

The Politics of What Works
in Reducing Chronic Poverty

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Abstract

There is a growing consensus concerning the forms of politics that are most likely to lead to successful forms of pro-poor policy, including the role of decentralisation and civil society, evidence-based policy and the opening of policy to the poor. This paper critically explores this consensus by examining the extent to which these forms of politics have underpinned actual examples of successful poverty reducing interventions. The focus here is on social protection policies, namely old age pension schemes in India, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa, vulnerable group assistance programmes in Bangladesh and Mozambique, and recent efforts to mainstream social protection within national development plans in Uganda and Zambia. This comparative case-study analysis reveals that the consensus bears little resemblance to the actual politics of what works in terms of implementing and sustaining policies for the poorest. A synthesis suggests the need to shift attention towards political rather than civil society, to issues of discourse and ideology rather than simply poverty data, and to a closer understanding of how political contracts for social protection might be supported and developed.

Keywords: social protection, politics, chronic poverty.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive Summary | ii |
| Abbreviations and Acronyms | ix |
| 1. Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Locating the research | 1 |
| 1.2 The politics of reaching the poorest..... | 2 |
| 1.3 Defining policy and the politics of policy-reform..... | 2 |
| 1.4 What constitutes success regarding pro-poor policy? | 4 |
| 1.5 The research project: approaches and constraints..... | 4 |
| Table 1: The case-studies | 7 |
| 2. Exploring the politics of what works: towards a framework of analysis | 9 |
| 2.1 Foregrounding the political ‘context’ | 9 |
| 2.2 Identifying the ‘drivers of change’ behind pro-poor policies and programmes..... | 10 |
| 2.3 Room for manoeuvre? Understanding ‘policy spaces’ | 11 |
| 2.4 The power of ideas: knowledge, discourse and thinking on poverty and development..... | 12 |
| 2.5 Design and Implementation | 13 |
| 2.6 Sustaining pro-poor policies over time: towards a ‘political contract’ between state and citizenry? | 14 |
| 3 The case studies: a descriptive overview | 15 |
| 3.1 Bangladesh..... | 15 |
| 3.2 Mozambique | 16 |
| 3.3 India..... | 17 |
| 3.4 South Africa | 17 |
| 3.5 Namibia | 18 |
| 3.6 Lesotho..... | 19 |
| 3.7 Uganda | 19 |
| 3.8 Zambia..... | 19 |
| 4. The case-studies: a comparative analysis..... | 20 |
| 4.1 Who and what were the key ‘drivers of change’ behind the formulation, promotion, implementation, and protection of these interventions? | 20 |
| 4.2 The role of ‘policy spaces’ | 28 |
| 4.3 Poverty knowledge and analysis: towards evidence-based policy-making? | 29 |
| 4.4 Ideologies of development and discourses on poverty..... | 31 |
| 4.5 Design and Implementation: critical issues..... | 34 |
| 4.6 Did the intervention emerge in relation to a ‘political contract’ between state and citizenry, or has it come to form part of such a contract? | 40 |
| Table 2: The politics of what works in reducing poverty: Key findings by case | 42 |
| 5. Key findings: an overview | 47 |
| References | 50 |

Executive Summary

Overview

The role that politics plays in shaping efforts towards poverty reduction has received growing recognition within international development over the past decade. This realisation extends beyond the concerns of the 'good governance' agenda to encompass the ways in which political processes, actors, institutions, events, ideologies and struggles inform moves towards development and poverty reduction. Nonetheless, significant concerns remain that the political will to reduce poverty in developing countries remains absent at the national level, while even the now more politically-attuned approach of international development agencies lacks a clear understanding of actual (as opposed to the ideal) politics of pro-poor change. By focusing on the politics of what works – on policies and programmes that have been successful in terms of reducing extreme forms of poverty – this study seeks to shed light on both of these dilemmas.

A focus on the poorest – the destitute and chronically poor – as opposed to 'the poor' in general is justified for two main reasons. First, it seems likely that the current focus of the international development community, particularly through the Millennium Development Goals, may lead to a policy-focus on the 'easily assisted poor' as opposed to those facing more structural forms of poverty. Second, there is growing evidence that politics plays a particularly important and perhaps distinctive role in relation to the poorest groups, whether in terms of the chronic lack of agency available to the poorest groups, the often disparaging elitist discourses concerning the 'undeserving poor', or allegations that programmes targeted at the poorest groups are most likely to be undercut and prove politically unsustainable.

There are also good reasons to focus on 'success' stories. Whereas politics is often blamed for the failure of development policy, it is also important to explain why governments do seek to promote poverty reduction, often against the apparent interests of dominant groups.

The following cases of policy success were identified for investigation here:

- Vulnerable Group Development Programme, Bangladesh
- Office for Assistance to Vulnerable People / National Institute of Social Action (GAPVU / INAS), Mozambique
- National Old Age Pension Scheme, India
- Old Age Pension, Lesotho
- Old Age Pension, Namibia
- Old Age Grant, South Africa
- Mainstreaming Social Protection in Uganda
- Mainstreaming Social Protection in Zambia.

