Research into policy processes: Bringing global evidence on social protection into local policy contexts

Ursula Grant

August 2006

What is Chronic Poverty?

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty.

Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g. consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation.

This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line.

www.chronicpoverty.org

Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

1   Introduction

This project aimed to explicitly learn about and operationalise links between international discourse and national discourses and policy processes. It has achieved this through a series of varied country-based policy engagement activities in Uganda to debate international research findings that support the potential for social protection approaches to meet the poverty reduction needs of chronically and extremely poor people. The project elicited responses from national policy makers and other stakeholders in Uganda, and assessed the contextual political and logistical constraints to policy uptake, with a view to supporting any openings to move the agenda forward nationally.

National policy contexts are often typified by only weak knowledge of poverty and low commitment to policies that respond directly to the challenges of intractable and long-term poverty (see Bird and Pratt, 2005). This project therefore collaborated with the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) in Uganda[1], which has pursued considerable national level policy engagement around deepening focus and attention on poverty knowledge among policy makers, and from whose experience the project could benefit. This work will continue beyond the life of this project.

The project responded to the CSPP objective of using evidence to influence policy, in ways that have potential multiplier effects both in terms of improving the evidence base itself and strengthening the position of southern partners in national policy processes. Lessons that emerged have deepened our understanding of the role and relevance of global research and policy positions in national processes.

---

[1]   CPRC Uganda is led by Development Research and Training, an NGO, and includes the Economic Policy Research Centre, as well as a number of researchers and policy analysts from the academic, government and NGO community.

Global findings: Social Protection and the Chronically Poor

A set of findings on the application of social protection for the chronically poor from global experience, were presented to a varied policy audience. Responses to this presentation have allowed us to gauge the potential for application in Uganda. Rather than presenting written evidence at this stage, we decided to simply bring Armando Barrientos to Uganda to engage directly with national audiences on these issues. He was able to present findings from work he has been involved both in Africa and elsewhere, and answer stakeholder questions directly. The core ideas that were presented included:

Some poverty persists and is deep seated. People affected by chronic poverty often have very few options, but social protection can offer important measures to address this situation. Internationally, social protection is gaining substantial support. The approach can assist in the meeting of the MDG targets on poverty. The Commission for Africa (2005) has articulated a need to have in place a social protection framework across African countries by 2014.

Eradicating chronic poverty is about empowering the poorest, and generating and sustaining a constituency of support. Social protection allows us to take a prospective look at poverty; look at what is making people poor and keeping them poor. Transfers are associated with the transfer of human capitals so that individuals and households can work more productively and better insure themselves against different forms of vulnerability (such as ill health or drought).

Social protection does not need to be very complicated or technical. Its core concern is protecting people from events and processes that cause decline, and focusing on the processes that help people before they become poor or stop them from falling further into poverty. In advocacy terms, this translates into a 'let's not wait' approach and an emphasis is placed on vulnerability to poverty and not just poverty itself. Current international and regional policy environments are increasingly supportive. The Africa Commission for example has pushed these ideas forward, and there are many examples of pilots being initiated across Africa as well as elsewhere.

Economic conditions are clearly important for society. But, unless carefully planned much growth creates only limited or unfair options for the poorest and most vulnerable in society. Options for breaking poverty cycles are linked with education, health care and nutrition. Assisting the poorest households to ensure that poverty is not persistent across generations means social protection is particularly about investing in children. Cash transfers are often conditional on children attending school and infants attending health care units. Global experience has shown substantial improvements in both schooling rates and health status among beneficiaries. These cases are found in Africa too.

From a moral standpoint it is possible to argue that a society should be judged from the perspective of how its poorest population is doing. However, this can be harder to argue in contexts where resources are limited. *The productive potential of social protection measures must be emphasised.* DFID argues that social protection is an essential component of any long-term sustainable growth and poverty reduction agenda. "It can boost human development of the poor, increase the participation of the poor in the economy including

women, help markets to work more efficiently, and help to create an effective state (DFID, 2006:1).

As regards instruments, a variety can be effective in addressing chronic poverty, including cash and in kind transfers. Cash transfers have attracted a great deal of attention, we agree that cash is underused and that there are good examples of countries that have actually utilised cash transfers focused on the extreme poor and have found them to be quite useful. But in most cases a range of instruments are needed.

Cash can be better than food transfers as food aid is often politicised and intransparent. Cash is much more flexible and useful to recipients who can manage their household budgets according to needs and deficits. Food or in-kind transfers can make wrong assumptions about what households need, provide inappropriate foods and undermine local production and markets.

What is even more important than whether cash or in kind transfers are used however is ensuring the provision of regular and reliable, not temporary and unreliable, forms of support for the poor. Regular forms of support empower households where irregular handouts disempower them. This means that timing is critical and enough time must also be given to allow new programmes/policies to work. E.g. in Mexico's Progressa programme, beneficiaries are entitled to three years of support after which they 'graduate' from the programme. During this three year period they are provided conditional transfers as well as personal tailored support from a support officer.

There is lots of innovation taking place. Conditional cash transfer programmes are in or under discussion in Nigeria, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Malawi. There are three pilots in Zambia from which a process of learning and knowledge transfer can take place. Transfer amounts are comparatively small and clearly smaller than potential costs for physical transfer of in-kind transfers if that is the alternative. In Kolomo district beneficiary households receive $7/month. These approaches aim to increase the range of opportunities that the poor have available and improve the ground for other poverty reduction and development endeavours.

We would argue in favour of targeting. By this we mean retaining a strong *focus* on the poor, poorest and chronically poor. Costs are manageable if appropriate targeting is applied. In addition to targeting approaches, it is important to be innovative in designing the programmes/policies themselves. This means designing programmes to support human development and not just providing the minimum income to take a household over or through a bad patch. These include subsidies to health, education, nutrition and household support. This means treating households as a unit, and focusing on the long term rather than short term, and in some cases this has involved direct advisory visits with the household.

The chronically poor and vulnerable poor are not easily distinct groups. For example, would you prioritise children that are not in school at all or children taken out of school when household needs demand they enter the labour market. Social protection ideally deals with all these groups together, for example targeting at 125% of the poverty line. Evidence suggests that you can reach all these groups but that there also needs to be some priorities to reflect resource availability. In Zambia only 10% of 76% poor population are targeted by the conditional cash transfer programme. The Zambia programme engages a community

targeting mechanism; each village in the district identify the poorest 10% of households using a number of selection criteria, such as number of working members, the presence of children, impacts of major illness, such as AIDS, and so on. Geographical targeting is used in other cases (e.g. Mexico's Progressa programme targets just the poorest districts).

Knowledge about policy effectiveness is also important. Project impact assessments need to be built into the social protection approach. This can both harness enthusiasms within the project and provide support structures to beneficiaries, but also provide impact evidence for political purposes too. Assessment does not need to involve major M&E but simple information gathering exercises that feed back into the management and implementation of the initiative.

2 Local policy context: Uganda

2.1 Chronic Poverty in Uganda

Uganda's impressive economic recovery in the late 1980s and early 1990s was credited with decreases in consumption poverty from 56% of the population living below the poverty line in 1992 to an estimated 34% in 2000. However, the proportion of people below the poverty line rose from 34 % in 2000 to 38% in 2003. These trends notwithstanding, it is estimated that 20 percent of the country's households, or 26 percent of its population [more than seven (7) million people – or one in five people] live in chronic poverty. Chronically poor people are sometimes dependents, but often working poor, and their situation stems from a web of interrelated factors, amongst which lack of assets, lack of education, chronic illness, belonging to a large and expanding household and remoteness are prominent. The situation of chronic poverty has been further aggravated by the widening inequality since 1997[2].

The web of factors causing and maintaining chronic poverty in Uganda makes for a limited range of survival strategies (casual labour, scavenging, begging, selling or borrowing assets, migration, etc). Thus the type of poverty revolves around its perpetual nature and persistence, the feeling of bare survival with no sign of escape and an inability to resist shocks that lead to further impoverishment. Hence the need to focus on chronic poverty as a specific, enduring and deep-seated phenomenon.

2.2 The Ugandan Social Protection Task Force

Although, this project is concerned with understanding and operationalising international level research findings on policy at the national level, it is essential to first recognise that national policy contexts are not isolated but are influenced by many different research and lobbying processes. Social protection has a history in the Ugandan policy context and we need to recognise the impact this has had in influencing national responses to these issues today.

A social protection task force (SPTF)[3] was established in 2002 to explore the social protection options for Uganda. The expectation was that in 3-4 years time, the SPTF would have developed comprehensive strategy and framework with clearly defined mechanisms for delivering on that. However the process has fallen flat and although a plan was developed it has not been operationalised.

