in a time-bound design, but it may offer reassurance that the program is based on actual needs.

Adjust Targeting to Garner Support for Social Safety Nets

Political preferences and incentives shape the selection criteria for social safety net beneficiaries, and targeting methods often reflect a balance between programmatic and political objectives.

In many contexts, the response to concerns about deservingness and self-reliance has been to target only those who are clearly unable to provide for themselves. For instance, programs in Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia are categorically targeted, as well as means-tested in most cases, to focus on groups that are considered deserving of support, most notably mothers and the elderly, but also children and the disabled. While overall poverty-targeted programs account for the majority of spending in the region, most of the social safety net spending in Central Africa and West Africa goes to categorically targeted programs (figure 3.4; appendix G, table G.6).

Low-income countries and fragile states also allocate a large share of spending to categorically targeted programs in terms of the life-cycle. In Southern Africa and upper-middle- or high-income countries, significant shares of social safety net spending go to programs focused on the elderly (figure 3.5; appendix G, table G.6). Central Africa, East Africa, and fragile states allocate more of their social safety net spending than other country groups to special groups through emergency interventions directed at refugees and returning migrants.

The need to support the most vulnerable is sometimes enshrined in legal systems. Constitutions often single out categorical groups as worthy of public support, rather than the poor in general (see table 3.1). Of course, programs with objectives different or additional to poverty reduction warrant a categorical approach, for example, programs focused on children or pregnant women. And selecting beneficiaries based on categories that are collectively perceived as vulnerable can also help in advocating for higher levels of resources dedicated to social safety nets.
Figure 3.4 Targeting Varies across Regions and Groups


Note: The poverty category includes all programs that explicitly target households on the basis of welfare, poverty, or vulnerability. To identify households, these programs rely on community targeting, means or income tests, proxy-means tests, pension tests, self-targeting, or a combination of these. See methodology in appendices A and B.
Figure 3.5 The Elderly and Children Benefit Most From Social Safety Nets


Note: See methodology in appendices A and B.
Political incentives may also lead to the targeting of groups besides the poorest to expand support for the program. In some cases, while focusing on specific geographical areas would make sense from a poverty perspective, national coverage might be necessary to secure support (Gelbach and Pritchett 2002; Moene and Wallerstein 2001; van de Walle 1998). This may stem from concerns about equity and universality or the fear of alienating powerful constituents by excluding them. For example, while designing a new national social protection program in 2016, the Nigerian government determined that, for political reasons, all six geographical zones had to be covered by a pilot program on productive activities, which led to an adjustment of the targeting protocol. In Kenya, the consensus reached by members of parliament was to deliver about 30 percent of all transfers to all constituencies regardless of need (in line with political incentives), while allocating the rest according to the local prevalence of poverty, thereby maintaining pro-poor targeting, while ensuring political support. In Uganda, the choice to roll out the Senior Citizen’s Grant Program by targeting the 100 eldest pensioners in new districts arguably reflects a political consideration to distribute a small transfer as widely as possible, rather than pursue a more technically informed and pro-poor design. At the end of the spectrum, universal coverage may be the preferred option if the focus is on strict equality of treatment and the avoidance of any form of exclusion. That is, “the beneficiaries of thoroughly targeted poverty alleviation programs are often quite weak politically and may lack the clout to sustain the programs and maintain the quality of the services offered,” writes Sen (1995, 14). “Benefits meant exclusively for the poor often end up being poor benefits.”