Each of these cases has either demonstrably achieved a recognised degree of success in reducing levels of extreme and/or chronic poverty, or have recently been proposed as a means of doing so. The types of success range from protection from starvation to reducing structural forms of inequality, and include broader gains in terms of human and socio-political capital as well as reducing income poverty. Most cases have been running for ten years or more – a further sign of success. However, some very recent interventions have been included, primarily as a means of offering 'test-cases' for exploring the extent to which current donor thinking on promoting policies intended for the poorest is aligned with an accurate understanding of the politics of what works.

The methodology for this study involved researchers applying a common research framework to their respective case/s, an approach that produced an insightful and solid basis of evidence for comparative analysis. However, there are methodological limitations with this

type of 'rapid' policy research that should be noted, particularly in terms of the difficulties in trying to observe the underlying motivations for public policy in countries where political decision-making is often highly informalised.

Understanding the politics of what works

Efforts to understand the politics of development policy have only recently shifted away from broad concerns with economic and political reform agenda to specifically assessing the politics of pro-poor reform. As such, there is little firm evidence to date concerning the forms of politics that are more likely to produce pro-poor outcomes, or well-tested analytical frameworks to investigate these. This project critically reviewed the recent literature on the politics of pro-poor policy-making, and distilled the key findings into a series of distinct dimensions that would need to be explored in each case:

1. The political context into which the programme/policy is introduced
2. The key 'drivers of change' behind the intervention
3. The policy spaces within which the interventions were formulated and debated
4. The forms of poverty data and analysis used in relation to the interventions
5. The different ideologies and discourses of development mobilised behind interventions for the poorest
6. The politics of their design and implementation modalities
7. The extent to which they emerge from, or help construct, 'social contracts' between state and citizenry.

The following section organises the key findings from the comparative analysis under these headings.

Key findings: a comparative analysis

The first finding is that *context matters*. It is difficult to mobilise any general conclusions that can offer adequate explanations for the particular reasons for success in each case. This is perhaps not surprising given the variety of contexts, perhaps outside of the southern African cases. However, some general tendencies can be identified in relation to each dimension of politics explored here.

Political Context and Drivers of Change

Several of the interventions emerged during moments that have been described as moments of 'crisis' rather than 'politics as usual'. However, it is more useful to think in terms of political junctures or moments that either persuade or enable regimes to re-negotiate the political settlement or contract between state and citizenry. Elections and post-colonial settlements are important here.

The key structural features that can be associated with regime support for pro-poorest policies relate to particular trends within capitalist development, state formation, urbanisation and citizenship formation. In most cases, colonial rule played a significant role across each of these dimensions. In particular, it is notable that social protection policies have often emerged at moments wherein either the demands of capital alter, or when the social impacts of liberalised capitalist economies become too great to be borne in political terms. Urbanisation is one of the processes that accompany such developments in the political economy of developing countries, and several regimes have sought to counter the perceived

ill-effects of urbanisation through pro-poor policies. Urban-rural dynamics are at the centre of state formation strategies, in ways that are directly entwined with an apparent urban bias in social policy. However, discriminatory social policies introduced by colonial regimes for the benefit of white citizens are significant in having cut policy channels that could later be expanded by post-colonial regimes.

Institutional norms of political patronage that many observers note in developing countries have both undermined certain successful initiatives and apparently underpinned them in productive synergy, as in Bangladesh where the VGD has benefited from the dual imperatives of electoral accountability and the moral obligations of local political elites to distribute goods to the poorest groups. High levels of executive power and discretion have been a positive driver in some cases, although the longer-term implications of policies introduced with such a narrow constituency remain to be seen.

Electoral competition is favourably correlated here with the introduction of pro-poorest policies, with regimes sometimes required to seek popular support from marginal groups. However, parties and political party systems are also central. Parties that introduce pro-poor policies tend to be either led by populist leaders and/or have strong social movement characteristics, and have a broader programmatic agenda. They have often also attained a degree of dominance *vis-à-vis* other political parties in non-fragmented party systems.

As such, the key agents involved in promoting policies and programmes for the poorest can be located within political society, such as legislative assemblies, political leaders, parties and elites. Important executive actors include ministries of finance and social sector ministries, with the inputs of both usually required to give interventions both relevance and political sustainability. Civil society organisations have played a more limited role in the establishment and implementation of pro-poor policies than suggested in current development policy rhetoric, although unions have sometimes been prominent. The social categories targeted by these policies – such as the elderly or destitute women – have rarely provided the basis for political mobilisation. This suggests that representative forms of democracy retain certain advantages in exerting a degree of disciplinary power over power-holders when compared to the various forms of participatory democracy that have recently been promoted by donors. However, civil society ‘participation’ may prove important in terms of sustaining policies over time and helping to ensure accountability in delivery, and there is some evidence that the presence of policies for these groups may create new ‘policy constituencies’ that will seek to protect the policy as a ‘right’.