This process was linked to the PEAP revision 2003-4 process. The SPTF decided against developing a separate strategy and instead worked within the PEAP with sector ministries to identify the key risk and vulnerability issues to respond to, producing a number of Issue Papers to support this process. One member of the task force told us that a check list was

---

2   The Gini coefficient rose from 0.35 in 1997 to 0.43 in 2003.
3   The SPTF was represented by the NGO and donor sectors, as well government, housed in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, but included also the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, and Office of the Prime Minister. We spoke to representatives from each of these institutions.

produced to assist sector ministries to understand the concept and become 'social protection compliant'. Ultimately however, the sectors have not really engaged with the concept or ideas presented through the SPTF.

The Ministry of Education proposed a School feeding programme. While some budgeting was done there has been little action on the ground (although, as seen below, non-governmental stakeholders are engaged in providing such programmatic support in different parts of the country). The Ministry of Health was initially very negative and strongly opposed to social protection. However, a number of health subsidies were proposed and although this has not moved forward very quickly the idea is still on the agenda. However, planned health insurance is targeted to public sector workers, and not the poor.

At this time, social protection was gaining international recognition, and the process was spearheaded by DFID in Uganda. A number of observers independently noted however that the national process remained too much driven from outside. DFID agreed that this was a major contributing factor to poor progress and that much more effort should have been made to develop real national interest and commitment before trying to move the process forward.

Very little direction was taken by the lead ministry. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) went along with the energy and enthusiasm being generated by the then DFID social development adviser. It is the opinion of an informant in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) that DFID involvement was particularly driven by this adviser and her own technical skill, and was not perceived to be a DFID-wide agenda. Enthusiasm was fostered through international trips - the SPTF were taken to Finland to see social protection approaches at work. However, this enthusiasm was not grounded institutionally.

Despite being perceived as too donor driven, there is some feeling that donors involved (mainly DFID and the World Bank) were giving mixed signals. The World Bank was guided by their social risk management (SRM) framework and DFID by vulnerability and poverty frameworks. There is some feeling that the process being spearheaded by DFID was being undermined at the same time by World Bank priorities. An informant from the Prime Minister's office, also a member of the SPTF, noted that the SRM Framework was almost tantamount to another whole agenda. Similarly, in the MGLSD, informants claimed their ideas developed with DFID were dismissed by the World Bank as they did not fall within the framework's conceptualisation of social protection. As DFID was not providing any operational funding this was perceived as a barrier to maintaining enthusiasm and initiating any pilots.

At the same time, an NGO member of the SPTF candidly reflected that the agenda had been overly optimistic[4], too far reaching in the conceptualisation of social protection and had

---

4   The study recommended that the social protection activities of fairly small or medium orgs operating in communities should be supported and provided with a framework within which they could be more effective and far reaching. The reality was however that many of these were tiny little groups – friend in need societies, mostly women that come to rescue of family

underestimated the time and effort required to generate policy support. The SPTF had commissioned a number of studies from international consultants. While what was produced provided a useful inventory, DFID reflected that the main report was rather lengthy and not very accessible or user friendly as an engagement document. The conceptualisation of social protection was too ambitious for what policy makers were ready for and the effect of this was to confuse the agenda. A much more concise and well defined agenda would have laid better ground to get things moving and help the Ministry get started.

This process was not helped by the lack of clout within the MGLSD. Despite their having some very good people it was not perceived to be effective. This was a widely held view outside of MGLSD and identified as a major contributor to low uptake of social protection ideas at this time. One informant in the Ministry of Finance observed that the presentation of what was actually needed wasn't thoroughly or convincingly detailed – or, and perhaps more importantly, argued. Despite having the commissioned support studies, the MGLSD did not push the issues forward aggressively. This informant also noted that usually for a new issue to be taken seriously at policy levels it needs to come up time and time again, but without clear leadership within the Ministry of Gender social protection issues simply didn't make an impact. He acknowledges that there were some very good ideas within the social investment development plan but they simply have not been picked up. Similarly, the MGLSD exclusively relied on "the beaten path" (the linear model) for policy making and engagement – officials expected that once information on social protection had been collected, analysed and documented, uptake and buy-in by the different relevant institutions would be automatic. Little or no consideration, therefore, was given to the practical requirement of identifying and working with gatekeepers, or the need to explore multiple engagement strategies.

There was some discussion at the time of finding a different home for social protection. This reflected both recognised weaknesses within the MGLSD but also the fact that this was a period of structural change within government at that time. Central bank had been the most powerful institution, until around this time when the Ministry of Finance acquired additional powers and was combined with the Ministry of Planning. There was some thinking that the social protection agenda should become part of this new, more powerful ministry's remit, but it had just taken responsibility for the Modernisation of Agriculture programme and this had caused huge ill-feeling with the Ministry of Agriculture. As a result it was impossible for the MFPED to take on the social protection agenda at this time as well and it found a home within the MGLSD.

Other national processes affected the development of a constituency for social protection. Observers note, it was a fluid time and period of transition between DFID and the Government as projects were being discouraged and focus was moving to budget support. Discussions at the time therefore involved sectors re-jigging and re-clarifying their positions and observers acknowledge that this put a lot of pressure on respective ministries who didn't feel inclined towards new agenda.

member or member of group who face one shock or another. Being linked to formality with enactment of NGOP act which is more about control than support – regulating civsoc – if there is a law that law should look to facilitate these orgs than restrict them through institutional bottlenecks.

Weak institutional frameworks have allowed momentum to be lost. One observer involved with the SPTF acknowledged that there had been a lot of hope (and time investment) into the social investment plan. We will explore all these issues further below to determine whether our global findings support a more or less palatable conceptualisation of social protection for Uganda and whether the current climate is potentially more receptive to a concerted engagement effort.

3   Policy influencing framework

Policy making is not linear, but involves dynamic interlocking and overlapping processes influenced strongly by prevailing contexts. Openings for poverty and policy-related research to influence policy processes are sometimes limited. While robust evidence can be persuasive, it is only part of the picture (Bird and Grant, 2005:5). The RAPID framework helps to visualise the wide range of inter-related and overlapping factors and processes:

Figure 3.1:   ODI's Policy Process Framework (RAPID, 2004)
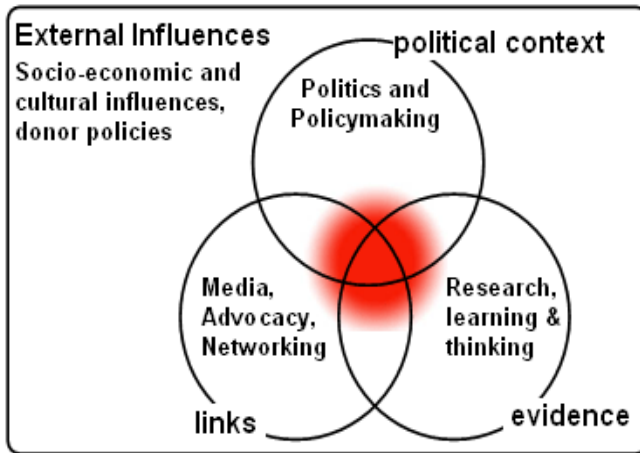
As represented in the RAPID framework, the political context, the evidence, and the links between policy and research communities are all important, and influenced externally by other non-directly linked processes. Below we briefly examine these in the Ugandan context.

3.1   External influences: socio-economic and cultural influences, donor policies

Bird and Pratt, et al (2004) argue that, despite evidence, policy makers often fail to respond adequately to severe and widespread problems that drive and maintain poverty. This failure can be linked to the dominance of development and poverty discourses that discourage a focus on non-mainstream approaches or on groups and poverty issues that are viewed as residual and/or undeserving of policy attention and investment. Attitudes are shaped by deep seated societal views that are difficult to change. Evidence that support agenda which challenge these views is potentially marginalised and rejected as subversive (ibid). We do not rehearse this debate here; refer to Bird and Grant (2005) for a detailed discussion.

Donor interests have a significant effect on policy agendas and play a potentially powerful role in shifting discourse. We've seen already that DFID had a strong influence on the construction of the SPTF in Uganda. We've also seen that this didn't necessarily go anywhere because DFID commitment was not firm. International mobilisation has a clear role to play in generating initial enthusiasm for a new agenda. As the policy issue is associated so

strongly with marginal issues, this support is crucial and requires continual external support over longer time periods. However, donor interest is not enough if national institutions are not developed to take new policy forward.

3.2   Political context: Politics and policy making

Chronically poor and vulnerable people have low political capital. Despite this, poverty eradication has been a high priority of government, captured by the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), Uganda's PRS, which is now in its third phase and tenth year. According to the PEAP, poverty will be eradicated through:

- Economic management – macro-economic stability, fiscal consolidation, boosting private investment, and improving trade policy.