Similarly, politically influential groups may receive more benefits than their economic situation would require. For instance, the elderly tend to be disproportionately supported relative to children, even though universal programs for children would have a much larger impact on poverty reduction than social pension programs (Guven and Leite 2016). This may be because the elderly can be relatively powerful voters, while children’s voices are not taken into account. Indeed, in Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, between 60 percent and 70 percent of individuals believe that the elderly enjoy too much political influence.3

Even if programs are targeted to poverty, the targeting methodology should be chosen with consideration for the consequences for voice and agency across communities. Targeting based on independent data collection, such as the proxy means test, offers some guarantees of independence and minimizes the risks of capture, but it may be viewed negatively as an exogenous technical process with little community involvement. Conversely, community-based targeting generally fosters ownership and buy-in by communities or local leaders, but exposes programs to risk of local capture if the program is not run properly. Beyond the various statistical properties that distinguish both methodologies,
choosing to use either one or to combine them may also respond to a need to adapt to political constraints or foster buy-in among certain groups.

A Possible Trade-Off between Political and Technical Imperatives
Taking political considerations into account in designing a social safety net program may result in a technically suboptimal program. In Rwanda, for example, the emphasis placed on infrastructure development has made ensuring the labor intensity of public works challenging. Indeed, faced with strong incentives to meet infrastructure targets, local officials have tended to resort to capital-intensive production techniques, thereby reducing the proportion of resources available to wages and favoring strong, able-bodied participants, who might not be the poorest (Lavers 2016a, 2016b). Similarly, imposing conditionalities might result in greater impact; but enforcement can be costly and resource intensive. Meanwhile, imposing time limits or predetermined targets in terms of the number of households expected to graduate from a program can conflict with the objective of poverty reduction. For instance, the decision by the Ethiopian government to graduate a large share of PSNP beneficiaries is said to have resulted in a significant drop in PSNP enrollment after regional governments instructed local administrations to exit participants regardless of the state of food security (Lavers 2016a).

If political considerations inform the choice of target groups, transparency and effectiveness are paramount in protecting programs from capture. The competing tensions between political incentives and more technical approaches to the design of pro-poor programs are particularly evident for the issue of targeting and the selection of beneficiaries and districts. For example, the selection of program participants in Kenya was initially conducted by local committees and reflected the preferences of tribal chiefs, with subsequent validation by the national social protection secretariat. This process has been revised subsequently through the creation of social assistance committees as a result of demands by members of parliament to allow greater involvement in program management in their constituencies, but the number of political appointees on these new committees has triggered fears of patronage (Wanyama and McCord 2017). If this process becomes politicized, the need arises for delivery agencies to become (as far as possible) pockets of bureaucratic effectiveness that are not only well led and managed but are also freer of political pressures (Roll 2014).

It is therefore critical to resort to political tweaks to program design only if resistance cannot be addressed through evidence-based dialogue and to impose strict safeguards. Strengthening the foundations of programs can prevent distortionary use of programs for political gain. Clear operational manuals, information campaigns, and accountability mechanisms can help promote the faithful implementation of programs. While program parameters should not be set too firmly, for they may require adjustment as conditions evolve, basic rights
and principles might be institutionalized to discourage manipulation for political gain (chapter 4).

**Political Impacts May Favor Social Safety Net Sustainability**

The political environment is not an exogenous, unalterable factor that overdetermines policy choices. Politics and policies have a two-way relationship. By promoting the empowerment of their beneficiaries and changing the way beneficiaries relate to governments, social safety nets can shift the incentives faced by decision makers and promote program sustainability.

**Social Safety Nets May Foster Empowerment**

Social safety net programs may increase power and promote autonomy among beneficiary households. In addition to their broader impact on well-being (chapter 2), cash transfer programs enhance self-esteem among individuals. Positive impacts on psychosocial well-being lead to positive impacts on educational performance, participation in social life, and empowerment for decision making. In Kenya, Mozambique, and Zambia, orphans, other vulnerable children, and disabled beneficiaries report that the cash transfers have boosted their self-confidence, sense of dignity, ability to be more assertive, and expectation of future well-being (Attah et al. 2016; Handa et al. 2014a, 2014b; Haushofer and Shapiro 2013; Jones et al. 2016; Seidenfeld, Handa, and Tembo 2013). However, social safety net programs can also be associated with stereotype threat or stigma because their beneficiaries are labeled as extremely poor (Molyneux 2016). Programs can also have negative side effects, such as feelings of shame because of reliance on program support. Any program that requires people to be identified as poor and unable to provide for themselves would, Sen (1995, 12) warns, “tend to have some effects on their self-respect as well as on the respect accorded them by others.”

