Social and Economic Exclusions in Times of Social Protection: A case of Makueni County Kenya

Introduction

Kenya has an estimated population of 47.6 million people. The country is classified as a lower Middle Income Country (LMIC) with a national poverty prevalence rate of 36.1%. However, some parts experience higher poverty rates.

Evidence from across the world shows the potential of Social Protection Systems to prevent poverty, reduce social and economic inequality and improve levels of health and education. In spite of this, even in countries where Social Protection is guaranteed by law, not all segments of the population are reached effectively. Discrimination, socioeconomic disadvantage and the way in which policies are designed and implemented play a role in keeping Social Protection out of reach of some individuals and groups. Understanding the challenges that potential beneficiaries face in obtaining access to Social Protection is necessary if equity is to be achieved among segments of society.

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In view of this, the Africa Platform for Social Protection (APSP), with funding support from the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA) and the Open Society Foundations’ Economic Advancement Programme, carried out a study in Kenya in the period May–June 2019 using Makueni County as a case study. The aim was to gain an understanding of how exclusion in State cash transfer programmes affects these households, identify coping strategies and come up with recommendations to ameliorate the situation. The study used government data obtained from the single registry, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and two validation meetings.

The study examined the following National State Programmes: Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC), Older Persons Cash Transfer Programme (OPCT) and Persons with Severe Disabilities Cash Transfer (PWSD-CT). In addition, the study examined other Social Protection interventions run by the national government namely, Uwezo Fund, Women Enterprise Fund, Youth Enterprise Fund and The National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF), the National Universal Health Coverage programme and county-specific Social Protection interventions namely, county universal healthcare scheme, Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA), Tetelka, Asset Financing among others.

The study adopted a Social Exclusion Framework as shown in figure 1 to guide in the analysis.

The following are the key findings:

Excluded Groups in Makueni

Exclusion is defined as inadequate participation and access to basic services by individuals in society due to discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, social economic status, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status or other health conditions (refer to Figure 1).

1.1 The Youth

The youth in Kenya are defined as persons between the ages of 15–34 and make up about 20% of the population (10 million). This phenomenon is referred to as the youth bulge and it characterizes Africa's demography. If managed well, the youth bulge can be an asset. A youthful population could mean higher consumption and increased productivity. A youthful population is also associated with an increase in savings because there are more people working than retirees. Spending on health benefits, pensions and other social services for older persons decreases and savings accruing channelled towards development.

However, Kenya and other countries in Africa have not been able to benefit from the youth bulge. This is because of poor planning and lack of enabling policies. As a result, education and training curricula do not adequately prepare youth for the market. In addition, the economy, due to various factors, has not kept up with demands of the job market. The informal sector can only absorb a small fraction of school leaving youth. Every year, large numbers of youth leave the school system and join the ranks of the unemployed. Without addressing the interplay of factors that cause youth unemployment, Kenya and Africa will not reap the benefits of the youth bulge. Instead, large numbers of unemployed youth will increasingly present social and economic challenges.

Youth in Makueni are faced with high unemployment as youth in the rest of the country. As such, they are part of the groups that are economically excluded in Makueni. National and county government interventions have not been adequate in addressing this exclusion. Funds targeting youth such as the Youth Enterprise Fund need to be redesigned in order to ease participation by the youth. Requirements for participation leave out many youth. The vulnerability of youth is exacerbated by lack of assets they can use as collateral to start businesses. Female youth suffer from multiple vulnerabilities due to culturally-determined gender roles and societal gender bias. For instance, their care-giving role restricts their ability to compete for the few training and job opportunities. A high percentage of youth in Makueni come from poor families who are unable to support them to start businesses. Female youth are more unlikely to get family support to start businesses due to cultural gender stereotyping.

National and county governments have vocational training centres and more being set up which try to equip youth for the job market. But these centres are not well resourced or staffed and some of the courses being offered requires redesigning. Therefore, they are...
Coping Mechanisms in Makueni

When people are faced with shocks, they use detrimental coping mechanisms which increase their vulnerability. Children are withdrawn from school to save money. Some foods are left out of the diet and rations are reduced. The resulting nutritional deficiencies make small children and the elderly susceptible to ill health. Some people lease out part of the little land they have, leaving a small area for subsistence farming. Others sell their cattle which leaves them without a source of income. The distance of payment points is little left for investment. Delay of payment disrupts planning and forces beneficiaries of the programme to borrow from community members.