- Enhancing production, competitiveness and income – modernisation of agriculture, natural resource conservation, infrastructure (roads, electricity and railways) and better infrastructure maintenance, and enhanced private sector skills and participation.

- Security, conflict resolution and disaster management – ending the rebel insurgency, ending cattle rustling, dealing with internal displacement and abduction.

- Governance – human rights and democratisation, the development of a better legal system and transparency, accountability and the elimination of corruption.

- Human development – primary and secondary education, improving health outcomes, increasing people's ability to plan their families, community empowerment including adult literacy.

The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) is at the core of the PEAP, monitors public spending through the Public Expenditure Review and allocates resources through the Medium Term Expenditure Framework. The PEAP is implemented through sector programmes, and a few multi-sectoral ones, of which the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture is the most important. Local government has been strengthened, but districts are far from autonomous[5].

3.3   Evidence base: Research, leaning and thinking

The evidence base is really important to a credible policy influencing strategy. There was evidence of substantially reduced income poverty incidence in the 1990s, but poverty incidence has increased again since 2000, and inequality has worsened since 1997. The poorest hardly benefit from Uganda's development. Universal Primary Education increased enrolment greatly but quality is a big problem. Infant and child mortality have both increased recently. Similarly, insecurity has continued to drive chronic poverty, as has growing

---

5   We observe, however, that following much disquiet about corruption and lack of accountability in the decentralised organs, coupled with inefficiencies in service delivery there is now an increased push to "re-centralise", beginning with placement of Chief Administrative Officers (the civil heads of districts) under direct supervision of Central Government.

vulnerability to landlessness, gender disparities, old age, disability and chronic illness, including HIV and AIDS.

However the existence of data alone is simply not enough. A number of factors are identified in Bird and Grant (2005:5) which influence the way in which data is viewed, respected and utilised in policy processes:

- the credibility of the research team

- the apparent rigour of the results

- resonance of the findings with dominant country-level and international discourses

- presentation of results to policy makers in an absorbable and useful format (sometimes alongside effective use of the media and other intermediaries)

- timeliness of dissemination

- the degree to which evidence is commonly used in national policy formation

- the degree to which national policy makers have an interest in the study and its findings.

3.4 Relationship between researchers and policy makers: Media, advocacy and networking

Both donors and government talk about a 'pro-poor policy partnership'. There are four sets of actors influencing policy in Uganda: government, and especially MFPED; local government; academia, NGOs and research organisations; and business lobby groups. Government actively uses the results of research: it listens to the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC, a CPRC partner) and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics. When NGOs organise their efforts and link up with Central Government institutions, for instance for the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process, government also listens to them: UPPAP 1 identified in 2000 that water was of great importance to the poor, and the budget for water was subsequently increased significantly; widespread discontent with user fees for health and education led to the abolition of cost sharing in health, and UPE in education. The new PEAP has included provision for research. However, the government is perceived to listen more to the business lobbies, in part due to the predominant macro-economic thinking which emphasises private-sector-led growth..

CPRC chose to work with MFPED, especially the Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit (PMAU) and academia, and to focus on the PEAP along with other policy researchers and advocates. It was thought that if the PEAP could be influenced, this would be the most cost-effective approach to policy engagement. Two senior PMAU staff have been involved in design, analysis and provision of advisory services to CPRC, and have drawn CPRC's attention to the emerging poverty research agenda. Chronic poverty has been recognised, but no strategies developed to address it. However, CSOs have engaged in significant advocacy of the interests of groups experiencing inter-generational transfer of poverty: people with disabilities, older people, landless peasants, people living in remote rural or conflict-torn areas, and government invited CSOs to review the PEAP.

3.5   Reflections on this framework for social protection agenda

During our research we often heard references made to the social envelop 'being tight' but clearly there is much more complexity behind the response to new social policy agenda. In addition to the processes and relationships identified in the RAPID framework above, it is also worth noting, before we move on, that the nature of the issue itself is also pertinent. Social protection is conceptually unclear because it is a cross cutting approach that can be applied by any sector. It is not necessarily applicable to just one problem or one group but can provide a more holistic solution to many problems of poverty. While this might sound appealing, it also means that there is no natural home for policy lobbying. It is harder to develop a single agenda for policy that will gain legitimacy across more than one ministry. Policy discourses need to be shifted so that the needs of the chronically poor and marginalised and vulnerable groups are identified as valid.

4   Responding to global research findings

The strategy we took for this work was for Armando Barrientos[6] to engage directly with strategically chosen individuals from MFPED, Prime Ministers office and Office of the President, the MGLSD, as well as from DFID, the World Bank and DANIDA, and a number of specifically relevant NGOs and media. The meeting format generally involved a brief introduction to the emerging CPRC position on social protection, followed by a structured, but fairly open discussion of its relevance to the Uganda context.

We quickly realised that the global research issues we were raising were already on the agenda. Defining the starting point for this process is not simple and there have been different stakeholders involved and lots of inputs already (section 3). Although DFID has clearly been a major player at different times, this process has clearly not been linear, and many local initiatives are independently happening on the ground. How people responded to our research findings depended in large part on whether and how they had engaged in this local process, over and above what is happening elsewhere in the world.

For example, a respondent from the President's Office argued strongly that, despite being a low income country, Zambia's experience might not be very relevant to Uganda as the contexts are so different. Zambia had a history of being heavily urbanised and monetised. The collapse in Zambia (particularly urban collapse associated with the decline of urban copper mining industry) meant that many people didn't even have land to fall back on and so a social protection response was appropriate. He argued that you need to know the structures in Uganda to realise social protection is less relevant. He concluded that in Uganda, even destitute people have community level support, basic needs often provided by a rich relative, for example. His argument was that social protection was only relevant for those that do not have that support (e.g. displaced people) and that first need to know who, where and how many these people are. The argument brings into sharp focus the issue of elite perceptions about the nature and level of community level support. The belief that such support "widely exists in Uganda" might be a misnomer, and is mostly based on the age-old concept of flourishing extended family relationships. The reality on the ground as Uganda's two PPA studies reveal is quite different – extended family relationships at community level are breaking down, and even where they remain, they are quite stretched (UPPAP Report, 2000).

Nonetheless, there was a very clear sense that while other countries' experiences are interesting these can be easily dismissed as Uganda's solutions are going to be specific to Uganda. So, while we talked of experiences around the world, many respondents found the ideas interesting but not always useful. It is worth reflecting here on the utility of overseas trips (Sweden, and a just concluded high level visit to Zambia) without significant support

---

6   Rather than make a case with written outputs, we decided that bringing the lead researcher on these issues to the table was the most effective engagement strategy, recognising that the people we spoke to were likely to be fairly sceptical, busy and unlikely to have time or inclination to read any preparatory materials. It is important to our continued engagement however that written materials that provide accessible evidence support for key stakeholders to use. CPRC in Uganda is now developing these outputs.

activities to assist delegates in considering the implications of what they are seeing for the local context.

Among those that were cautious or dismissive, an often cited fear was of creating dependency and the feeling that Uganda's low income status means it is not able to consider developing a welfare state. These feelings are born out of a feeling that social protection is an expensive approach (indicating a clear need to follow up on financial cost-benefit issues). We were able to respond with examples of costs from other countries[7] but it is unclear how convincing this argument was. It is not clear whether this rejection was based on any evaluations or whether people were simply responding on instincts. We tended to conclude the latter.

The poverty line and incidence data has been used for many years in policy debates in Uganda, and is simple, accessible and persuasive. It would be a good long term indicator for success for the CPRC if there was a move towards use of measures that reflect poverty depth and dynamics. If issues of poverty depth were more generally recognised then the political case for reducing extreme poverty would be more obvious and this could translate into more direct interest in social protection measures. We tended to find a rejection of our position on prioritising and targeting, which perhaps in part reflects this significant acceptance of aggregate poverty measures (both politically and economically).

Below, we consider the responses to the CPRC position on social protection. Respondents provided both negative and positive enquiry, which we have grouped below under the following headings:

- Persuasiveness of information and evidence
- The resources question
- Perception of poverty
- Perception of development
- Institutional and operational challenges

4.1   Persuasiveness of information and evidence

The first influence on persuasiveness is clearly *conceptual clarity.* Social protection is jargon for a number of measures that reduce vulnerability. What this actually means remains vague in Uganda despite previous work. This vagueness is much more evident among those that were not or were less involved in previous social protection debates. Even so, it is also the case among those that were involved in this process and there is a tendency to equate social protection with safety nets. Despite our presentation, the productive developmental angle was only weakly picked up and this is clearly a mind set change needed if the term itself is going to get a policy hearing that more accurately reflects our agenda. Survival and handouts is not convincing enough for those that want to see hard poverty reduction statistics.