Private sector interests can converge strongly with the needs of the poorest. The donor community has played a key role in the more highly indebted countries, although there is little evidence that they systematically focus on the poorest groups. It is notable that the level of resistance to the policies discussed here has been neither widespread nor vociferous; this suggests that the politics of the possible is more expansive than the often pessimistic readings of politics in the South tend to claim.

Policy spaces: context or a causal factor?

Policy spaces do not emerge as defining features concerning the production and implementation of pro-poor policies, with as many of our interventions emerged from closed policy spaces as from ones into which pro-poor advocates were either invited or have claimed. This perhaps reflects a general tension between civil society and government in Southern countries, and a tendency to see opening policy processes to popular participation as ceding power in “zero-sum” politics. As noted above, elections rather than direct participation in policy design have proved to be the vehicle where the concerns of the poor are introduced to the policy process, at least in the cases studied here. However, there is

some evidence that this may be changing, and that it is related to the longevity of democracy in different political contexts.¹

Poverty analysis: the importance of causality and differentiation

The presence, quality and usage of different types of poverty analysis and data are of growing importance in relation to the politics of what works. It is particularly important that poverty is conceptualised in a disaggregated way in policy circles, and that it is understood by political elites as something that is (at least to some extent) caused by external factors over which the poor have little control. At present, there is a greater appreciation of the severity of poverty than its depth, while many elites tend to see some of the poorest groups as ‘undeserving’ of assistance. Evidence of success is critical to long-term political sustainability, and requires close attention to high quality monitoring and evaluation approaches.

Ideologies of development: the power of discourse and changes over time

Political discourses closely shape the possibility and character of policies for the poorest groups. This is most apparent in terms of shifting ideologies of development, elite conceptions of the ‘deserving’ poor and their fear of creating dependency amongst the poor, and discourses around the proper role of the state in responding to the poorest groups. A wide range of development discourses can offer the ideological underpinning required for policies directed towards the poorest groups, from radical discourses of a leftist or anti-colonial character through to a focus on ‘liberalisation with a human face’. Implementing regimes often profess their commitment to a wider and entwined project of development and nation-building, and claims of promoting social justice cut across some cases.

Such discourses are prone to change over time, and the apparent shift from a ‘welfarist’ to ‘developmentalist’ approach in several cases arguably distracts from a focus on the very poorest, while the current agency-centred approach to development overlooks the often chronic lack of agency amongst the poorest groups. The fear amongst political elites that pro-poorest interventions will create dependency runs deeply across both space and time, and closely informs the levels at which subsidies are set in our cases, and even their type. This shows how anti-poverty programmes may work politically without necessarily working for the poorest. Finally, the apparently perennial tendency of elites to view certain groups as deserving and others as undeserving remains central to the politics of reaching the poorest groups.

Design and implementation: does more for the poor mean less for the poor?

Securing the right ‘institutional fit’ for pro-poorest policies and programmes can help ensure their success. However, while social sector agencies can provide both advocacy and a natural home for such policies, they tend to lack the institutional weight to promote or sustain significant policy initiatives. Securing political support from more powerful actors is essential, particularly ministries of finance, and long-term institutional partnerships or ‘hybrid’ institutional arrangements for housing pro-poor policies might be the most promising way forward here (e.g. relocating a social sector department within a finance ministry).

The links between successful pro-poor policies and decentralisation prove to be highly contextual. While positive synergies have developed in some contexts, and have been central to success, the same is true of centralised approaches elsewhere. Factors associated

¹ It is also worth remembering that this research was not able to track the influence of those informal spaces within which decisions are often made in developing countries.

with administrative capacity, political culture, central-local relations and particular histories of state formation emerge as central.

Many 'new' pro-poorest policies build directly on existing policy initiatives, perhaps indicating a degree of path dependency in policy choices. These initiatives can offer significant opportunities in providing the building blocks for 'new' initiatives, and offer a stronger possibility of ensuring ownership than certain stand-alone interventions (e.g. social funds).

Our cases offer little support for the theory that the more closely targeted the programme, the less the poor will get. Several programmes have been sustained for over one or two decades, and have seen their scope and funding rise over that time, despite economic decline. However, the targeting here is often broad enough to include large numbers of vulnerable as well as 'less politically important' destitute people. The specific character of the beneficiary group may also be important, with the elderly being widely recognised as 'deserving' of their benefit. The socio-political impacts of these interventions range from strengthening citizenship and social solidarity to strengthening patronage politics.

In terms of efforts to mainstream pro-poor policy agendas, both the 'cross-cutting' and 'stand-alone' approaches deployed in Uganda and Zambia respectively, have their strengths and weaknesses. Whereas the cross-cutting approach insists that the attention of more powerful policy actors is sought by a smaller advocacy group, the stand-alone approach may allow a new sector to display technical competence and make a reasonable budgetary case, but could also breed a degree of insularity that prevents moves towards the wider engagement that will ultimately be required for social protection policies to gain a broader political constituency.

