

Strengthening Uganda's Social Protection System Lessons from COVID-19

02210805



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Suggested Citation: Kabahizi, C.B.(2021). *Strengthening Uganda's social protection system: Lessons from COVID-19*. Center of Faith Family and Justice

Key Words: Social Protection, Welfare, Uganda, COVID-19

Strengthening Uganda's Social Protection System: Lessons from COVID-19

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CFFJ Policy Brief 02210805

Published by Center of Faith Family and Justice in August 2021

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic rendered the whole global population vulnerable to contracting the novel coronavirus. The coronavirus has caused unprecedented shocks through the entire fabric of the world's societies, and even people leading stable lives in our societies suffered great disruptions. Some parts of the business world thrived while others suffered greatly from hampered activity.

It is such tough times that provide testing for the strength and effectiveness of Social Protection measures in supporting the needs of people in times of crisis. The loopholes exposed during such times can then be amended to establish stronger and more resilient social protection measures. In Uganda today, social protection is still underfunded. With only UGX 221 Billion allocated to social development in 2020/2021, social development is one of the least funded categories in the overall budget of the country. More must be done if Uganda is to realize increased resilience in our society.

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Introduction

Social Protection is a broad concept that envelopes social assistance, labor market schemes, and social insurance (World Bank, 2012). These are policies and initiatives that aim to empower the poor and vulnerable in society. They also aim to provide buffers against disasters and disruptive shocks in the economy and environment. Shocks like floods, wars, and disease upset the livelihoods in affected communities causing suffering for people who are not well prepared to handle them. It is in such situations, in which people are vulnerable, that Social Protection measures directly address people's needs and make such a big difference in the livelihoods of people. However, even when circumstances are not as hard as during crises, Social Protection helps people cope through some difficult situations.

For decades now, international organizations around the world such as the World Bank and the UN and its agencies like UNHCR, UNDP, WFP, and others, have focused their mandates around solving problems in society to create better and safer lives for all in a healthy environment. These agencies have made great differences in society by implementing their various mandates.

The concept of Social Protection (SP) started taking shape in the 1980s after some countries started implementing policies that were aimed at supporting the poor and vulnerable in society. These measures gained popularity and continue to do so as they have shown to have many positive outcomes on benefactors' standard of living. As a result, many countries are increasingly implementing SP measures.

Although the current level of material wealth in the world is unprecedented with the last two centuries being far more materially wealth than all of human history (World in Data, n.d.), the ever-growing standards of living are very unequally distributed meaning many people are left behind and thus remain in poverty. However, even these levels of global poverty have fallen drastically over the past few decades, this means that now more than ever, levels of global material wealth are higher than it has ever been.

However, for the Sub-Saharan Africa region (SSA), the poverty levels have not drastically reduced. For several reasons, the poverty levels have instead slightly increased over the past few decades as shown in Figure C below. Although every country has its poverty line measure, the World Bank's poverty line measure is at \$1.90 per day (World Bank, n.d.). This means people living on \$1.90 or less per day are living on or under the poverty line. On a national level, Uganda's poverty line is currently at UGX 46,233.65 (Mwonge 2019); this is the average annual consumption expenditure per adult that can meet the basic calorie requirements of an adult.

The poverty levels of countries around the world may be worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic which is expected to greatly increase the levels of income inequalities as many informally employed people have slipped back into unemployment. Only vaccines are expected to fully remedy this situation and provide a chance for a return of normalcy.

Although the COVID-19 vaccines currently under trial around the world are expected to be ready for use in 2021, SSA countries may not receive these vaccines until 2022 or 2023. According to WHO, only two billion doses can be made annually and globally, this means only two billion people can be vaccinated in a year if the current vaccination capacities remain constant. Given that every country would prioritize vaccinating its people first followed by countries that can afford to pay for the vaccine, SSA countries may be nearly last in line to receive the vaccinations. This means the impacts of COVID-19 on African countries will be far-reaching in ways that cannot be well predicted as of now.