---

7   e.g. Progressa (0.4% GDP) is v. well targeted; Kalomo district, Zambia, the transfer provides $7/hh/month (85K/month total, delivery includes about 15% for petrol, a moped for delivery, admin, but doesn't include time for the committees).

What is apparent as well is that people are unsure how to differentiate the kind of approach we're talking about from other poverty reduction measures. Distinguishing between social protection and other instruments is to a degree somewhat false and should not be overplayed. Yet, at the same time, the terminology is necessary for retaining a focus on vulnerabilities and an emphasis on productive investments for the poor, poorest and chronically poor. This is more than just survival inputs. A prevailing sentiment was captured in the comment "Uganda can't afford a welfare state" and indicates social protection is not viewed as a legitimate development strategy yet.

The challenge is also that there are different international perspectives on what social protection is, and this has also sent mixed messages to different stakeholders. As one informant said, 'IDS and ODI might be similar but DFID and WB are different'. MGLSD informants argued that if priorities they had previously come up with didn't fit within the World Bank's Social Risk Management (SRM) framework then it was not accepted there, despite having worked with DFID. They claim they started broadly with a conceptualisation of social protection but then had ideas rejected by the World Bank.

A DFID informant observed that agreement is easy to reach at a general level but that this falls apart when you start talking about specific policy reforms. That said, he also argued that there is currently greater clarity within DFID (due to work being done at policy division) and less reluctance to work collaboratively on these issues than there perhaps was previously.

Much of the challenge is still to do with ignorance and a concerted effort is required to keep the concept on the agenda while also clarifying the productive roles for social protection approaches. Much of this debate is still not being had, even within donors. For example, cash transfers alternatives to food aid in IDP camps in the North of the country is still not yet part of an open debate. National institutions must be the main target for advocacy.

Lack of evidence is inhibiting this discussion. During our meetings we had requests for both general and specific information. We were able to provide some of this as we went along, however there is clearly a need to support work on generating evidence on both need and impact of social protection interventions. The SPTF had focused particularly on vulnerable groups, but hadn't been able to answer the 'to what extent' questions concerning their numbers and needs. This kind of data could be drawn internationally but if there are ways to use local data that would probably have a more direct impact. It became clearer that with more sceptical audiences data would need to be Ugandan (see below).

Informants were largely reliant on their own perceptions and experiences as Ugandan evidence is limited. Getting interventions properly evaluated is really crucial, but not something that is yet viewed as a high priority in Uganda. As one MFPED informant argued, "international knowledge wealth is interesting but limited in our context. We need to know what is going on already in the country. The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) has already had an evaluation, but not available yet. Similarly there are some integrated approaches in sectors". The Poverty Status Report is the only mechanism that is produced on regular basis, and a national monitoring system is being put in place as a comprehensive tool which also will inform knowledge. However, there are social protection initiatives already occurring in the country that people simply don't know enough about.

This partly reflects problems of programme politicisation and the fact that politicians don't necessarily want data released. The idea of integrating monitoring into the design of initiatives, and not just relying on higher level accountability monitoring, has not yet taken off, but will be crucial to the development of persuasive national level data. In addition, a need exists for having a better understanding of how some existing programmes, such as NUSAF, can more systematically contribute to the achievement of long-term social protection objectives.

The nature of social protection as a cross cutting policy issue makes it harder to identify the strategic data required. The evidence needs to help support the position that while social protection is not the answer to all Uganda's problems it can help to ensure better uptake of other mainstream government policies and services.

4.2 A question of resources

It was an often voiced perception that cash transfers for the very poor was a very expensive option for Uganda. We found it important to reassert the relative small cost of programmes in other countries and push the point that much more gets spent else where without knowing whether it is really making an impact on longer term poverty. Social protection is not the answer to all problems but specific help and support for the poorest is important to ensure successful uptake of other mainstream govt policies. There are no studies of what the costs of not providing social protection are.

Amounts that are transferred tend to be small. In Mexico, the Progressa programme costs 0.4% GDP and is very well targeted. In Kalomo district, Zambia, the transfer provides $7/hh/month and costs 85K/month in total. This includes delivery costs (at about 15% for petrol), a moped for delivery, as well as administration, but doesn't include time for the committees which does need to be factored in.

MGLSD informants had experienced costs discussions during the earlier process. They found that national macro-economic advisers dismiss cash transfers by referring to inflation effects of giving cash, and that resistance is strong among this group. It doesn't matter therefore if this form of support is provided by free development aid as their argument still holds. As it is these advisers that have most power and influence of the policy agenda development at the highest levels, this is a real obstacle to up take.

The resources issue needs to be framed within an argument of the long term impacts of increasing the ability of poor people to make investments for their future. It is also important to assert the fact that other development policies that aim to open up access for the poor and marginal groups (such as universal primary education, which was often referred to) are not necessarily going to help as there are other costs that households contend with in using services (e.g. sending their children to school requires uniforms, lunch costs, opportunity costs etc). Transfers can respond well to demand side issues. A continuous process of awareness creation and discussion with key macroeconomists should also help to ensure enhanced understanding by these cadres of the benefits to the economy of investing in social protection.

4.3   Perception of poverty

An MFPED informant told us that many influential people are not sensitive to poverty issues, and would argue for different priorities – illustrated by the following typified quotes 'the country is not only about vulnerable poor people'; 'what about protecting those that have come out of poverty'; 'no free cash to reward people for being poor'; 'growth is key everything else is secondary'.

MGLSD informants also reflected that the MFPED on the whole tended to appear uninterested in those under the current target of poverty reduction to 28% by 2014. Those that are harder to reach are therefore not interesting and can stay in poverty as they are not a priority. Although the Finance Ministers may be making positive noises about social protection, the MGLSD argues that the MFPED interests are made clear by the fact that social protection is only treated very cursorily in both the Poverty Status Report and the PEAP.

As expressed by a high ranking MFPED informant, 'economics is politics and politics is not long term'. Politics only has 5 years to deliver. Therefore politicians are looking to make clear impacts and dealing with deeper poverty is perceived as less likely to show impacts quickly enough. If assistance is not likely to raise targeted beneficiaries above the poverty line quickly then the political benefits of prioritising these actions are not apparent.

Clearly, poverty discourse is imperative. There was considerable scepticism expressed among some senior officials at the idea of government taking an active role in dealing with the problems of the poorest. These were framed in ways that both blamed the poor for their poverty (large families, laziness, poor money management and alcohol abuse), and also warned of limitations of government engaging in the problems of poverty (and so encouraging dependencies) particularly when traditional forms of support are perceived to be already providing protection.

Media representatives identified household size and family planning as a core poverty issue and responsibility of individual households. Uganda's population has grown from 5 million in 1948 to 26 million today and, it was argued, that it is the largest families that are suffering the worse poverty. As such, it was reasoned, chronic poverty becomes more of an inherited problem than a social or economic one[8].

Concerns about increased dependency were frequently raised and the fear that social protection type approaches could encourage laziness. Alcoholism was particularly raised as a major poverty issue both by government people and media. The point was argued that 'they can't easily translate cash into investment' and was combined with the negative perception that they would 'use money for drinking'. We highlighted cases in Mexico where

---

8 While acknowledging the poverty implications of family size, we re-posed demographic issues more positively. Highlighting the negative impacts of extreme single child policies in China, we discussed declining populations as providing a 30 year window as education provision is easier and so on. But, as populations get older there is increasingly little family support for older people. Singapore reversed this agenda as fewer people coming into the labour force and implications of that are massive. One of most important check on pop growth is women going to work (and getting an education) as there capacity for looking after children reduces (and their ambitions expand).

transfers were made direct to mothers and money had tended to be spent for household needs, while also increasing mothers' decision making power within the household within a machismo society. In other contexts a similar scenario has occurred through transfers to older people, who tended to have more money management experience.

We also discussed the importance of regularity and predictability of transfers in ensuring appropriate investments are enabled. Regularity allows households to plan ahead, save up and use the money for productive investments. Responsible investment is much more likely when recipients receive more than just a one off payment. Finally, in response to the repeated dependency concern we argued the importance of having some form of exit strategy. In Mexico this was three years, at which point beneficiaries graduate from the programme.

In discussions on cash transfers there was some feeling expressed that probably government was better positioned to decide what people need, for example the provision of maize storage facilities to stop crops perishing. Much was made of negative experiences with micro-credit[9] while at the same time some informants pressed these programmes as an alternative to [free] cash transfers. Certainly, there was an element of distrust of the poor to spend wisely but also media representatives drew issue with direct benefits being linked to payment of taxes and to political patronage. Our informant from the President's Office thought that cash transfers might only be appropriate for people who have *no* land, but thought it better to provide them with land and settle them in their own areas. Some groups were clearly regarded as burdensome and dependent (e.g. 'cripples'). In this case, it is hard to argue a persuading case for the transfer of resources to them but much more poverty engagement is required.