Through the Inua Jamii initiative, everyone who is 70 years old and above can benefit from the cash transfer programme. However, a discrepancy exists where those on government pension cannot participate whereas those on private pensions can. The study recommends that the cash grants be made fully universal to cover everyone above the age of seventy.

When old age intersects with disability, gender, widowhood and its male equivalent, the vulnerabilities and exclusions become multiple.

1.4 Coping Mechanisms in Makueni

When people are faced with shocks, they use detrimental coping mechanisms which increase their vulnerability. Children are withdrawn from school to save money. Some foods are left out of the diet and rations are reduced. The resulting nutritional deficiencies make small children and the elderly susceptible to illness. Some people lease out part of the little land they have, leaving a small area for subsistence farming. Others sell their cattle which leaves them without a cushion against future shocks. Some women opt for early marriages. With increased vulnerability, women become susceptible to sexual exploitation.

Some community members have devised beneficial coping mechanisms. They have merry-go-round
schemes. Community members help each other to cultivate land or repair homes. The Makueni government has imitated a scheme that avails credit to women and youth who want to start businesses, adding to the funds availed by the national government. Other county-supported schemes include Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA), Tetheka and Asset Financing which enables women to buy water tanks for water harvesting. Makueni also implements a universal health coverage scheme. Those older than sixty years are exempt from the annual fee of Kenya Shillings 500 which is a well thought out idea.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of the study of Social Protection interventions in Makueni are in line with studies done elsewhere that show Social Protection, if well designed and implemented, engenders poverty reduction, social inclusion and human development.

One of the key findings is that these schemes need to be universal. Residents of Makueni pointed out that universal schemes such as free education and universal health coverage were the most beneficial and impactful. Schemes that employ targeting to identify beneficiaries are faulty as they leave out deserving people. Targeting methods besides being expensive will lead to national and international goals on poverty reduction and inclusive societies not being attained in addition to exacerbating social tensions within communities.

**Recommendations**

Drawing upon these conclusions, we make the following recommendations to Civil Society Organizations, County Governments and National Government

**County and National Governments**

1. Leverage on other initiatives like Kenya Social Economic and Inclusion Project Programme in Makueni (KSEIP) to increase inclusion of vulnerable groups. KSEIP provides opportunity for social and economic inclusion of vulnerable population groups and those left out of social protection interventions and other programmes. However, broad and meaningful involvement and engagement with the community is recommended.

2. Remove structural barriers to inclusion and ease access to relevant identification and documents. Some of these barriers include difficulties related to securing identification documents like identity cards and birth certificates.

3. Reform and re-look at barriers to micro-finance schemes (UWEZO, youth and women’s funds) which are a hindrance to providing benefits to the financially excluded groups of people.

4. Provide relevant skills set to youth to enable them integrate in the economy and markets. Currently, the government is upgrading Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) colleges in counties to provide training for youth in various courses. Adequate equipment and trained personnel will enhance government efforts towards this endeavour.

5. Commit to seek avenues to create jobs for the growing number of youths. In addition, through legislation or other means, and in line with the Decent Work agenda, the government needs to commit to address the problem of bad jobs which further increase the exclusion and vulnerability of the youth.

6. Improve access to education, health care and other important services. Improved access will mean households receiving cash grants can use the funds for other productive activities rather than to seek basic services. In Makueni County, the universal health coverage scheme has promoted access to affordable health care for residents. However, enhancing access to services needs to go hand in hand with improving quality of the services including equipping of hospitals, recruitment of additional health care workers and teachers, provision of learning materials, etcetera.

7. Government to increase public investment in services like agriculture, health and education. This will promote the use of meager household earnings on other needs.

8. Promote the participation and inclusion of women in social protection schemes through design of programmes that take into account gender roles and the burden of care work that is shouldered by women and girls.

**Civil society organisations**

1. Develop mechanisms to enhance accountability and for holding both governments to account. Social transfers and provision of services by themselves are inadequate in challenging structures that keep people in poverty and exclusion. However, they present avenues through which citizens can demand better governance thereby challenging structural forms of exclusion.

2. Support awareness-raising on existing public programmes to enable a higher uptake by citizens. Awareness creation on social protection in general, including health insurance, social security and social assistance is important in promoting citizen awareness and participation in the programmes.