Social safety nets may also promote greater cohesion and empowerment in recipient communities. By improving the living conditions of their beneficiaries, programs promote greater inclusion by reducing the stigma of helplessness among people with disabilities in Ghana, ensuring that children can go to school well dressed and clean in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, and, more generally, by raising the social status of the poorest, thereby promoting a greater willingness to befriend recipients of cash transfers in Malawi (Attah et al. 2016; MacAuslan and Riemenschneider 2011; Oduro 2014). Greater inclusion is also realized if beneficiaries meet their social obligations and engage in relations of reciprocity, such as paying church tithes or funeral group fees, contributing to savings groups, and attending weddings (chapter 2; Pavanello et al. 2016).
Households in Ghana, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe were able to reenter risk-sharing networks (Attah et al. 2016). Investing in these risk-sharing networks improves household social support and resilience to shocks. Cohesion and proximity increase the support of richer households for social safety net programs, thereby contributing to program sustainability.

However, the impact on social cohesion depends on the acceptability of the selection process for nonbeneficiaries. Indeed, programs may also have negative impacts on inclusion and solidarity, for instance, if the process of selecting beneficiaries is perceived as unclear or unfair or if poverty is significant (Ellis 2012). In Lesotho, tensions between transfer recipients and nonrecipients grew because of a lack of knowledge about selection criteria and the perception that deserving households had been excluded from the program (Attah et al. 2016). Social safety net programs can also alter patterns of informal support within communities, eroding traditional moral obligations toward the poor. In Zimbabwe, nonrecipients were more reluctant to share agricultural inputs or participate in community work to build shared assets; and in Ghana, beneficiaries expressed fears about the consequences they would face if the program ended, in light of eroding traditional support practices (MacAuslan and Riemenschneider 2011; Oduro 2014).

Introducing social safety nets may therefore affect the local political economy. If the selection process is handled in a way that minimizes stereotype threats and the resentment of nonbeneficiaries, social safety net programs may promote greater empowerment among individual beneficiaries and greater cohesion in communities. In African countries, as elsewhere, cultural norms are not static and can be influenced by policies.

**Shifting the Public’s Expectations of Governments**

Social safety net programs can bring governments closer to beneficiaries by showing how governments can effectively respond to needs. New programs can offer important entry points for shifting interactions between governments and individuals (Jones et al. 2016). In South Africa, social safety net programs reportedly made citizens proud of their country (Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012). Programs can shape this relationship by providing space for regular interaction between representatives of the government and individuals. In Ghana, beneficiary forums and payment cards helped encourage a contract between the government and beneficiaries and provided a means for beneficiaries to make claims and access social services (Oduro 2014). In South Africa, the affidavit required as proof of a beneficiary’s income was considered a direct channel of communication with the government (Plagerson, Harpham, and Kielmann 2012). In Mauritania, a contract is signed between beneficiaries and the government as households are registered, which highlights the contractual basis of the program.
Decentralizing program administration may help foster this local political dynamic. The Tanzania pilot cash transfer program run by TASAF empowered local elected committees in targeting and distributing cash transfers. Compared with the centrally run program, this substantially increased trust in leaders and elected members of local government organizations, boosted voter turnout in local elections, and fostered informal solidarity networks among community members (Evans, Holtemeyer, and Kosec 2017). If programs are centralized and frontline service providers have limited authority to respond to specific queries or complaints, the connection between a program and its beneficiaries is likely to be reduced (Ayliffe, Aslam, and Schjødt 2016; Jones and Samuels 2013). Decentralization is associated, however, with risks of looser oversight and local capture that need to be carefully managed (see chapter 4).