The fall in global material poverty over the past few decades can partly be attributed to the Social Protection measures that have been increasingly implemented in many countries over the past four decades (World Bank 2012). SP policies are always employed to reduce vulnerability and poverty and always aim at improving the living standards of people.

Social Protection has three main components (World Bank 2012):

- **Resilience:** This includes social insurance and is meant to protect people against different shocks. These measures act as buffers against hardships when difficult times come.
- **Opportunity:** This revolves around promoting human capital and providing access to satisfactory work. This would include providing good quality education to children and tackling youth unemployment issues that are so rampant in many places.
- **Equity:** This mainly aims at poverty reduction and reduction in income inequalities, protecting people against destitution.

Social Protection concepts

These are two terms commonly used in the circles of social protection:

Safety Nets: These are social assistance programs like giving food aid, cash transfers, giving food at schools, distributing free mosquito nets, distributing face masks and radios during the COVID-19 driven lockdown.

Social Protection Floors (SPF's): These are the first level of social protection in a national social protection system (Wikipedia, n.d.). These are usually found in the legislation and they address the SP needs of people.

SP is a human right that every country must provide for its citizens (ATD FourthWorld 2017). Research has shown that Social Protection increases human development, improved school grades for students, and has improved health outcomes. It has also reduced poverty and reduced child labor (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004). Moreover, higher levels of social protection measures like cash transfers give recipients higher purchasing power, leading to increased domestic demand for goods and services, increased consumption, and increased stability in the country.

SP measures can take the form of social action which consists of direct cash transfers to people, food aid, and supplies. When money is given to the poor directly, it increases their purchasing power and so increasing their demand for consumption goods, thus increasing their expenditure. It, therefore, turns out to be a way of pumping money into the economy, SP measures thus not only help the poor live better but they promote a thriving economy. Some governments, however, are resistant to over-investing in SP measures because they argue that social action measures just aid and abet laziness and idleness among the people (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004).

Human Capacity Development is a vital aspect of social protection because capacity building empowers people to do more productive work, increasing the production capacity of the economy. For some well-developed countries, compulsory excellent education was among the foundational initiatives they implemented to increase their country's productivity and grow their Gross Domestic Product.

The human development index is a composite statistic (UNDP, n.d). It is the geometric mean of the normalized indices of a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being knowledgeable (measured by literacy rates), and having a decent standard of living (measured by GDP per Capita).

By looking at these three measures, it can be seen that SP has a role to play in improving each of them. SP measures can increase life expectancy through free healthcare; widespread health insurance; providing food aid; providing free vaccines; providing mosquito nets, etc.

SP measures improve literacy rates through good quality education policies; free education policies; providing lunch at school; deworming children, etc. For example, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab carried out a study in Kenya between 1997 and 2001 in which they found that deworming pupils significantly increased school participation (J-PAL, n.d.).

With regards to having a good standard of living, SP measures have a great role to play through social action measures like direct cash transfers that provide financial relief to benefactors; providing work opportunities to the unemployed in society; providing skills with which beneficiaries can be self-employed or get gainful employment, etc. The right of worship is also a human right that allows people to find nourishment for their spiritual lives, many times worship helps people gain perspective in life, allowing for more purposeful living. Research has proven that spirituality and religious participation significantly improves people's life satisfaction (Ellison and Gay 2009; Marques, Lopez, and Mitchell 2013). In this COVID-19 crisis that has caused upheavals in our normal routines, it is even more important that we enjoy the support systems available to us through the church. During the COVID-19 period, worship ceremonies have been broadcasted online and on Television. This has enabled many to worship from their homes. Many await the reopening of so worship places so that they can enjoy the psychosocial support received from sharing fellowship with fellow worshippers.

The benefits of SP measures are both short term and long term. Overall, we see that SP measures promote peace, lead to all-round growth in the capital market, and increase expenditures in the economy. We see that they lead to personal and community growth, and generally improve the human capital and productivity of a country.

