From research findings to policy change: the role of parliamentarians in the promotion of social transfers in southern Africa

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Context - poverty & social transfers in southern Africa

• Poverty is chronic, pervasive & resistant
  – only 2 countries on track to meet MDG1

• Economic growth hasn’t reduced poverty
  – high levels of income inequality

• Humanitarian assistance only alleviates and may even exacerbate poverty
  – a buffer against difficult policy reforms?

• Social protection, particularly social cash transfers, seen as a more effective means of protecting the poor, promoting livelihoods and fostering wider pro-poor economic growth
Adoption of social transfers in southern Africa

- Sorry, but neither donor engagement nor evidence based research are pre-requisites for the effective adoption of social transfers.

- Learning from “peers”/neighbours is an important factor – not simply explained by affordability.
Social transfers research: a western obsession?

• Profusion of pilots, evidence, lessons and best practices
  • Not convinced? Just look at IDS, ODI and wahenga websites!
  • Malawi – 24 pilots in just 1 district (ODI 2006)
  • A donor pre-occupation

• Yet lessons and best practices often not followed up . . . even by donors who fund the research
  • Food aid in Lesotho and Swaziland (see http://www.wahenga.net/node/1025 )

• Research can be divisive & obstruct progress
  • The targeting debate in Malawi and Zambia

• Fear of commitment?
  • Investing in research offers a means of staying engaged without committing to funding scaled-up social transfer systems
  • The funding cycle excuse
Some messages for donors

• How much added value from more research?
  • At very least a more critical evaluation of research priorities and proposals - especially piloting! (see http://www.wahenga.net/node/1012 & http://www.wahenga.net/node/1047)

• Time to get off the fence
  • Narrow in (from social protection to cash transfers)
  • Invest in advocacy, dialogue and awareness building

• Learning through implementation, not experimentation
  • Research is a continuous process; there is no nirvana
  • You can’t improve what you don’t implement

• Recognising when to step back – from driver to facilitator
  • National ownership and drive are paramount
  • Nurture drivers of change
  • Long term engagement
  • Foster national debate and engagement
RHVP: from social transfers research to advocacy & ownership

- Consolidating research ([http://www.wahenga.net/resources](http://www.wahenga.net/resources))
  - REBA - 20 case studies + 6 thematic & policy context briefs
  - FoSP – 9 policy & programme design oriented briefs

- **Advocacy & ownership**
  - Distilled Policy Briefs (see [http://www.wahenga.net/briefs/policy](http://www.wahenga.net/briefs/policy))
  - “A transfer out of poverty” – [YouTube](http://www.youtube.com)
  - [wahenga](http://www.wahenga.net) - web portal stimulating engagement & translating research into advocacy ([www.wahenga.net](http://www.wahenga.net))
  - Utilising national radio & newspaper s to gain a wider audience and getting voices heard
  - **Parliamentarian Policy Dialogue on Poverty & Social Transfers**
SADC-PF/RHVP policy dialogue initiative on poverty & social transfers

• Objectives
  • Build awareness & understanding
  • Foster national debate & dialogue
  • Nurture drivers of change

• Activities
  • Awareness building workshops for new parliaments
    • Budgetary process / Gender / HIV-AIDS / Social transfers
    • Botswana / DRC / Lesotho / Swaziland
  • In-depth national/regional policy dialogues on social transfers
    • Angola / Botswana / Lesotho / Malawi / Mozambique / Namibia / Swaziland / Tanzania / Zambia / Zimbabwe
  • Parliamentary handbook
Why parliamentarians?

• **Potential**
  • Growing democratisation – increasing importance
  • Roles – representation, legislation & oversight
  • Getting social transfers on to the political agenda - Lesotho 2006 general election
  • Vested interest – re-election

• **Challenges**
  • Still immature democracies
    • Vote buying v election pledging
    • Often more concerned about thwarting the opposition than taking the initiative
  • Varied educational attainment of parliamentarians - 15% to tertiary level
  • Sidelined/undermined by executive – engagement in budget process
  • Limited understanding of wide range of policy issues
  • Limited awareness of what’s going on
  • Donor reticence to engage with parliaments, let alone political parties!
Impact

• In summary
  • Limited but needs to be put into perspective in terms of resources and duration

• Increased awareness
  • Over 550 parliamentarians and parliamentary staff exposed to the social transfers debate, of which over 200 engaged in more detailed policy dialogue
  • Pre/post workshop perceptions exercises indicate significant positive swing in opinions regarding social transfers

• Individual initiatives
  • Private Members Bills in support of scaled up social transfers in Malawi & Zambia
  • Direct intervention of MPs in social transfers delivery system impasse in Swaziland
Lessons

• Legislatives generally under-valued, under-equipped & under-utilised
• Significant unmet demand for knowledge & skill development – not just social transfers
• Driver of change often not “ready made” but need to be nurtured.
• Support needs to be both more intensive & more sustained
• From parliamentarians to political parties; the real prize!

Where next?
• SADC-PF proposal to continue and expand policy dialogue work . . . but no donor interest