Dependency was perceived as less of a worrying issue when not linked to government. There was a perception among some informants that protection was the role of families and communities. This kind of activity was also not considered negatively by those that worried about dependency, and yet these types of transfers tend not to be regular, predictable or free of ties, and as a result they also tend not to improve household investments.

Transfers of cash clearly raised difficult dilemmas for a number of our informants. In-kind transfers tended to present fewer dilemmas, although the costs or transfer and weakening effects these kinds of transfers can have on markets were not wholly considered. Priorities included food/blankets/tarpaulin for internally displaced people. A representative from the President's Office argued strongly for making land more productive and considered provision of in-kind transfers to increase productivity potentially a useful approach. He argued however that targeting should be to local chiefs rather than the chronically poor directly. Again, this point was linked to his understanding of the role of traditional systems. He argued that it was better to deal with chiefs as all poor people are dependent to a degree on the well being of local chiefs and it is difficult to separate them from the traditional systems that prevail. If

---

9 Targeting had been very poor in the schemes, professionalism was lacking and the whole approach was riddled with patronage from the top. Transfers were linked to elections, until people realised they had to pay the credit back. Poorly designed and implemented micro-credit programmes have left a high profile negative legacy in Uganda that present learning opportunities but also limit enthusiasm to try again with cash transfers.

chiefs are doing well, it was argued, the poor will also benefit. It was also implied that the poor are not able to manage money, that they need someone 'above them' who can provide both guidance and authority.

4.4 Perception of development

Poverty discourse is clearly linked to development discourses. We were asked, what is it that we dream of and a wry suggestion was made of 'a world where we're all rich and there is no-one in poverty? Is this really possible?' A number of representatives of MGLSD acknowledged that in pursuing social protection they had had to fight against strong views that linked the approach to a modernisation process that would somehow conflict with traditional forms[10] of social protection. They talked of having hit against prevailing sentiments for 'keeping what we've already got'.

There was general agreement among people that had had a role in the SPTF that it is not difficult talking in general terms about social protection with policy makers. Specifics are much harder to debate and reach agreement. There is not likely to be consensus. DFID representatives talked about the need to develop consensus on PEAP limitations as a first step, while also emphasising the importance of focusing on Northern Uganda, rather than more controversial policy issues. Some NGO officials also talked about "peering into each sector and seeing how improvements in delivery could be made by giving a social protection spin". Two of the examples given were providing school meals in order to improve delivery in the education sector and undertaking land reform in order to positively impact on small-holder agriculture.

Perhaps surprisingly, NGO representatives particularly voiced concerns about going down a route that contradicts current dominant thinking. Policy contradictions were identified between macro-economist positions and Uganda's poverty reduction focus. These contradictions were acknowledged by informants within the MFPED but re-posed as contradictions that are inherent in development generally, and not limited to Uganda but found in the World Bank and other stakeholders too. This observation was tempered by the remark 'we all know where the power is though'. As already highlighted, the comment that economics is politics and politics is not long term is clear enough.

We found it useful to argue that while it takes a short time to drop into poverty, it takes a long term to get out of it. Therefore it is better to try to focus on the processes the cause descent (including those processes that cause deepening poverty) as it becomes harder to tackle comprehensively as it becomes worse. By specifically focusing on the vulnerabilities that drag people down, interventions can be limited to a number of years. Exit is important, particularly in poor countries, to minimise dependency but also create a clear focus. For

---

10 The clearest description of what was meant by 'traditional systems' was provided by an informant from the President's Office: He argued that traditional models look after the weak, through clan support, such that people act as brothers and sisters to each other within that frame. If one is rich, weaker clan members come and associate themselves with you, while richer people then act like a 'locomotive and pull the weak ones through support'. There are known obligations that frame how people live in rural areas. The main question is therefore who can and can't access land. How many can't, because they fall out of traditional systems (internally displaced people for example)? We need figures to deal with.

example, transfers linked to schooling are limited to years children are at school. Tailored support can assist people in making investment choices that have most significant long term potential. There will however always be some groups that need long term support – some groups of elderly and people with certain disabilities. These are small groups however.

There are some individuals within the MFPED that could be, or already are, convinced that there is something useful in a social protection approach. However, our informants made it clear that there are also many that aren't. They haven't yet been brought to the same table and there is a need to bring that process forward. However, clear from past experience, it is important that a position on social protection is clarified and priorities are clear.

4.5   Institutional and operational challenges

MFPED informants argued that financing these initiatives is of just secondary concern. While bottlenecks are money related to a degree, the reality is that the MFPED responds where can impact is persuasive. MFPED informants we met considered that a coherent social protection approach could be managed within existing budgets and frameworks. It is not that new things are needed but innovative thinking and planning.

Weak institutions, managerial direction and lack of clout play a significant part in influencing how policy issues are viewed. Personalities are crucial in policy and positions need to be presented convincingly. More of a problem than resources for the SPTF was that the MGLSD was not strong in arguing the case, and allowed other people to take over before their points were made in policy debates.

MFPED acknowledged that all policy issues are secondary to 'traditional priorities' of roads, agriculture, education, health and water, particularly as they relate to the economic and political environment. If argument skills are weak, other priorities, even clearly linked priorities, are not taken seriously.

A linked observation from an NGO representative was that MGLSD is perceived to only deals with women and children, and that no matter what they say, they're biased against them because of this. Further, the MFPED only talks in economic language and those that don't are simply not listened to. This sentiment was also echoed by people within the MGLSD.

The MGLSD had managed the SPTF process and produced a social investment plan but its status remained unresourced. This is generally acknowledged to be a shame as a lot of work went into its production. The donor group of social development policy advisers hasn't meet with the MGLSD for over a year now, as a result of this frustration. It is clear perception of many people we interviewed that the process has needed a champion and it seems finances could be made available if the process is led strategically. There remains much feeling that MGLSD remains the ideal institutional home for social protection agenda but that there remains considerable challenges in making it work here.

The perception is however that the MGLSD does not have the necessary vision or strategy, and is preoccupied with running ongoing projects. There are real questions about whether or not this is the right ministry for pushing this agenda (see below). This is a difficult problem to

solve but many people identified this at being a root cause to why the issues are not receiving attention and things are not moving forward.

It was acknowledged that even outside this ministry, serious capacity needed to be built as it is a new area and not many, if any, people can say they have the necessary expertise. It could be a case of creating the right units and getting the right people on board. Among civil society groups some interest was expressed in creating a forum, that would work alongside the institutional structure and constitute a pressure group for change.

There is a feeling that future activity would benefit from a secretariat, with a stronger focus and dedicated staff (of at least two people). One member of the SPFT claimed that the current task force could be easily dismissed now as it had lost its impetus, and was partly swallowed up by the social development working group. The secretariat would need better access to key players and better institutionalisation[11].

This links to an often voiced concern of corruption, particularly at point of delivery. Corruption was widely perceived to reduce the viability of government locally and this seriously inhibited positive reactions to the concept of cash and to a degree even in-kind transfers in Uganda. An informant from the Office of the President claimed that while you might receive good reports on how much is allocated this would hide the reality of how little was actually being received by intended beneficiaries. The feeling, particularly at higher levels of central government, is that independent institutions are needed, and suggestions were made for churches and CBOs to play a role in delivering on a social protection policy/programme.

We tabled the idea that cash could be more transparent (and cheap) to hand out than food or in-kind transfers, and discussed different modes of community based monitoring. Media representatives were to a degree interested in taking an independent monitoring role here, recognising that cash transfers would be entangled in political systems.

Local non-governmental institutions, including "traditional Church institutions" were generally identified as the best providers of services and transfers. They were not only generally more trusted but also viewed to have the necessary flexibility to respond to local situations, with many references made to various charity and outreach activities. Respondents were quite adamant that this was not a role for the government system. That said, Ministries would have a role in creating national policies and ensuring funds are transferred to local secretariats.

---

[11] While this idea seems to have gained currency, it should also be remembered that DFID and other key donors have been de-emphasising project support and favouring budget support in their dealings with MFPED.

5   Likelihood for strategic uptake of social protection in Uganda

It is pertinent now to return to our opening question to determine whether international research on social protection is convincing enough for local policy makers. Is our conceptualisation of social protection more palatable than during earlier processes? Is the current climate more receptive?