Social Protection in Uganda

Social Protection in Uganda is categorized under Social Development, an umbrella that includes: Community mobilization and empowerment; Redressing imbalances and promoting equal opportunities for all; Social protection for vulnerable groups; Promotion of decent employment; Gender, equality and women's empowerment; and, Community mobilization, culture and empowerment (Development Initiatives 2019). The budget that covers this Social Development Category is called the Poverty Action Fund. For the FY 2020/2021, UGX 221 Billion was allocated to Social Development (MoFPED 2020). This is still one of the least funded categories in Uganda's annual budget.

To understand SP in Uganda, we first seek to understand the current social characteristics of Uganda's population. According to the Third National Development Plan, the following are some characteristics of Uganda's social outlook (NPA 2020):

- Uganda's population stands at 45.7 million people with a median age of 16.7 years. About 78% of Uganda's population is aged 30 years and below;
- The GDP per Capita is \$878 as of 2019. The main aim of Uganda's National Development Plan III has been to deliver Uganda into the middle-income status which is signified by achieving GDP per capita of \$1,029;
- Uganda's Human Development Index was measured by UNDP at 0.516 as of 2017. Still quite low;
- The unemployment of youth is at 13.3%;
- There is still a high prevalence of corruption in Uganda;
- Low quality of education;
- Inadequate functionality of health facilities.

Social security programs in Uganda include:

Social Insurance

Insurance coverage in Uganda, although is still low, has grown quite steadily over the past few decades. Insurance in Uganda takes two forms: formal insurance and informal insurance. Formal insurance involves the attainment of insurance policies from insurance companies, whereas informal insurance takes the form of all kinds of saving schemes: SACCOS (Savings and Credit Cooperatives), burial societies (members of a village agree to pool resources to cover burial expenses, collecting an agreed amount monthly), cash rounds (saving schemes in which members collect an agreed amount of money and give it to one of their members on an arranged basis until everyone has taken a turn receiving money), and all such saving schemes that people use to hedge themselves from different types of risk.

In addition to these informal insurance schemes, several insurance companies provide formal insurance coverage under several schemes. Statistics show that majority of insurance policyholders were invested in Non-Life insurance packages with the majority on health insurance and third-party insurance which is compulsory for all vehicles. Only 25.36% were vested in Life insurance, a critical investment for retirement and old age (IRA 2018).

The Government of Uganda (GoU) provides a pension for government workers. And then there is a compulsory social security scheme for all formal workers to save for retirement through the National Social Security Fund. These arrangements usually prepare formal workers for retirement. They, however, must seek to expand their coverage to workers in the informal sector who are the vast majority in Uganda.

Labor programs

To reduce the unemployment rates, the GoU has taken on several initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship. This self-employment initiative has greatly increased the informal work sector in Uganda. When youth finish school, many explore the self-employment arena to find ways to earn a living.

The ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development runs several social development programs. Two of these include the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship (UWE) and the other is the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP). The UWE provides soft loans for women who want to invest in projects, while the YLP also provides soft loans to youth groups who want to start businesses. In this context, soft loans are given without security, at a very low or no interest, and with ample grace periods given for repayment.

Social action

Social action measures are meant to directly support the vulnerable people in society. Vulnerable people in Uganda include the poor, persons living with a disability, refugees, people facing domestic violence in homes—especially women and children, children who are vulnerable to early marriage and teenage pregnancies, older persons, and the unemployed youth.

Many non-governmental-agencies and international non-governmental agencies in Uganda are also involved in social action. INGOs like World Food Program works hard to provide food aid to the undernourished and those facing food insecurity. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees works to care for the refugees in Uganda. With over 1.2 million refugees, Uganda is hosting the highest number of refugees in Africa, and the second-highest in the world.

Protecting and providing for older persons

Older persons in Uganda and around the world, deserve to live the evening of their lives in dignity and comfort. 1 in 6 households in Uganda has one person aged 65 years and above (MoFPED 2020). This proportion is expected to increase in the years ahead as the majority of Uganda's population is below 30 years of age. But as of 2017, 85% of older persons in Uganda lived in rural areas under conditions of chronic poverty (MoGLSD, n.d.).