Towards a social contract for the poorest people

Arguably the strongest political underpinning for pro-poorest policies involves the formation of a 'contract' between the state and citizenry, whereby a tacit agreement is made concerning state responsibility for certain groups, either permanently or in certain circumstances. Such contracts exist in some of our cases, such as pensions in South Africa and Namibia, while the scheme in India is moving towards this position. The VGD in Bangladesh is underpinned by a two-fold contract between recipients and local elites on the one hand, and between local and national elites on the other. Although we lack clear evidence that there would be significant popular mobilisation against efforts to roll-back these policies, there are some signs that recipients would act as empowered citizens in this regard. The case of state-citizen contracts around development policy in Mozambique is confused by the high-level of donor-dependency, and it is still too early to judge for Lesotho, Zambia and Uganda.

Challenging the consensus: cross-cutting issues and ways forward

In terms of drivers of change, structural factors are central, and this suggests that policy analysts need to focus on the *longue durée* in order to understand what is feasible for different regimes at particular points in time. Although there are some moves towards a greater recognition of this (e.g. DFID's Drivers of Change approach), this more in-depth understanding of development as an historical process is often absent in current development thinking.

Political competition through elections can be an important driver for pro-poor change, but should not be viewed as an independent variable *vis-à-vis* the role of political institutions. The role of well-institutionalised and programmatic political parties, often with social movement characteristics, has proved significant here. Importantly, and aside from unions, civil society organisations have historically played a much more limited role in promoting pro-poorest policies than key actors within political society. This again suggests the need to break with

the current civil society paradigm and focus more clearly on the role of key political actors, and to re-emphasise representative forms of democracy. At particular moments, the interests of private sector actors are likely to converge closely with the interests of poor groups, and such impulses could usefully be capitalised on.

The design of pro-poor policies carries strong political implications. Targeted interventions are not as politically problematic as they are often thought to be, particularly if they are targeted broadly enough to include some of the vulnerable 'middle-poor' as opposed to just the poorest. Second, there are strong incentives to build 'new' policies on existing ones, for reasons of ownership, continuity and also to further develop any contractual relationship/s that may have been established around the existing channel. Finally, policies and programmes can, and perhaps should, be designed in a way that maintains political as well as technical optimality. This might involve working with – rather than in direct opposition to – local patronage structures, especially where there is evidence that the moral reciprocity and forms of accountability that can reside in such relationships supersede the exploitative characteristics of the same relationships.

The institutional location and inter-institutional arrangements for delivering pro-poorest policies are critical. Although the issue of 'fit' is central, it might be less important than ensuring that such programmes offer serious roles and responsibilities to players from different policy tendencies, with particular care taken to include those with the greatest political capacity and power, most notably ministries of finance. The extent of decentralisation associated with policy design is a matter that needs to be determined in relation to specific contexts; this research supports wider findings that decentralisation can only be linked positively with poverty reduction in a handful of cases, and that the current enthusiasm for decentralisation may be grounded more in ideology than empirical evidence.

Recent debates concerning policy spaces and poverty data might be less important than focusing more clearly on policy actors and discourses. However, there is a clear need to promote the construction of panel datasets, vulnerability analyses and more structural understandings of how poverty is caused, in order to increase the attention to chronic poverty amongst policy and political elites.

Political discourses of development are highly instructive, as is their trajectory over time. Focusing on discourse offers a window onto the political project of the regime and of the attitudes of the political class more broadly, which can be very useful in terms of framing policy agendas in productive alignment with progressive elements of mainstream political discourse. In particular, developmentalist discourses around nation-building projects still exist in many poor countries, and could be engaged with more constructively by international actors. Importantly, a focus on elites and political discourse can help remind us that 'what works politically', in terms of development policy agendas, is not the same as what might work for the poorest.

There is an increasingly important global dimension to the politics of reaching the poorest, with global actors and thinking exerting a significant influence over national-level policies in many poor countries. However, the current focus on poverty reduction not only pays little attention to the poorest strata, but also tends to offer prescriptions that have a limited resonance with the political realities of successful interventions as discussed here (e.g. the World Bank's 'social risk management' approach to social protection).

Finally, it is clear that events matter. The 'politics of crisis' rather than 'politics as usual' can provide more fertile ground for pro-poor policies to emerge, suggesting that the potential and perhaps sudden opening of windows of opportunity need to be constantly monitored. Moreover, political events matter a great deal, particularly when they lead to changes in the terms of political settlements. It is at these moments that contracts between states and citizens are re-negotiated and the political space to act is expanded. Elections – which have been strongly associated with the announcement and implantation of pro-poor policies here – can offer a useful moment around which to re-negotiate this contract. It is clear that poverty

policy is rarely about poverty *per se*, but responds to an often variety of historical, institutional, political economy and political incentives and imperatives. It is towards a fuller understanding of these issues that this report has worked.