It is clear that there are already projects in Uganda that could be labelled social protection. Although these are happening, there is little policy level awareness of them and no national level coordination. The general [and rather misled] perception that poverty has been reduced in Uganda limits policy focus on vulnerability, a situation described by an NGO informant as 'losing vigilance' and a 'worrying shift'.

We concluded meetings by asking informants their opinion on Uganda's social protection priorities. The priorities reached included:

- The elderly that have increased destitution. These are the 'big' people that others in the locality would rely on; particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS and looking after children; those that have some land but can't work it; those whose families have left them without support (e.g. for the urban centres);

- People with disabilities that are shunned by society;

- Landless class;

- Children, who are the future; those growing up without adult support; particularly those in the North, affected by displacement and conflict.

- People in remote marginalised regions.

Most informants referred to school feeding programmes and some (e.g. DANIDA, Save the Children) had been directly involved. In North Uganda (Karamoja) the World Food Programme has joined forces with the government to provide school lunches for all children. Lunch had been identified as a significant barrier to school attendance in this dry region. This was a case where food shortages and social problems are evident.

Similarly, the Acholi Education Initiative[12] in Acholi district, was started in 2001 and is supported by Irish, Canadian, and Dutch donors. Over time, this has expanded; targeting about 1000 disadvantaged households, and provides lessons for potential scaling up. The programme is managed through a non-governmental Secretariat, with three Programme Officers and support staff to deal with the day to day management. Selection is determined by community leaders, who identify the poorest households. The beneficiaries tend to be

---

12 Scholarships are provided and ongoing monitoring of student's progress ensures commitment to the programme. Transfers are distributed directly to pupils four times a year. The secretariat has a vehicle to visit all beneficiary pupils twice a term to assess their educational progress.

children left traumatised after capture by the LRA. A board, chaired by the Catholic Monsignor, assesses this selection[13].

Although there are many pilots (notably in North Uganda) there is no coordinated or long-term perspective school feeding programme yet. These pilots in principle come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. If a more active role can be encouraged CPRC research provides important design issues, which would be useful to expansion discussions[14].

Although there are universal programmes in place for health, education and nutrition, it was acknowledged by MFPED informants that there is a need for specific innovations to 'fill the gaps and loop holes' through which some people are missed. As a number of respondents asked, why is it hat certain people still don't take up services when they are free? Why do they drop out of school? If these questions are slowly taking ground in policy debates, this indicates a shift in recognising a role for social protection type interventions.

The SPTF previously decided against developing a parallel process for social protection agenda but to work with the processes around the development of the PEAP. In principle this approach was sound but in application didn't work. MGLSD informants claim that time allowed for mainstreaming social protection into the PEAP was simply too short and that an engagement process with sector ministries needs to be continuous.

On reflection, it seems that the time is increasingly right for this engagement. A senior analyst with the MFPED commented that 'with the previous PEAP, there were too many poor people to bother with the poorest', but that now the focus 'has shifted more towards uplifting as we get nearer the poverty line'. This contradicts other statements that dismiss focussing on the poorest. However, another MFPED informant told us that analysis of the earlier PEAP had showed that the productive sectors weren't growing, (and poverty was increasing), and that this realisation had massively influenced the way the subsequent PEAP progressed. It is very important that the misperception that social protection only offers residual safety nets needs to be turned around so that the productivity enhancing dimensions of social protection are recognised and can then feed into this emerging shift.

It is evident that often the reasons behind an issue gaining policy recognition are dynamic. It is essential to latch onto the instrumental arguments that strongly influence policy agendas and to frame arguments to policy makers with these clearly in mind. References to the need for results and the linkages between policies and politics highlight this most clearly. To conclude on the potential for social protection in Uganda policy processes it is useful to relate back to the RAPID (2004) framework

---

13 Informants claimed there were problems with the selection committees and that targeting had been a problem, but DANIDA cited engagement with local FM radio as a means in exposing and ironing out these earlier problems

14 For example, sourcing food from outside will reduce local activities (e.g. chefs, equipment etc). In some cases, children are not fed on site but given a food package to take home (e.g. Pakistan where it was thought that children that went to school might not be given food at home if they were getting it at school with preference being given to other children in the household with worse unmet needs). In this way, the transfer becomes a household transfer.

5.1 Evidence – credibility, methods, use, packaging, communication

There is some Ugandan evidence but as suggested by a DFID informant, there is also need to identify the appropriate policy space to use that evidence. International evidence is useful and interesting to a point but what is really required is nationally generated information and data. Substantial information is required on the potential beneficiaries. As our informant from the President's Office requested 'get us the good stats so we can determine who the elders are that require this support?' MFPED informants also asserted they need better definition of the problem, supported by sufficient Ugandan evidence. Much of this can be achieved through strategic dissemination and communication of the Uganda Chronic Poverty Report. The MGLSD needs to be encouraged and supported to draw extensively from the data presented in this report.

One MFPED informant also identified an essential need for the MGLSD to be helped to put together a database on different groups, such as older people. While this informant agreed that it is important to have well designed programmes she also argued that policies on paper often fall flat when we can't 'find' (identify) the beneficiaries, and then become more open to local discretion.

Evidence can be provided in different forms but is crucial for successful negotiation with MFPED for resources. Current weaknesses in data dissemination have been a block. There is certainly a gap in information on what already works in Uganda and evaluation should be built in to programmes. Much more could be made of data that is available however; more effort could be applied to the communication and presentation of this, in ways that will talk to the needs of particular policy stakeholders.

Communication blockages between MGLSD and MFPED are also a real obstacle. It must be recognised that MFPED is important to the progress of policy issues in Uganda and appropriate efforts therefore need to be raised. We were unable to meet with sector ministry representatives; however these are also essential links that need strengthening too, and are no doubt affected by similar process difficulties. Cost-benefit analysis will be important to taking these discussions forward, but are not currently available. Current equity budgeting initiatives being trialled within the MFPED could provide an important engagement process for pursuing social protection agenda. A set of other strategic engagement openings are further highlighted in the final section below.

5.2 Political context: Politics and policy making

While Uganda has attracted greatly increased aid flows, the country's trade deficit has doubled, and it remains economically vulnerable in terms of its productive structure, exports and product quality. The main debate is between those who believe that economic growth will eradicate poverty (government, business, donors), and those (in the NGO community) who believe poverty has a more structural basis. There is pressure from CSOs to give more emphasis to the PEAP pillars other than economic growth and redesign economic policy.

However, the country's elite believes that economic growth will reduce poverty; that the chronically poor are residual groups who need simply specialised welfare programmes.

As in many developing countries, this political economy inhibits the response and resource allocation for improving the productive capitals of marginalised and vulnerable groups. As articulated by a key informant in MFPED "economics is politics and politics is not long term". Politicians are interested in policy agenda that will provide them with strong evidence for change within five or less years. The challenge is to find strong instrumental and political reasons with which to present a convincing case (e.g. presenting social protection as a means of extending opportunities for increased productivity and economic growth, or emphasising poverty measures that include poverty severity).

Support and legitimisation of new policy issues was not previously linked broadly enough to Parliamentarians[15], Ministries, potential beneficiaries, or the general public, and this needs reconsideration now. There is a need to identify those individuals that can take the discussion forward. This core group doesn't necessarily have to sit in the MGLSD but must continue to engage with the ministry as this is where many people have felt the emphasis must come from nationally. Respondents acknowledged that this is an important topic for the MGLSD, but that there are serious questions of capacity. It will be critical for this institutional body, in what ever form it takes, to be formally linked with the social development working group.

Linked to success in influencing policy agenda is the need for an institutional base that is perceived strong enough to implement the agenda. Many concerns were raised regarding the appropriate institutional base for a national social protection framework. The current set up was perceived to be too weak to cope with the coordination role[16] required.

The earlier SPTF was only set up as an interim body but a permanent structure was generally agreed by informants as necessary to deal with this moving agenda, and keep reminding people to take the issues on board and through to conclusion, as well as regulating initiatives. A number of respondents, particularly those from MFPED, argued that responsibility had to be held within an institution with real power if social protection was to be taken seriously. Those that have the necessary clout included the MFPED, the Office of the Prime Minister, and the President's Office. This presents a dilemma as the many respondents agreed that it was important to acknowledge and build from the efforts of the MGLSD, and work with that rather than against it. [17]

---

15 Uganda's Presidential and Parliamentary elections, took place on the 23rd February. During our visit MPs were facing election and it can be assumed that many of them would not be returned. As such it was very difficult to gain access to them. However once the election fever has died down, it will be important to bring MPs into this discussion. Getting MPs up to speed with a nuanced understanding of poverty, disaggregated poverty data and the concept and potential of social protection will be critical at the begging of a new term in office.