The majority of the elderly who are not covered under SP usually work until their death. The majority of them are farmers and continue to manually till their lands until they are physically unable to or until they pass away. Very few are covered under SP policies. The MGLSD provides a Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) which provides a minimum income to the elderly- 65 years and above for the rest of Uganda but 60 years and above in Karamoja (MoGLSD, n.d.). This scheme gives older persons UGX 50,000 every two months to cater to basic expenses.

This SCG which was together with the Vulnerable Family Grant—which was scraped off in 2015 after the pilot results were not favorable for its continuation— are both under the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) program. The target of the SCG program is to provide direct income transfers to senior citizens.

Older persons also suffer many recurrent health problems and are vulnerable to sexual assault (Ajiambo, n.d.). In these cases, they need protection, justice, and free or affordable medical care. The GoU provides free medical care at Government Hospitals and Health Centers. This Social Protection initiative has facilitated healthcare provision for the poor. Although many healthcare centers remain understaffed, the Ministry of Health has recently made strides towards appropriately furnishing health centers and hospitals in Uganda.

Persons suffering Domestic Violence

As in all other patriarchal societies, Uganda has faced and still grapples with Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Women and children are still by far the most vulnerable family members who face GBV in Uganda. However, men too suffer violence from their female partners/wives. The most common circumstances surrounding GBV in Uganda are: alcoholism, poverty, illiteracy, having multiple partners, growing economic independence of women, among others. Important to note is that GBV is not only between blood relations but it can be between acquaintances, neighbors, relatives, workmates, and even friends. The abuse is not only physical, but it can also be sexual, emotional, economical, verbal, and psychological in nature. The most common perpetrators of physical violence are partners, teachers, and step-parents (Madinah 2020). Whereas for sexual violence, the most common perpetrators are partners, parents, relatives, acquaintances, relatives, and in-laws. This said, the vast majority get away with GBV in Uganda because it is not always physical or debilitating. Nevertheless, GBV always takes its toll on members of society.

Several organs dedicated to tackling GBV issues in Uganda range from INGOs like Save the Children, UN Women, WHO (World Health Organization) and NGOs like CEDOVIP (Center for Domestic Violence Prevention), FIDA (The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers), WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations) to Government Agencies like the Police, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development's GoU-Irish Aid Joint Programme to Address GBV in Busoga Region. Despite several statistics on the issue, it is believed that the majority of the GBV issues in Uganda's society go unreported (MoGLSD, n.d.).

Children vulnerable to early marriage and Teenage Pregnancies

Although less common than it used to be, child marriage still happens in very rural areas in Uganda. Children who get married away are less likely to finish school and are less likely to fully educate their children. They are more likely to have informal employment and are more likely to live below the poverty line. They are also more prone to suffering domestic violence.

Persons living with HIV

As of 2019, approximately 1.5 million Ugandans currently live with HIV (Avert, n.d.). With the first cases registered in 1983 the HIV epidemic soon caused the loss of so many lives, it was not until widespread awareness of the disease and its preventive measures were achieved that the rate of new infections started slowing down. The prevalence of HIV has dropped drastically since the 1980's to 53,000 new infections in the year as of 2018 (UNAIDS, n.d.). This progress can be attributed to the GoU's aggressive campaigns about HIV awareness and prevention.

According to UNAIDS, the main categories of people affected by HIV in Uganda include: sex workers; men who have sex with men; people who inject drugs; and prisoners (Hladik et al. 2017; UNAIDS, n.d.)

Uganda aimed at achieving a 90-90-90 target by 2020. This target means by 2020, 90 % of HIV positive people will be aware of their status. Of these, 90% will have access to ARVs (Anti Retro Viral drugs) and of these taking ARVs, 90% will achieve viral suppression. The SP measure the GoU put in place to support HIV positive persons is providing them with free ARV drugs. As a result of this SP measure coupled with aggressive awareness measures, AIDS-related deaths have greatly decreased. New infections have also slowed over the years.

