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CENTRALITY OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Rebased estimates released in 2019 by Uganda Bureau of Statistics show that real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased at an annual rate of 6.5% in 2018-2019 - higher than the previous estimate of 6.2%. However, the economy is not expanding fast enough to meet the government's lower middle-income status and poverty reduction ambitions by the end of 2020.

2. INCLUSIVE GROWTH ENGENDERS SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAM

Social protection is pivotal if a country's development strategy shields households from exposure to such factors as epidemics, droughts, floods, international price shocks, and conflict. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, cash transfers, public works programs, and other in-kind and cash interventions and services continue to change the lives of millions of vulnerable people hence supporting economic growth and creating a more inclusive society.

3. CASES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS IN UGANDA

At strategic level, Uganda's Third National Development Plan (NDP III), currently still in Draft, social protection is emphasized as a key to pursuit of inclusive growth for national development. Government of Uganda has been progressively introducing a series of such programs (regardless of the contentiousness over their respective effectiveness). These include Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan (PRSP), Northern Uganda Recovery Plan (NURP), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund and other social care and services interventions which continue to enable poor and poor and vulnerable people, across the different stages of their lives, to increase their household incomes, access better services and to stem effects of unforeseen shocks.

Beneficiaries. Elderly Karimojong women being pushed in wheel burrows to go and receive their money under the Senior Citizen Grant Programme in Napak District, courtesy photo by Daily monitor.

Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) cash transfer scheme (which covers both Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) and Vulnerable Family Support Grant (VFSG) is a key element of Uganda Government's Expanding Social Protection Programme (ESPP). In 2019 the Kampala Capital City Authority launched Uganda's first urban social protection program for adolescent girls, targeting girls who are both in and out of school.

4. HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE UGANDA'S SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS BEEN?

Within social protection, direct income support transfers and contributory social insurance schemes play complementary roles, although the current levels of expenditure on social protection are still very low. A closer examination of the design for these social protection programs reveals that they are insufficient in terms of vulnerability range and scope. The newly released World Bank's Uganda Economic Update report indicates that existing direct income support programs in Uganda have low coverage, with the overall reach of the two main programs (SAGE & NUSAF) at only 3% of the population – which is very low given the needs in the country.

While on at face value they seem to mean well, these programmes, are marred by governance challenges, corruption, political interference in implementation; improper targeting, inadequate financing and dysfunctional institutional frameworks.

It therefore remains a challenge as to whether and to what extent the social protection programmes obtain their desired effects downstream, given the multiple implementation deficits highlighted. This is more so in the context of increasing vulnerabilities emanating from widening income inequalities, a variety of disasters like landslides, floods, climate change, which has exacerbated food insecurity and malnutrition, especially among the uneducated and unemployed.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

If they are to have the intend effects, these are some of the possible remedial interventions.

1) Mainstream key Social Protection Programs into sector budget processes to avoid disbursement delays and repeated supplementary requests.
2) Initiate more innovative strategies such as leveraging digital solutions to harmonize and expand social protection programs run by different players including government as well as development partners
3) Scale up disaster risk financing pilots to mitigate drought and other shocks e.g. provision of agricultural insurance given the likelihood of a plethora of attendant risks since most of the target households are engaged in agriculture.
4) Expand Fiscal incentives to improve uptake of voluntary savings schemes by informal sector workers as an urgent measure of financial inclusion.
5) Government should recognize the invest in the human capital by improving health, education and skills outcomes, given the current cohort of vulnerables, especially in geographical areas highlighted by UBOS to be marginalized - Acholi, Bunyoro, Busoga, Elgon, Karamoja, Lango, Teso, Tooro and West Nile.
6) Continue empowering women and youth socially and economically by putting in place mechanisms for them to access, use and control resources both at personal and community level.

Center: UDN's Julius Kapwepwe giving remarks on the assessment on the status of the Auditor Generals reports in Uganda and below is UDN's Penninah Mbabazi making a submission on local content and the 12 principles of Beneficial Ownership during the workshop on Domestic Revenue Mobilization through plugging gaps in Beneficial Ownership & African Mining vision organized by TIU, at Grand Imperial hotel, Kampala, 20th Feb 2020.

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What the Judiciary's self accounting status means?

https://youtu.be/iYGqjPogolk

READERS' FEEDBACK CORNER

Christine Mubiru (Email), in respect to : UDN Weekly Newsletter, Edition 338

Thank you for the 338th edition of the newsletter. The observations are quite good. I would only add that during the budget process; more attention should be made to functions like M&E , a number of times neglected. So are other related ones, for proper and intended results.

Nabukenya Jesicca (Email)

Uganda's fiscal policy has not been so lucky yet as the good budget frameworks that aimed to remove key binding constraints to economic growth are under-executed, due to the way public investments are managed, experience shows that projects that are poorly designed often fail to produce strong and favorable results owing to poor costing, procurement delays, and capacity gaps, this is where Uganda needs to put emphasis.

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