16 Coordinating would include both the strategic sector initiatives and specific instruments. It means keeping on top of the activities of different actors in different localities as well as the development of a strategic approach within sectors ministries. For example, this might include bringing together all the strategies taken in response to HIV/AIDS, or all project specific education feeding programmes.

17 Many mitigating issues for why the SPTF had not had success. These included the fact that DFID had not made it clear that their interest was only policy influencing and resources would not be forthcoming to follow up to the social investment plan. The SPTF had no budget, but consisted of a team of officers that had other duties demanding their consideration and time. Frustrations have clearly limited the activities of the SPTF .

5.3 Relationship between researchers and policy makers: Media, advocacy and networking

Building a constituency within Uganda for pursuing social protection issues is key. There are already the makings of a strong constituency but this is currently rather disparate and frustrated, and requires a clearer conceptualisation of its an advocacy and policy position. It is important to find a way to re-energise this as a potential force for change. Suggestions were made that a small forum would be the most appropriate way to build the necessary energy and profile. The forum would perform an engagement role, rather than institutional or policy role. Suggestions for inclusion were:

- The Uganda NGO Forum and DENIVA – who could communicate to members
- World Vision
- SCF Uganda
- UNICEF
- DFID
- NORD
- Local Authorities Association

Other key stakeholders would be linked through regular meetings and other engagement activities:

- MGLSD and the new institutional home of social protection;
- MFPED – particularly the poverty monitoring unit, and PEAP office;
- Research and academia – assist in raising the relevant data; asking the right questions;
- Media. Can help to demystify and profile the issues, but it is important to identify key individuals, such as political column writers. It is important to regard this as a long term engagement and education process.

It is important to assume as a starting position that people are poorly informed on social protection issues. Even those that have worked on the issues need to be given very clear terms and concepts. Learning from the past, it is also important to initially limit the agenda to what is more doable and build from that over time.

5.4 External influences: socio-economic and cultural influences, donor policies

National perceptions of donor priorities clearly impact on the way in which a new policy issue is conceived and pursued nationally. It is important to recognise this impact as it can affect the framework of what is possible to think about and achieve. There is some potential for different donors to work together here, for example DFID work policy engagement should be linked to DANIDA programmatic efforts on the ground.

Within the context of increased general budget support it is harder for donors to influence policy uptake. What this means for DFID is that separate social protection projects would not be pursued but there is an influencing role that can be played within the context of the PEAP. Efforts to align the budget to the PEAP present a clear opportunity and important strategy for engagement – an activity the gender working group is pursuing well.

It is also necessary to find pathways for improved donor coordination as the social protection debate unfolds. Differing donor positions and/or approaches to SP could do more harm than good to the process.

5.5 Reflection on the current climate for social protection in Uganda

Earlier engagement on social protection provides a legacy for both this research project and continued engagement. It is not the first time that policy makers have debated the issues, although perhaps the case has not been so strongly put for social protection as a response to extreme and chronic poverty. The legacy also influences the potential for strategically engaging with policy makers on these issues, as many may have already dismissed its relevance while others have been convinced but don't see an appropriate channel for ideas to be taken forward.

The international policy environment is stronger in its support of social protection now than it was a few years ago. Has anything changed within Uganda that means a social protection agenda may gain further policy currency today? Uganda's participatory poverty assessment process has been well received generally and makes the case clearly that something needs to be done to support the poorest. The PEAP also provides entry points. It is going to be important to identify where strong leadership for this agenda will come from.

Looking at other more successful policy agenda, such as the OVC programme, it is clear that success was built from creating a very high profile agenda. A body of civil society was always making noise about the issues. The challenge for the social protection agenda however is to tighten the focus, making it a more concise and manageable policy agenda, as well as respond to the resources case. This means responding to the concerns that social protection is too expensive for Uganda and the worry that such support will turn Uganda's poor into lazy alcoholics. The double fear of welfarism and affordability have not have been loudly vocal but are very persistent.

6   Strategising for future engagement

The key learning points from this research and also SPTF activities:

- The process needs to be firmly rooted in Uganda;
- Clarity of concept and prioritised policy response needs to be developed and communicated persistently where is matters;
- The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development needs considerable support to harness the necessary clout to push the policy approach within policy circles;
- Need to develop a combined forum within civil society to lobby for change;
- Need for a harmonised and systematic approach to Social Protection in Uganda

Below we identify the priority actions for the CPRC in Uganda, as well as the development of a national roadmap for institutionalising social protection in sector approaches. These activities include, clarifying the issues and evidence base, and framing them convincingly, as well as building a constituency, and strategically piggy backing national policy processes, communicating and linking stakeholders.

6.1   Priority actions for the CPRC

It is currently a hot time politically regarding chronic poverty, with increased awareness and public debate on rising poverty and inequality trends. Although this has not been a top media priority our media informants agreed that they should be working to highlight the issues both in light of the elections and results.[18]

The Presidents Office wrote to the CPRC to express interest in our work. It is important to build this link, perhaps from the initial contact made through this project, but certainly also with the office poverty experts. Engagement on these difficult structural issues requires broad activities involving different stakeholders.

We need to take as our starting point for engagement on social protection what has been done before. This doesn't just include engagement activities but also applies to what is happening in terms of social protection initiatives on the ground. So, far there is very little lesson learning occurring, and this could become a strategic policy analysis input that the CPRC could consider investing in. In terms of policy engagement, we need to recognise that we are often up against people who have very fixed ideas, (it is their idea or nothing). These views are difficult to change but impossible without the right data.

There remains work needed to fill in the concept of poverty better. Poverty incidence concerns are understandable, but recognition needs to be that this flattens out poverty to one dimension, loses duration and depth, and can simplify too much the policy response. NGOs

---

18 Immediately after our discussion with media representatives, Charles Lwanga-Ntale was contacted to give a radio interview on Fm Radio. This was aired on Friday, 10th February.

need to flesh in this concept of poverty much better and the CPRC can work with other civil society actors to educate policy makers that the poverty incidence doesn't have to be the only political question. Social protection becomes a clearer policy response if these arguments are acknowledged.

6.2   Roadmap for development of the national social protection agenda

There is a need to:

1. to rebuild momentum and regenerate interest where it has flagged
2.   bring in critical voices.
3. establish strategic alliances with other stakeholders in social protection

The process needs to be firmly based in Ugandan institutions, but there questions around the role that should be played by MGLSD. No matter, this ministry will have a significant role to play and will require assistance to determine options and strategy. This means linking the terms and policy ideas in with other development processes (see 7.3 below for discussion of which processes are most strategic for this).

It is critical that the issues are not presented as residual policy ideas to support residual groups of the poor/population but framed within growth and productivity strategies. As one MFPED informant explained, the term 'social protection' itself conjures up images of giving 'protection' for nothing' and this is rejected without reflection. It may be worthwhile using a different term, however this should be considered carefully.

The approach needs to prioritise a number of sectors first and decide what appropriate social protection measures would be for these sectors. What aspects of it can be implemented? The roles played by different stakeholders need definition. The approach needs to be guided by the knowledge that resistance is not just about money but about unclear and weekly communicated ideas on what can be done and how. Need to move away from the money constraint as the only focus.

In conclusion, the roadmap needs to be guided by the following basic principles:

i)   Have the right information
ii)   Talk to the right people – if not, you will be given a lot of arguments, based on very little knowledge and they will waste your time and energy as they are not influential enough. Aim high!
iii) Know how to talk convincingly to people

6.3   Strategic piggy backing ongoing policy processes

It is important to think carefully about the national level processes that engagement should support. An MFPED informant outlined a number of the Finance Minister's current interests that would be good for considerable profile rising. Some of these fit very neatly with our social protection position. For example, he has a strong current focus on responses that will

make change at the household level. The Minister's idea is for a Parish Model. From this an economic calculation will be made to determine the productivity inputs that are required to improve productivity. There have been no social science inputs into this potentially mechanistic delivery model and this presents a clear opening. This new stream of thinking is going to influence MFPED, and was made public through a statement made on rural development but the MGLSD didn't engage.

How to engage budget processes is critical for this agenda. Equitable budgeting process can be an entry point for pushing the social protection agenda forward and should be followed up as this is taken forward. The formal budget process runs from June to May and while it is too late now to add anything new, it is worth reflecting on this process. The budget was rather over powered by political processes this year, it was rushed and sectors are still trying to firm up the numbers. All sectors are currently quite unhappy with the levels of funding they've had earmarked and are developing lists of priorities they believe should be funded. An MFPED informant told us that it would be a worthwhile endeavour to try to influence this process.