In terms of current thinking on these issues within international development, what has emerged here is a strong sense that, although development agencies (and academics) have become more attuned to the politics of poverty reduction in poor countries and are moving further in this direction, they continue to look in the wrong places at least some of the time. This is particularly the case regarding the importance of political society, the links between poverty analysis and political discourse, the role of the developmental state and the importance of political contracts. However, these findings also needed to be tested more fully through in-depth case-study research, which will seek to uncover more of the informal as well as formal aspects of policy-making in poor countries and study a range of policies beyond social protection. The analytical approaches used to understand the politics of poverty reduction, such as the one employed here will also need to be refined

Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank Institute |
| ANC | African National Congress (South Africa) |
| BRAC | Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee |
| CPRC | Chronic Poverty Research Centre |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DFID | Department for International Development (UK) |
| DRDA | District Rural Development Agency (India) |
| Frelimo | Front for the Liberation of Mozambique |
| GAPVU | Office for the Assistance of Vulnerable People (Mozambique) |
| GEAR | Growth, Employment and Redistribution (South Africa) |
| GoZ | Government of Zambia |
| IFI | International Financial Institution |
| IGVGD | Income-Generating Vulnerable Group Development Programme (Bangladesh) |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| INAS | National Institute for Social Action (Mozambique) |
| MCDSS | Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (Zambia) |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goal |
| MGLSD | Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (Uganda) |
| MISA | Minimum Income for School Attendance (Brazil, Mozambique) |
| MoF | Ministry of Finance |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| MTEF | Medium-Term Expenditure Framework |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NOAPS | National Old Age Pension Scheme (India) |
| NRM | National Resistance Movement (Uganda) |
| NSAP | National Social Assistance Programme (India) |
| ODI | Overseas Development Institute (UK) |
| PEAP | Poverty Eradication Action Plan (Uganda) |
| PPA | Participatory Poverty Assessment |
| PR | Proportional Representation |
| PRSP | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper |
| PWAS | Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (Zambia) |
| Renamo | National Resistance Movement (Mozambique) |
| SA | South Africa |
| SEAS | Secretariat for Social Action (Mozambique) |

| | |
|-------|---|
| SP | Social protection |
| SRM | Social Risk Management |
| SWAp | Sector-Wide Approach |
| SWAPO | South West African People's Organisation (Namibia) |
| SWG | Sector Working Group |
| Tk | Taka (Bangladesh currency) |
| VGD | Vulnerable Group Development Programme (Bangladesh) <i>also IGVGD</i> |
| VGf | Vulnerable Group Feeding Programme (Bangladesh) |
| WFP | World Food Programme |

1. Introduction

“...the PRSP experiment will work through the political systems and policy processes of the countries concerned, or it will not work at all” (Booth 2003: 137).

1.1 Locating the research

The past decade has seen a growing recognition within international development of the role that politics plays in shaping the potential for and success of poverty reduction interventions. This realisation is related to, but extends beyond, the concerns of the political conditionality agenda, so often limited to technical issues of ‘good governance’, to encompass broader concerns with how political processes, actors, institutions, events, ideologies and struggles inform moves towards development and poverty reduction. This has not only opened up a broad agenda for development research but also presented some fresh challenges to donors concerning how they might use a closer understanding of the politics that shapes development policy in recipient countries – a politics often shaped to some degree by their presence.

Indeed, a realisation that the international development agenda needed to be ‘nationalised’ if it was to achieve its ostensible aims of poverty reduction has been a key driver behind recent shifts in international development. The impetus was twofold: a recognition that the one-size-fits-all approach to reform that characterised both economic and political conditionality during the 1980s and much of the 1990s lacked a sense of national context, and also a strong sense that the reform process also needed to promote particular forms of politics that would be more likely to sustain the desired reforms, now couched in terms of ‘poverty reduction’. This involved not only undermining the norms of patronage and corruption that apparently stood in the way of ‘good governance’, but also supporting more inclusive policy processes, securing a pro-poor focus within budgetary processes, and working towards a strong sense of ‘ownership’ of the poverty agenda. The key harbinger of this shift has been the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) process, rolled out by the international financial institutions since 1999.

This shift towards a greater appreciation of the role of politics in shaping the success of pro-poor policy-making sets the context for this research in at least two important senses. On the one hand, most recent reviews of the PRSP experiment come to the somewhat pessimistic conclusion that the political situation on the ground has not become significantly more favourable to pro-poor policy reform (e.g. Booth 2005, World Vision 2005). Rather, there has been a severe slippage of political and institutional reforms required to give life to PRSPs because “those who exercise real power in a country are not interested in promoting them” (Booth 2005: 3). Political buy-in remains critical and apparently absent. On the other hand, however, the same reviews note that the theory of political change that underpins PRSPs – founded on a belief in the power of consultation and participatory processes in reshaping governance into accountable and responsive forms – fails to account for the political realities in most poor countries, which present severe obstacles to the idea that participatory processes can increase the effectiveness and accountability of public policy and governance. This dual problematic calls not only for deeper understanding of the specific forms of politics that underpin pro-poor policies in developing countries, but also a need to interrogate the solutions being proposed by international agencies under their ostensibly more politically attuned approach.