Social safety nets can help reshape the relationship between individuals and the state by expanding the capacity of individuals or groups to access other government processes, for instance, by supporting households in their efforts to obtain national identity documentation (see box 3.3). For example, showing a valid birth certificate has been a condition for receiving the Child Support Grant in South Africa. Because this requirement effectively barred access to the program by certain groups, a new procedure was introduced for delivering birth certificates directly at hospitals, thereby facilitating the acquisition of formal identification among new segments of the population (Glassman and Temin 2016). This not only allows full participation in the program by the poorest or most vulnerable, but it may also have additional benefits for recipients (Hurrell and MacAuslen 2012).

Social safety nets may induce changes in the discourse on poverty and the role of the government and public policy, including perceptions of the obligations of the government to recognize rights. These efforts help individuals understand they are rights-holders and governments realize they are duty-bearers. A sentiment analysis in Tanzania shows that the media is becoming supportive of the PSSN as an instrument that contributes to reducing poverty and inequality (box 3.5).

Social Accountability Mechanisms May Strengthen the Political Feedback Loop

Social accountability mechanisms may further empower beneficiaries. Accountability elements have been increasingly included in social safety net programs in recent years to limit exclusion and to promote voice and rights. Program features such as grievance redress and community and beneficiary participation may be contributing to the development of social contracts (Ringold et al. 2012). Molyneux (2016, 4) argues that social accountability mechanisms can create “some of the embryonic forms of citizenship that can emerge when recipients of welfare begin not only to ‘see the state’ (Corbridge et al. 2005), but also engage with it and challenge it where it falls short of expectations.”
The Media Eventually Became Favorable toward the Social Safety Net in Tanzania

A rigorous analysis of the media coverage of Tanzania’s PSSN shows that coverage intensified as the program was expanded. The PSSN was designed in 2011 after the successful pilot launch of a conditional cash transfer targeting 6,000 beneficiaries. This developed into a program that provided a combination of labor-intensive public works, conditional cash transfer interventions, and productive activities, including basic skills and awareness training, savings promotion, productive grants, and coaching. During the first stage of the PSSN (2012–13), expansion was modest. A full expansion started in stage 2 (2014–16), and the program was reaching 400,000 beneficiaries by 2014 and more than 1 million households by 2015. Media coverage was almost nonexistent in the early stages and increased along with program coverage during the first stage of the expansion (figure B3.5.1). In 2015, media coverage stabilized, even though the number of beneficiaries tripled.

A sentiment analysis has shown that the media has gradually become more supportive of the PSSN as an instrument that helps reduce poverty and narrow inequality. The overall perception of the program in 2010–15 was positive; 76 percent of relevant media articles had a tone that was favorable. Examples of positive coverage included praise for the program as “a vital vehicle for government to eradicate poverty in the country” (2015), “helping people to get out of poverty and improving social and economic welfare” (2014), and “promoting health and boosting education in the country’s poorest households” (2014). The average positive tone became markedly more evident as the program was expanded.

Beyond the poverty impacts of the program, the media highlighted coverage, targeting, conditionalities, and productive activities. The direct beneficiaries are people living below the

Figure B3.5.1 Press Coverage Increased with the Expansion of the PSSN


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Box 3.5 (continued)

poverty line and people temporarily affected by short-term shocks. During the first years of the program, news articles focused on the need to expand the program to “cover every poor person in the targeted areas” (2013) and expressed worry that “the poorest families tend to be left behind” (2014). In general, conditionalities and productive activities were praised as a way to motivate beneficiaries to participate and commit to the program. For example, the program “helped poor households to engage in economic activities, thus improving their