Ugandans Living Abroad

The Embassies of Uganda in other countries are mandated to provide consular services to both Ugandans and international citizens. These embassies play a supportive role in connecting Ugandans abroad to whatever services they need. Social support should be extended to Ugandans through the ministry of Foreign Affairs through making allowances for the provision of food aid and cash transfers to Ugandans during times of crisis.

Environmental Health Issues

In addition to living in poverty, many people also live and/or work in very poor sanitary conditions. This is a constant threat to the health of the people and children using these environments. They are at higher risk of contracting diarrhea, Ebola, and Cholera. Although people have the largest share of responsibility of ensuring that their surroundings are healthy and sanitary, the municipalities and other local authorities have a fair share of responsibility to make sure that rubbish collection systems are in place, drainage systems are working, and people have access to clean water.

With all this insight, it is important to note that because of the acute deforestation Uganda has suffered over the past few decades, it is important that going forward, SP measures should be climate-responsive. This will reduce the vulnerability of farmers to climate change. In the recent years, droughts and longer dry spells have become more common. Very heavy rains that cause flooding and land-slides have also become more common. These changes in weather patterns cause great losses in crop production, rendering farmers vulnerable. It is thus important that environmental protection measures be put in place.

The Escalation of Social Protection needs due to COVID-19

One important fact to note about these vulnerable people is the fact that their struggles were in existence before the COVID pandemic. Already, the GoU and humanitarian development agencies are working hard to reduce the struggles these people were facing. The troubles just escalated after restrictions were put in place to curb the COVID-19 because restricted movements meant many informal workers lost their income-earning capacities and thus had a lower purchasing power. Vulnerable people have found an increased need for support and financial assistance during the lockdown. For many vulnerable people, the lockdown cut them off from their main support systems (WFP, 2020). When it comes to COVID-19, so much uncertainty still revolves around everything to do with the future.

Like it has done to many other systems everywhere, COVID-19 has exposed the strengths and weaknesses of Uganda's Social Protection System. Below are the major problems that came up during the lockdown.

Many workers fell out of employment. This was a big blow to many especially informal workers and Small and Medium Business Enterprise (SME) owners. As a result of so many people falling out of employment due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the poverty gap in Uganda is expected to increase. It was mostly the informal workers who already live near the poverty line that was affected by business losses.

Interesting to note is that as a result of the economic distress caused by employment losses, the public started demanding their NSSF savings to relieve their financial hardships. Although these savings were not returned to the public, this rightly caused upheavals in the social security circles because indeed the social action measures provided by the government had not been sufficient to support members of the public. The GoU was not able to make consistent direct cash transfers to affected persons in the community, and only some food aid was given. This was insufficient and brought to light the need for the revision of SP measures in times of crisis.

Food Insecurity is one of the greatest SP needs that arose during the pandemic. Whereas, on one hand, the demand for fresh food fell during the lockdown because of the movement restrictions, lower purchasing power, and the discontinuation of 'open markets' leading to a sharp drop in prices of fresh food. On the other hand, because of the same reduced purchasing power, fewer people could afford to buy necessary foodstuffs.

At the onset of the lockdown in March 2020, Ugandans showed patriotism and kindness when they generously contributed tons of food, sanitizers, and soap to the more vulnerable people in society. Many informal workers and business owners who live hand to mouth were greatly affected by the movement and work restrictions. The food aid distributed went a long way to reduce the food insecurity in the country.

International Organizations like the WFP also provided food aid worth millions of dollars. This food was procured on the Ugandan market and given to people facing food insecurity. This initiative pumped more than \$24.5 million into the Ugandan economy between January and June 2020 (WFP 2020).

The GoU also made and is still distributing masks to the general public in a bid to curb COVID-19 transmissions between people. By 4 August 2020, over 5 million masks had been distributed in Kampala Metropolitan Area, Wakiso and Mukono districts (GoU 2020).

Domestic Violence is one issue of vulnerability that saw a sharp increase during the lockdown. This was a global phenomenon because for once, couples that had always managed to live together, with separation during the day acting as a buffer, had to live in the same space for months on end. This meant couples had to deal with all underlying animosities. This, coupled with the decreased incomes suffered by many, has been the perfect setup for increased domestic violence.