This project seeks to engage this dual problematic through looking specifically at the particular forms of politics playing a role in shaping interventions that have successfully reduced extreme forms of severe and persistent poverty. This requires that we spend some time first clearing some of the conceptual ground concerning the key categories to be used here, and particularly what might be said to constitute extreme forms of poverty, pro-poorest policy and policy success, and also the way in which ‘politics’ itself will be approached.

1.2 The politics of reaching the poorest

The most extreme forms of poverty can be conceptualised in terms of the duration and depth of poverty. Here, the chronically poor have been defined as those who experience "significant capability deprivations for a period of five years or more" (Hulme and Shepherd, 2003: 405), a group that is conservatively estimated at between 300 to 420 million worldwide (CPRC, 2004). The concept of destitution, meanwhile, is often applied to those suffering the deepest forms of poverty. For Devereux (2004a), it involves an inability to meet subsistence needs, assetlessness, and dependence on transfers, while Harriss-White (2005) reveals the extent to which political and political economy factors underpin this state. Perhaps most evocatively, Hossain (2005) has defined the poorest people simply as those whom it is permissible to ignore.

There are a growing number of reasons for development research to focus more clearly on extreme forms of poverty, not least as a means of ensuring that the current focus on the Millennium Development Goals does not simply encourage an overemphasis on the easily assisted poor. More specifically, there is growing evidence that politics plays a particular role in both the reduction and the reproduction of destitution and extreme forms of poverty. As noted by Green and Hulme (2005), the persistence of poverty over time strongly suggests that it has become embedded in existing institutional norms, and tolerated by political elites. Others go further, showing how processes of state formation, political party mobilisation and law-making, actively impoverish certain groups in society (e.g. Good 1999, Harriss-White 2005). Disparaging discourses around the 'undeserving' or 'unproductive' poor often relegate the poorest groups to the status of basement-class citizens and exclude them from anti-poverty interventions (Hossain and Moore 2001, Hossain 2005, Hickey 2005). And, even where policies directed to the poorest groups make it on to the policy agenda in poor countries, they are crippled by numerous 'fracture points' which prevent policies from achieving their aims (Bird et al 2004). The likelihood of the poorest groups generating the agency required to challenge these structural and institutional constraints – as called for within the actor-oriented approach of the 'empowerment' agenda within international development (e.g. World Bank 2000) – is severely limited when one considers that the poorest may be those with the least agency to spare (Cleaver 2005), having traded this away for a semblance of livelihood security in what Wood (2003) has termed the Faustian bargain that faces the poorest groups. It seems, then, that there is a particular politics to staying poor.

1.3 Defining policy and the politics of policy-reform

In terms of the politics of pro-poor policy-making, we are influenced here by the now widely accepted understanding that 'policy' itself cannot be seen as a linear, rational and technocratic process – from conceptualisation through formulation to implementation. Policy is now commonly viewed as a *process*, one that is often iterative rather than linear, and frequently riven with power struggles. Although public policies may emerge as proposed solutions to identified social problems, they form part of a regime's wider political project and are struggled over by often diverse sets of actors. It is also important to note that 'the politics of what works' might differ significantly depending on the stage of the policy process that is being explored. For example, Nelson (2000) has broadly delineated the policy process into the following key stages: (i) getting on the agenda; (ii) reaching agreement within the executive branch of government; (iii) winning legislative approval and public acceptance; and (iv) launching and sustaining implementation. As Nelson notes (2000: 7), "political battles are not settled once reforms are formally approved. Rather they will be recast and re-fought, at local and national levels, certainly in the early stages of implementation and often at later stages as well". Protecting and sustaining pro-poor interventions may prove to be a particularly tricky business, particularly given some evidence that policies targeted directly at

the poorest sections of the population are particularly prone to being undermined over time, especially when funds become tight. This has led to the now famous maxim that 'more for the poor might mean less for the poor' (Gelbach and Pritchett 1997), an issue taken up in more depth below.

Research into the politics of development policy reform has tended to follow the ordering of different phases of economic and political conditionality, from structural adjustment through to the current focus on poverty reduction. A particular focus has fallen on the politics of 'good governance' reforms, including decentralisation (e.g. Manor 1999, Tendler 1997) and public sector reform (e.g. Batley 2004, McCourt 2003), while others have examined generic forms of 'good performance' amongst public sector agencies in the South (e.g. Grindle and Thomas 1980, Grindle 1997, Tendler 1997). A further wave of studies examined the linkages between these areas of policy reform and poverty reduction, including the links between decentralisation and poverty reduction (e.g. Crook and Sverrisson 2001) and elections and social sector spending (e.g. Block 2002, Stasavage 2003). A focus on pro-poor policy-making has emerged more gradually, and can be identified in work on the politics of social sector reform more explicitly, (e.g. Grindle 2002, Nelson 2000), including specific pro-poor policy measures such as safety nets and social protection (e.g. Graham 1995, Pritchett 2005, Gelbach and Pritchett 1997). The biggest growth area – following the familiar political economy of development research which centres on IFI-conceived reforms – has been work aimed at exploring the politics of PRSP reform (e.g. Piron and Evans 2004, Booth 2005, Craig and Porter 2003). The current poverty agenda, as reflected, and indeed driven, most clearly through the PRSP experiment, seeks to encompass three main areas of policy reform: macro-economic policy, good governance reforms and social sector policy reform.