Figure B3.5.2 The Media Became More Favorable during Program Expansion

Source: The analysis was based on 142 newspaper articles published in English in 2010–15. The list of articles was built from the Factiva database using search-constructs related to PSSN and TASAF and includes articles from Arusha Times, Business Daily, Citizen, East Africa Business Week, Nation, New Times, Observer, and Tanzania Daily. However, Tanzania Daily News accounts for more than 85 percent of the articles. The sentiment analysis indicates the general perception (positive or negative) of the selected articles. It relies on a simple counting methodology of negative and positive words, the list of which is provided in the sentiment dictionary created by Hu and Liu (2004). The method assigns values of 1 to positive words and −1 to negative words. The sentiment index for every article is the normalized sum of positive and negative values. Words such as “poverty” and “poor” that are included in the Hu and Liu negative words list, but do not have this connotation in the context of social safety net programs, have been excluded. For the database, see Factiva (database), Dow Jones and Company, New York, https://www.dowjones.com/products/factiva/.

(continued next page)
Box 3.5 (continued)

welfare” and “helped to improve academic performance of children from poor households” through an “increase in school enrollment” (2013). Several news outlets examined the graduation strategy and urged beneficiaries to make proper use of the training and resources supplied through the program to establish income-generating activities, thereby linking the impacts of the program to the values of self-reliance. It was claimed that the program had been “requested by poor households . . . to provide them with training on entrepreneurship and financial management so they would be self-dependent” (2014).

In line with international experience, press coverage of the program was influenced by elections (figure B3.5.2). In the run-up to the 2010 and 2015 general elections, the media emphasized the president’s achievements during his term. The positive perception of the PSSN rose initially, but decreased as the election drew closer. As in the case for similar programs elsewhere, including in Latin America, some media articles raised questions about the perceived political use of the PSSN before elections. For instance, by the end of 2014, news articles were reporting that “politicians have been warned to stop utilizing the projects implemented under the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) programs for their political advantages” (2014). Although these reports were not substantiated, and whether the incumbent party or the opposition was seeking to benefit is unclear, the evidence demonstrates the potential for the politicization of cash transfers.

They can stimulate a greater awareness of entitlement and encourage the capacity to make claims (Harland 2014). Osofian (2011), for instance, finds that the Hunger Safety Net Program (HSNP) in northern Kenya, which includes a grievance mechanism and a rights education component, has helped communities hold local government to account. In Sierra Leone, confidence in the social safety net program has reportedly been greatly enhanced since the independent Anticorruption Commission began handling grievance redress and audits and using technology to shorten the response time.

Social accountability may not function equally in all programs or for all types of beneficiaries. Social accountability mechanisms tend to be deployed most effectively by better-educated, wealthier, and more able-bodied citizens rather than poorer and more vulnerable groups with less capacity to organize and voice their concerns (Giannozzi and Khan 2011; King and Hickey 2017). The low political mobilization around the HSNP may be attributed to the fact that beneficiaries were mostly nomadic pastoralists in northern Kenya, a marginalized group “that has tended to stay outside most domestic politics and has little leverage to make large demands” (Hurrell and MacAuslan 2012, 268). The poor might also not be part of networks that are critical to distribute information and convey concerns or may have limited agency to raise their concerns (Grandvoinnet, Aslam, and Raha 2015). Programs that are time bound also likely limit the development of a broader sense of rights and entitlement to benefits.
The design of appropriate social accountability mechanisms is therefore crucial to maximizing programs’ potential. The composition of oversight committees appears to be an influential determinant of the effectiveness and impact on beneficiaries. Grievance or redress offices must therefore be independent of the program implementation system so they can rectify errors rather than strengthen the position of program officers (Hurrell and MacAuslan 2012). Social accountability mechanisms may have greater potential if programs facilitate the formation of groups of beneficiaries that can leverage collective action, despite the private nature of the good involved and the individual level of targeting. Efforts to broaden bottom-up accountability mechanisms might be reinforced through stronger incentives for frontline providers (hierarchical discipline associated with top-down governance) (Brett 2003).