A good starting point would be to take the budget and present a clear, well articulated alternative. This proposal could be taken directly to the Minister. Similarly, we were told that critics have suggested that the budget statement should include a section on PEAP progress. The CPRC should push to write that section and get issues of poverty dynamics and social protection in there. This would be widely distributed and very influential. If social protection is not in people's minds it will not be reflected in debates. Although it is highly unlikely that it would gain funding this year it remains worthwhile to push the agenda forward now.

Using and critiquing key ministerial policy statements is a much better approach to just inserting ad hoc statements to our own time scales. Similarly, sector working groups are another target for getting social protection further up the PEAP agenda. There is a PEAP review planned for later in the year and again this provides an important national policy opening with which to engage. It would be crucial to try to influence the design of that review.

A high level trip was recently made to Zambia by two Government Ministers, one for Gender, Labour and Social Development and the other a Minister of State for Finance, plus two senior officials, one each from MFPED and MGLSD, and the DFID Uganda Social Development Adviser. The CPRC Uganda team was asked to help in preparing the team, including identifying key issues for discussion, and developing an agenda and country position for Uganda. The Zambia trip involved high ranking people visiting the Kalomo district transfer programme, and since return of the Uganda delegation, a series of meetings, debriefings and a major feedback workshop have taken place at which the subject of social protection has been discussed in great detail. A Permanent Secretaries meeting was also convened after the visit at which CPRC Uganda and the Commissioner for Planning at MGLSD made a presentation. Thus as part of this project we led these officials through the main issues at a breakfast meeting just days before they left for Zambia. After they returned, we met again to discuss their reactions to what they had seen and how Uganda could benefit from similar programmes. In doing this we worked with both Help the Aged in Uganda (as Help Age International was spearheading this event in Zambia) and with DFID, and we found it useful to bring on board MGLSD.

Similarly, we have hooked into a process being led by the MGLSD and funded by JICA to run a workshop aimed at developing a policy approach for transfers. Our role has been to influence the content of the workshop so that it is strategically linked to other processes and involves the right people. This contributes to long term planning for institutionalisation in Uganda and done right could be very important, not only for social protection as an agenda but also for MGLSDs reputation for taking this agenda forward.

There are also important local level activities that this process should hook in to. For example, we were told of the Moving out of Poverty programme that is occurring in six districts. This involves qualitative research to explain changes in poverty incidence, and so feeds directly into our core concerns. The current analysis of the World Bank Trust Fund supported Northern Uganda Vulnerability Survey is something that the CPRC is already engaged. There will be much from this data that can be used to support social protection approaches. However, again the challenge is not just to do the analysis but to ensure that it (and other analyses) are disseminated in ways that count.

7   Process observations and project impact

The PEAP has to be the starting point in Uganda and active engagement of the CPRC with this process previously means that there is already some progress on chronic poverty from which to build. This means that within the Ministry of Finance chronic poverty is recognised as an issue at least, even if there is no agreement on how to deal with it.

Timing of the project: Useful, especially now as a window is opening which needs to be grabbed quickly as they often close again very quickly. The project would have benefited by a longer time frame, but couldn't start until after the launch of the Ugandan Chronic Poverty Report, late 2005, as this created the initial building block from which this project was able to benefit. The clash with the national election process was unfortunate and hampered our access to politicians.

Meetings: It was important for us to meet with small groups and individuals to discuss these issues. It was good to have seen a cross section of people and institutional opinions. This was designed for maximum impact potential. We met with a good section that are opposed and supportive. Within both standpoints, we met with many individuals that seriously wanted to engage and requested support. There was a good level of discussion and there is now plenty of follow up potential.

 Partly because of the proximity of this project to the national elections, there were some gaps in who we met however. This was particularly inhibiting for parliamentarians and there will need to be significant follow up once the election results have settled. We have had a number of different audiences but the sector ministries were notably absent. The Ministry of Health has not been well represented yet, and perhaps the MFPED is overly represented.

There are some crucial meetings that we were not able to arrange but should be part of the future strategy:

- MoE – school feeding prog person and commissioner for planning or even the PS.
- MoH – insurance person and comm. For planning and even the PS.
- MFPED Local Govt – would be a central player.
- National Planning Authority. To share with them what we're doing, what they think they can contribute, get on their list etc.
- Set up a meeting for after the Zambia trip : debrief meeting to also feedback to key players.

Evidence: Direct expert input was really important and an excellent methodology for engagement. It is our feeling that simply bringing Dr Armando Barrientos from IDS to the meetings worked much better than making formal presentations and providing documentation would have done at this stage. However, support documents are now necessary for taking the process forward. In addition to this final report, there are a number of process documents and policy briefings which can support this ongoing process. It will be important to maintain this process documentation to aid reflective analysis on progress over time.

Uganda: There remains a big gap in the perceptions of poverty here. The focus on poverty head count measures is important but the nuances of poverty dynamics must be argued.

Education: the process has been very positive in the sense that it has raised people's perception and willingness to discuss other possibilities, and also presents new opportunities for engagement. It was not always very easy to gain insights from our informants as people were really keen to hear from us. This means we talked a lot and perhaps this inhibited the 'research' but in turn this is also in itself very important part of the process of communicating policy ideas with key people.

7.1   Impact of the project

It is very difficult to assess the policy impact of dissemination and communication. However, the MGLSD is thinking about initiating a pilot social grants programme, and we're told that this would not have happened and they hadn't thought of doing this before they met with us.

Meetings with MGLSD representatives centred heavily around what the ministry should do. This is important thinking process that the CPRC and other stakeholders – perhaps through the proposed NGO forum – must engage and support. Responding to the deep institutional issues are going to be key to success. While there is an argument for simply mainstreaming the issue through other sector ministries, there is a compelling position to maintaining a single institutional oversight role so that there remains a single coordination responsibility, with individuals specifically in charge of the agenda, checking sectors do what they say they are going to do, as their core business. There is a need for some kind of coordination role as others won't look at the issues from the same perspective.

Discussions on costs highlight a clear engagement issue. Cost-benefit analysis is going to be key. This can be achieved in part from international experience and is important to stress that these kinds of assessment do not count the cost of NOT having SP, There are long term impacts on health, labour market prospects, education levels, nutrition etc. all of which have costs to the country and economy However, it is clear that national evidence is more convincing. As this initial project moves forward into a strategic engagement programme it will be crucial for CPRC Uganda to employ a set of impact and monitoring tools from which to assess progress.

It is important to assess both progress in terms of engagement but also with regard to the application of pilots and project initiatives themselves. The RAPID programme has worked to develop an overview of different tools that can be used to assess policy impact. The available tools include research tools, context assessment tools, communication tools, and policy influence tools. See Start and Hovland (2004) for detail on the methods that each employ.

Bird and Grant (2005: 38) highlight the 'Most Significant Changes' (MSC) impact assessment and monitoring tool. This involves the collection of 'significant change stories' from a range of stakeholders that are then analysed, discussed and verified. Most Significant Changes monitoring is different from common monitoring practice in at least four respects: (a) The focus is on the unexpected, (b) Information about those events is documented using text

rather than numbers, (c) Analysis of that information is through the use of explicit value judgements, (d) Aggregation of information and analysis takes place through a structured social process. (For a summary see http://www.healthcomms.org/comms/eval/msc.html, and for the MSC Technique Guide see http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.htm). These tools are crucial in building the evidence base on social protection that is currently missing in Uganda.

To conclude, it is clear that serious capacity constraints inhibit operationalisation of social protection and that there is a serious amount of information and evidence that is still needed. Similarly, the need for increasing awareness of the opportunities which social protection interventions can create remains substantial. On top of this a strategic and well designed set of engagement activities are needed to lay the ground for engaging with social protection. This project has significantly assisted in laying this ground.

References

Bird K. and N. Pratt, (2004) 'Fracture Points in Social Policies for Chronic Poverty Reduction', <u>CPRC Working Paper 47</u>, CPRC: Manchester

Bird, K and Grant, U (2005) Policy Influencing and Media Engagement: an Overview, in Bird, K., and Grant, U. (eds.) <u>Policy Influencing and Media Engagement: A Resource Pack</u>, London: ODI and CPRC.

CPRC-Uganda (2005) 'CPRC-Uganda Policy Engagement Case Study' in Bird, K., and Grant, U. (eds.) <u>Policy Influencing and Media Engagement: A Resource Pack</u>, London: ODI and CPRC.

Ministry of Finance, Planning & Economic Development (2000): <u>Learning from the Poor – A Summary of Key Findings and Policy Messages</u>, Kampala, June 2000

RAPID (2004) *Bridging Policy and Research in International Development: An Analytical and Practical Framework*. <u>Research and Policy in Development Programme Briefing Paper No 1.</u> London: ODI, October.

Start D. and I. Hovland (2004) <u>Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for Researchers</u>, RAPID Programme: ODI, Lonond