Human Capital Development: Students in Uganda have suffered learning losses as schools have been closed since the third week of March 2020. For this, the Ministry of Education and Sports promoted remote learning strategies which including airing lessons on television and radio and providing lessons in newspapers.

Furthermore, many teachers continued sending learning material through email and online learning platforms. The GoU is set to distribute radios to Ugandan households to further facilitate remote learning.

Psychological Pressures: With people around the world suffering stress anxiety and uncertainty about the future because of this pandemic, and with so much bad news in circulation, it is very important the psychological needs of people around the world be met. One study likened the experience of going through this COVID-9 pandemic to the cultural shock that migrants face when they first move to a new country/environment (Olson 2020). This means that the GoU should be considerate of the psychological pressures and discomfort the people are facing in order to provide the most appropriate supportive measures.

Psychological support is mainly given through healthy and loving social settings. Settings that uplift the spirit. Spending time with family and friends, playing sports, and spending time at worship gatherings. These are aspects of social life that strengthen the moral fabric of society.

Worship gatherings, more specifically, provide counselling-like support to the congregations. They are psycho-social support systems that provide mental, emotional, psychological, spiritual, moral and even material support to participants. During the COVID-19 lockdown, congested social gatherings have been halted and places of worship have been closed because of the social distancing measures put in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus. This has led to the cutoff of major support systems in society, increasing loneliness, domestic violence, and stress.

Ugandans living abroad: The unprecedented COVID-19 crisis left no category of vulnerable people unscathed. Uganda through her embassies abroad had to repatriate Ugandans who were longing to return home during the lockdown. This exercise was successful although several Ugandans abroad are still living in vulnerable conditions because of the COVID-19 crisis. On 25th August, Mercy Baguma, a 34-year-old Ugandan living in Glasgow, UK, was found dead in her apartment due to starvation. She was found with her malnourished 1-year-old son who was safely given to his father. Such instances show a gap in SP measures extended to Ugandans abroad.

Policy Recommendations

Prioritizing Quality Education

The greatest social investment any country can make to fully empower its citizens is providing compulsory world-class education. This human capital development initiative by far causes the greatest impact in a community. The best way to do this, for now, is by encouraging investments in Private schools. Widespread cover of private schools and ensuring quality control in the quality academic standards is of paramount importance.

Privatizing UPE and USE Schools

UPE schools, a well-intended initiative that has greatly increased the enrollment of students, are not yet able to provide good quality education to students. These schools should be privatized and transformed into world-class education centers.

This would shift the administrative burden from the government to the people. This way, the MoES can play a supervisory role in ensuring that schools are meeting the standard education delivery procedures.

Raising Funds for Social Protection

To meet the required SP targets in a country, a considerable amount of money must be set aside to cater for this cause. Several schemes can be used to provide funds for these SP measures.

- i) Fighting corruption and illegitimate cash flows: In Uganda, an average of 2 trillion shillings are lost every year through corrupt schemes (PML Daily 2020). If the amount of money ordinarily lost can be used to do its work, the goals of many programs being implemented can be realized and more money can be saved to use in achieving SP targets.
- ii) Increasing tax revenues: To hit this target, a bigger tax base must be created through increased industrialization and providing gainful employment opportunities for the youth.
- iii) Reallocating some public expenditure: With increased program effectiveness realized in the first point, it will be easier to reallocate some funds to the cause of implementing SP targets.
- iv) Seeking aid from supportive donors: Funding opportunities like grants may also be found through this avenue. These may be available to fund SP initiatives in both the government and the private sector.

Providing Gainful Employment Opportunities

Great potential for the country's development lies in the ability to provide gainful employment for Uganda's youth. Not only would this greatly increase Uganda's standards of living, but it would also significantly boost tax revenues in the country from the larger tax base, which would, in turn, provide more funds for Social Protection.