Social accountability mechanisms may require time to deliver impacts on power relationships. At early stages, the effectiveness of social accountability mechanisms in Africa is likely to be influenced by local power dynamics and social norms (Tembo 2012). It takes significant time to build an environment that promotes voice and accountability, and progress is not linear (Grandvoinnet, Aslam, and Raha 2015). In settings where patron-client relations are pervasive, maintaining good relations with powerful individuals is the rational choice for the poor (Cornwall, Robins, and Von Lieres 2011). Social accountability mechanisms in social safety nets in Zambia have so far not challenged patron-client networks, although this may partly reflect the weak effort to incorporate such mechanisms within the cash transfer program there (Harland 2014).

Even if their impact is mostly felt in the longer term, feedback loops may be critical at the outset of a program. Indeed, much of the institutionalist literature argues that policy feedback may be particularly influential at nascent stages of social policy development in establishing patterns of path dependence (Pierson 1993).

Closing the Loop: The Risks and Opportunities of Politicization
Introducing or expanding social safety nets affects the relationship between the poor and vulnerable and their government. It also modifies incentives among politicians. Evidence is building that direct support for the poor can become a significant topic in electoral processes and the focus of the campaigns of competing parties or candidates. Because of the growing number of closely fought elections across Africa, the ground is becoming more fertile.

Indeed, social safety net programs may be adopted or expanded to strengthen electoral support. There is some evidence that elections have helped catalyze a policy focus on social safety nets, such as the correlation between the 2002 and 2007 elections and spikes in social safety net expenditures in Kenya or the introduction of the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty Program (LEAP) before the 2008 elections in Ghana. In Botswana, the Ipelegeng Public Works Program was used specifically to extend rural drought relief programs to urban...
areas where opposition support had been growing (Hamer 2016). In Uganda, pilot initiatives and the subsequent rollout of social safety nets have been shaped by the need of the ruling National Resistance Movement to secure support in the previously opposition-leaning north, especially in the run-up to the 2016 elections (Hickey and Bukenya 2016). In Senegal, President Abdoulaye Wade proposed the Plan Sésame the year before elections in 2007, which may have contributed to his electoral victory, though the plan failed to materialize in the absence of funding and sustained political commitment (Ndiaye 2017).

The political appetite for expanding social safety nets may also derive from more local governments and local politicians. Pressure from local members of parliament to expand programs in their districts suggests that they realize the potential rewards that could be produced through social safety net programs. For instance, in Kenya and Zambia, there has been pressure from members of parliament to expand small-scale pilot initiatives to new districts as a result of positive perceptions about the programs and the sense that political benefits can be gained from delivering programs to communities (Pruce and Hickey 2017; Wanyama and McCord 2017).

As they gain prominence and visibility, social safety nets become more central as a topic for political branding and electoral campaigns. In many cases, individual leaders seek to become associated with particular programs. Prime Minister Bethuel Pakalitha Mosisili was a key figure pushing for the adoption of the Old-Age Pension in Lesotho, to the point that pensioners regularly talked of collecting their Mosisili (Granvik 2015). Similarly, President Ian Khama of Botswana portrayed expanded public employment programs as his direct contribution, leading to the frequent reference to “our father’s programs” (Hamer 2016). To some degree, this mirrors the common reference to the VUP in Rwanda as a gift from President Paul Kagame.

Social safety nets have become an integral part of political debate and electoral promises. In competitive settings, such as Malawi and Sierra Leone, social safety net programs have been used by some presidential candidates as a brand to help differentiate themselves from political rivals during election campaigns (Albrecht 2017; Hamer 2016). In Lesotho, the Old-Age Pension became an electoral issue in 2007, when the main opposition party pledged to raise the monthly payment by a factor of more than three. Ultimately, the incumbent won the election, potentially partly as a result of the introduction of the pension; but, in the process, the opposition also increased support for the program, helping to consolidate the program’s sustainability (Devereux and White 2010; Granvik 2015).