This research project tends to diverge from the above literature in two main ways. First, it engages mostly with the politics of pro-poor policies that were driven primarily by national governments rather than by international donors, and draws its conceptual framework primarily from other studies that have sought to do this (e.g. de Waal 2000, Nelson 2000, Herring 2003, Hickey 2008, Houtzager and Pattenden 2003, Nelson 2003). Second, it focuses on a far more limited range of policies than those encompassed within PRSPs, which include each area of policy conditionality outlined above, namely macroeconomic reform, good governance and poverty reduction. It is striking that the growing research focus on the politics of PRSPs – while producing important findings – rarely seeks to differentiate between the forms of politics that might shape policy change in one of these realms as opposed to another or, perhaps critically, how these might be related. This is important. As discovered by Dijkstra (2002), economic conditionality has generally been promoted more successfully than political conditionality, not least because it involves fewer transactions and there are fewer competing models in terms of policy prescriptions (Nelson 2000, Pritchett and Woolcock 2004). Whereas many macroeconomic problems can be worked out by small numbers of smart people, policy reforms and new policies in the social sector are intrinsically different (Pritchett and Woolcock 2004).² Here, there are multiple models of pro-poor service delivery, large numbers of potential veto actors, large numbers of service providers (some of which may oppose the reform) and also potential competition between middle-income and low-income groups over their share of public expenditure. Furthermore, those promoting greater levels of expenditure and government activity in the social sectors often have to struggle against powerful political interests that seek to place the economic agenda first (Kanbur 2001). Although the PRSP process, and related reforms, such as the medium-term expenditure frameworks, have brought these policy realms closer together, it is not clear that this has either resolved the tensions between different policy tendencies so much as re-enforced the pre-existing hierarchy,³ or created a coherent realm of 'pro-poor policy reform'

² Morrissey and Verschoor (2005) show that these differences helped to shape different levels of ownership around economic reforms and pro-poor policies respectively, in Uganda.

³ According to Porter and Craig (2005), this means that growth remains the key policy focus, although now located within a broader agenda of 'inclusive liberalism'.

that research such as this can focus on. Our focus here, is specifically on policies that share the characteristics of the social sector policies outlined above.

1.4 What constitutes success regarding pro-poor policy?

Development policies have recently been defined as ‘successful’ if they “have demonstrably...improved the human capabilities of a significant population of otherwise disadvantaged people”, and lasted for at least ten years (McCourt and Bebbington 2005: 4). This definition covers the majority of cases examined here, with three caveats (see Table 1 for a list of case-studies). First, we focus on extreme forms of disadvantage, rather than the more general approach to poverty reduction. Second, we include some policies that are only at the first stages of the policy process, most notably the cases of Uganda and Zambia, where there have been recent efforts to mainstream social protection within the overall PRSP agenda. Although it could be argued that simply mainstreaming a policy agenda that targets the most vulnerable groups counts as a success, the reason for their inclusion here is that they offer a useful window onto the dual dilemma presented above concerning the contemporary politics of pro-poor policy-making. Both cases have involved donor efforts to promote policies for the most vulnerable groups in a more politically attuned way, and can thus be usefully juxtaposed with cases that were driven largely by national political factors. As such, they act as something of a test-case regarding the broader range of case-studies and analysis, as well as providing some useful comparative insights when set against each other. Our final caveat concerns the potential contradiction between the longevity of policy and its developmental impact, which might be expressed in terms of ‘what works politically’, and thus secures longevity, may not be the same as ‘what works in terms of poverty reduction’. For example, ostensibly pro-poor policies such as conditional cash transfers or public work programmes may have an intuitive appeal to elites, as they fulfil the desire of middle-classes and elite groups to create better citizens of the poor. However, as recent research has shown, such programmes often impose restrictions that prevent their playing a fuller role in improving the well-being of the poorest (Britto 2005, McCord 2005).

While much can be learned from policy failure,⁴ the route of analysing ‘what works’ is one less trodden and worthy of further work. As noted by Moore (2003), ‘politics’ has been mobilised most frequently in development policy studies as a reason for failure. This tendency remains predominant, and is often founded on sound empirical evidence. However, such pessimistic readings are often rooted in the rational-actor approach that dominates mainstream political science, and which tends to re-enforce the notion that politics is essentially a game played by powerful actors pursuing strategic self-interest, with few incentives to promote policies that might benefit the poor. Such an approach not only leads to pessimism, but fails to account for the multitude of cases where governments have sought to promote poverty reduction. The fact that this has happened, often against the apparent interests of dominant groups, also requires a political explanation.