Green SP Measures

SP measures should be climate-responsive as well. To provide a clean and healthy environment for all to live in, the following transitions must be made:

- Transitioning from biomass combustion as a source of energy (burning firewood and charcoal for cooking purposes) to clean energy like hydro-electricity and solar especially. Gas, too, should be made cheaply available for cooking purposes, when the oil extraction and processing become a reality in Uganda.
- Engaging aggressive re-afforestation drives to reclaim forest cover in Uganda. This would protect Ugandan farmers from suffering from climate-related hazards.
- Setting up living and building standards so that people can strive to live in clean and healthy environments, relocating slum dwellers to better shelters with higher sanitation standards.

Involving the Public in Social Protection Policy Formulation

Since the beneficiaries of SP measures are people in need, it is vital to allow their participation in the policy formulation of the SP policies.

The people's feedback on what measures are working and how things can be improved would go a long way in increasing the effectiveness of SP initiatives. Taking opinion polls to better understand the people's needs would also help policymakers to make the most effective interventions.

Strengthening the Capacities of Local Actors

Several organizations in Uganda like churches, orphanages, NGOs are, in one way or another, involved in offering social protection initiatives in communities. Their SP actions include; helping the poor, educating orphans, skilling the youth, providing shelters and legal help to persons facing GBV and many others should be supported by the GoU.

Considerations for Gender-Sensitive SP Measures

Uganda still suffers gender inequalities because of the patriarchal traditions in Uganda that still shape people's lifestyles. Although the gender divide is getting less and less severe, the gender gaps in economic opportunities, property ownership, leadership roles, school enrollment, and agency still draw attention to the need for continued implementation of gender-sensitive social protection measures. In this regard, there has been considerable progress over the decades to close gender gaps in education, work, and economic opportunity as a whole. More still has to be done until both women and men equally enjoy high levels of life satisfaction. The following are some recommendations measures towards achieving this goal:

- Teaching both genders, male and female, the importance and benefits (both long and short term) of mutual respect and co-operation.
- Criminalizing all violence.
- Publicizing helplines for victims of violence
- Sensitizing people on communication skills for tough conversations and provide healthy options to violence.
- Economic empowerment of both men and women.

Social Protection Measures for the Older Persons

In addition to increasing the reach of the SCG under the SAGE program, the following policies encouraging and supporting nursing homes and remote palliative care could be considered:

- Making allowance for social security programs of saving for remote palliative care or nursing home care during old age.
- Encouraging the creation of private nursing homes for older persons (or the families) who can afford it.
- Creating government-funded nursing homes for the older persons who have not been financially prepared for this and are not able to afford it.

Psychological Support for the People

In light of the psychological distress the COVID-19 pandemic has caused in society, it is vital to note the need for psycho-social support and encouragement the public needs at this time.

An important aspect of this includes allowing for social distanced healthy public gatherings like the reopening of places of worship. If the standard operating procedures were to be well managed, the benefits of the reopening of places of worship would far outweigh the risks. Fostering and encouraging positive communication would also provide psychological benefits to Ugandans.

Social Protection for Children prone to Early Marriages and Teenage Pregnancies

This problem, which robs Uganda's children of their future, is longstanding but still needs to be addressed. The following are some measures that can mitigate this problem:

- The banning and criminalization of child marriages
- Legally penalizing men and boys who are responsible for teenage pregnancies.
- Banning abortions of teenage pregnancies as many teenagers lose their lives in attempts to abort.
- Married girls and teenage mothers should be encouraged to return to school and finish their education.
- Children and teenagers should be encouraged to abstain from sex.

Social Protection measures for Informal Workers

Both formal and informal social security should be extended to cover informal workers. This would make them more resilient in times of crisis and would better prepare them for retirement and old age.

Conclusion

Uganda has already made tangible strides in her progress towards meeting the social protection needs of her people. A combination of more resources dedicated towards the cause of social development and the right policies implemented faithfully would go long way in creating the desirable impact on Uganda's society.

Strong Social Protection measures have the ability not only to transform the nation but would also increase the national pride and patriotism of Uganda's citizens.

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