Voters tend to reward politicians for social safety net programs if these are well implemented. Evidence on the effect of social safety nets on voting behavior and electoral outcomes is derived mostly from large-scale cash transfer programs in Asia and Latin America (box 3.6). At the national level, electoral benefits generally extend to members of the incumbent party. Impacts are lasting, but eventually taper off. Voters typically reward incumbent parties, rather than the parties that initiated the programs, suggesting that adopting and
Electoral Impacts of Social Safety Net Programs in Asia and Latin America

Cash transfers produce electoral benefits for incumbents. In Brazil, Bolsa Família, a cash transfer program, greatly increased the vote share of the incumbents in the three presidential elections from 2002 to 2010, boosting the probability that the poorest voters chose the incumbent by a margin of 32 percent in 2006 and by 21 percent in 2010 (Zucco 2013). In Colombia, beneficiaries of the Familias en Acción conditional cash transfer program were more likely to register, cast a ballot, and vote for the incumbent party in the 2010 presidential election (Báez et al. 2012). A 12.5 percent increase in the beneficiary rate in a municipality led to a 1 percent increase in the incumbent’s vote share (Nupia 2011). In Mexico, the cash transfer program led to a 7 percent increase in voter turnout and a 9 percent rise in the vote share among beneficiaries for the incumbents during the 2000 presidential elections (De La O 2013). In 2006, the candidate of the incumbent party led among beneficiaries by double digits, while he was even with the opposition candidate among nonbeneficiaries (Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2009). In Uruguay, beneficiaries of a temporary cash transfer program were 11–13 percent more likely to express support for the incumbent compared with people slightly above the program cutoff (Manacorda, Miguel, and Vigorito 2011).

The political gains endure for a while, but seem to decline eventually. Indeed, parties that originally initiate programs do not receive the same electoral benefits as incumbents. The existence of the cash transfers may also push nonbeneficiaries to defect from the incumbent, especially in countries with large, visible programs (Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2009; Linos 2013). Antiprogram voters may continue to defect for several years, and the pro-incumbent effects also diminish as voters mobilize less (Corrêa and Cheibub 2016).

Cash transfers produce electoral returns for local officials. A field experiment in the Philippines found that the vote share of incumbent mayors was 26 percent higher in competitive elections in municipalities where a cash transfer program was implemented in all villages, compared with municipalities in which the program was only implemented in half the villages (Labonne 2013). In Honduras, the Programa de Asignación Familiar, a household transfer program, raised an incumbent mayor’s probability of reelection by 39 percent, but did not influence voting in the presidential election (Linos 2013). A program in Indonesia that targeted benefits to villages boosted vote shares among legislative candidates from the incumbent president’s party in the 2009 elections, but did not increase the votes for the incumbent president and had no effect on village politics (Tobias, Sumarto, and Moody 2014).

Voters often seem unclear about whom or which government administration to credit for social safety net programs. The program in the Philippines boosted the reelection chances of mayors, although the program had been implemented by the central government with no input or influence from the mayors (Labonne 2013). Similarly, in Honduras, the mayor and local government played no role in determining whether
municipalities were selected for the cash transfer program (Linos 2013). A state-level program in Brazil significantly increased support for incumbent mayors (Corrêa 2015). In Uruguay, however, beneficiaries seemed able to differentiate between government entities, showing greater approval only for institutions that supported their cash transfers (Manacorda, Miguel, and Vigorito 2011).

Box 3.6 (continued)

supporting the expansion of the programs of the previous government can generate political rewards. In the Latin American and Asian studies, local leaders also seem to benefit, even from nationwide programs. Electoral returns are reported among local officials, sometimes in place of the returns for the elected national officials, as voters often seem unclear about whom to credit for social safety net programs. This support does not stop newly elected officials from holding the government accountable for poor performance (Pavão 2016).

The higher the political stakes, the more program manipulation and capture become attractive. As programs increase in the potential to help secure political support, they begin to fall into the grey area between promising to satisfy the demands of the electorate and vote buying (box 3.7). This can encourage the targeting of programs on the basis of patronage rather than need (Lippert-Rasmussen 2011; Stokes 2007). For instance, in Uganda and Zambia, programs that were once relatively well protected are now reportedly being politicized because members of parliament are pressuring technocrats to include their districts in the rollout. Targeting could also be manipulated to reward supporters of a political party and punish opponents.

A strict respect for the guiding principles of human rights, equity, and clear and transparent operating procedures is paramount in avoiding any suspicion of politically motivated fraud or abuse. The Benin government pushed for the highly decentralized delivery of benefits under the Youth Employment Project, including a cash grant. Nationwide, mayors and local elected officials actively mobilized their services and were keen to showcase participation to their constituencies in the hope that this would reap electoral and political benefits. To avoid the associated risks of clientelism, the government decided to organize a transparent, random selection of beneficiaries. Scratch cards showing random numbers were handed out to each applicant at the time of registration, and beneficiaries were drawn after the end of the registration process through a high-profile public lottery broadcast on national television. This process protected the project from any accusation of fraud and eased the pressure on mayors, most of whom expressed relief because they were thus also being protected from local demands for patronage.
Distinguishing Electoral Accountability and Clientelism in Theory and Practice

Politicians who make promises about the policies and programs they will support once in office are a given of democratic electoral competition. The promises provide voters with information to evaluate the platforms of the various parties and decide how they will vote, but they also enable voters to hold politicians to account for success or failure in delivering on their promises. A functioning competitive democracy depends on the aspiration of politicians to reap electoral benefit by enacting programs that enhance the welfare of their constituencies.

Clientelism is different. While voter mobilization involves politicians promising and then delivering goods to gain and retain support, regardless of whether the support comes from individuals who voted for the candidate, political clientelism involves an unequal exchange, whereby the patron trades the distribution of money or other resources for votes and other kinds of support (Kitschelt 2000; Stokes 2007; van de Walle 2007). The fundamental difference between the two is whether the promises and provision of support are impersonal or personal.

Political clientelism and vote buying are problematic for two main reasons. First, patronage can undermine democratic processes by enabling political elites to secure the political support of the poor, who are likely to be willing to sell their votes at a lower price, while ignoring the interests of the poor (Stokes 2007). Second, social protection benefits delivered as patronage would be distributed based on the political importance rather than the needs of would-be recipients and would therefore likely undermine the objectives of the program.

Individual vote buying is rendered difficult by secret ballots, which limit the ability of political parties to monitor individual votes effectively. Argentina’s Peronist party strove to assess individual votes indirectly through the deployment of local agents to monitor people’s attendance at party events or at the polls, but this requires a capacity and manpower that the majority of political parties in Africa lack (Stokes 2007; van de Walle 2014). Moreover, the design of cash transfer programs, which increasingly rely on electronic transfers (rather than programs handing cash directly) and contain oversight mechanisms, present logistical challenges to the use of social safety nets to promote clientelism.

However, in practice, there is a grey area between electoral accountability and vote buying (Lippert-Rasmussen 2011; Stokes 2007). Political parties may reward or punish entire communities based on aggregate votes within a particular district. In some cases, the promises of candidates and the distribution of resources may be viewed as a gift of munificence or legislative pork (van de Walle 2007). In contexts in which patronage is deeply embedded in social and political relations, the distribution of benefits, though not strictly conditional, may be interpreted by recipients as an obligation to provide political support.
Once they are expanded sufficiently and have demonstrated their value, programs create long-term commitments that are politically difficult to discontinue. In Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, for instance, programs have been established for more than a decade and have demonstrated their impacts. They have progressively been adopted by parties across the board, even if each new administration typically adjusts the program to reflect changes in focus on particular policies or approaches to poverty reduction, often altering the name of the intervention, while maintaining core features. Thus, in the 2006 Brazilian elections, the four main presidential candidates, despite the great differences in their political persuasions, all called for expanding Bolsa Família, which occurred. During the following election, no major candidate called for eliminating the program (Zucco 2013).

Notes


References


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