1.5 The research project: approaches and constraints

This research adopts the comparative case-study method, whereby a common analytical framework is applied to a range of different cases. The framework was designed through an analysis of the most recent conceptual approaches and findings within politics and development research, and is elaborated on in Section 2 and presented in full in Appendix One. The case-study researchers were invited to comment critically on the framework, and adapt it to suit the needs of their particular case.⁵ This comparative case-study approach is a

⁴ For example, Carole Graham’s (1995) influential study of the Politics of Safety Nets draws on three cases of success and three of failure

⁵ An exception here is the Zambia case-study, which was investigated in a parallel process undertaken by the lead author, and which used a closely related analytical framework (Barrientos et al 2005).

staple within policy research, offering as it does the possibility of generating general policy messages while being firmly grounded in particular contexts (Bulmer 1986). Researchers were sought on the basis of their academic credentials and their access to key participants in particular policy processes. Given the time and finances available, each undertook a 'quick-and-dirty' study of their particular policy case, using a variety of data including policy and evaluation documents; secondary and grey literature; and key informant interviews with stakeholders in/close observers of the policy process.

The primary criteria for selecting programmes and policies for this research concerned their demonstrable success in terms of reducing chronic poverty, or that they are policies recently implemented with this explicit aim. Following McCourt and Bebbington (2005), we insisted that policies should be at least ten years old, and have both grey and published material available on them. In order to ensure that the focus was on the national politics of poverty reduction, the focus was predominantly on national, state-led programmes, rather than one-off projects or donor/NGO led efforts.

The choice of cases was further influenced by the need for an adequate degree of representation in terms of type of political system (e.g. different party systems, stable and fragile states); geographical region (although given the particularly high levels of chronic poverty in Africa, most of the cases were drawn from this context); and policy type and sector. In order to add some comparative depth in key policy areas, there was a deliberate decision to study the same types of policies or programmes in different contexts (e.g. pensions in India and sub-Saharan Africa; food security in Mozambique and Bangladesh), and also a broad grouping of programmes under what might be termed 'social protection'.

Some cases (Uganda and Zambia) are clearly still progressing through Nelson's four stages of policy adoption, while the others have been involved in her stage four, the politics of sustaining implementation, for varying degrees of time. There is also a broad chronological progression through the cases, starting with longstanding national programmes devised and implemented by states as a result of particular needs (e.g. pensions in India, feeding programmes in Bangladesh); through programmes established in part at least to counter the effects of economic liberalisation (e.g. GAPVU); onwards to the current generation of policies targeted at the poorest groups (e.g. social protection in Uganda and Zambia). This trajectory offers a useful set of longitudinal insights into the changing character of development policy, particularly concerning the changing roles played by donors and states over time.

There are clearly a range of methodological constraints surrounding such a research exercise. For example, the choice of cases excludes many sectors and approaches that are doubtless of great significance to the reduction of extreme forms of poverty (such as pro-poor growth, education and specialised health programmes). A worrying factor for this type of comparative political analysis is the frequent finding that 'politics' is highly contextualised, rendering efforts to abstract general patterns from different cases and contexts vulnerable to the charge that they obscure the importance of history and context. This type of rapid policy research has also exacerbated the inherent difficulties in trying to actually observe the underlying motivations for public policy. The possibilities here are that researchers can identify proxy indicators (e.g. matching the geographic distribution of policies as against poverty levels and areas of political discontent), or the attempt to get behind the scenes, either directly as participant observers or via key informants who were there in time and space. While the former was achieved to an extent, it proved very difficult to identify researchers who had direct insights into the cases identified here (with the exceptions to some extent of Bangladesh and the more recent cases of Lesotho, Zambia and Uganda). This is a particular problem given that many formal decision-making processes in poor countries are 'theatre', with most political decisions taken informally. Getting beyond 'the politics of the air-conditioner' to this 'politics of the veranda' has thus proved as difficult for this research as for development policy research more generally.

Overall, then, we know remarkably little about the politics of pro-poor, let alone pro-poorest policy. Given that 'pro-poor policy' has not historically constituted a traditional object of research into public policy, the comment by Nelson on social sector reform in general, such that, "we are only beginning to assemble good case and comparative studies that analyse what circumstances and tactics contributed to success or failure"(2000: 3), applies acutely here. This research hopes to contribute just one of the many steps needed to move towards a fuller understanding.

Table 1: The case-studies

| Programme /Country | Details | Target/Reach | Evidence of success | Current stage in policy process |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| VGD, Bangladesh | Food transfer and economic development programme; government. | Very poor rural women. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluations indicate a majority of beneficiaries gain ▪ Increased social status ▪ Increased asset holding ▪ Income diversification ▪ Membership of micro-finance programmes | ▪ 4), sustaining implementation (advanced) |
| GAPVU / INAS, Mozambique | Cash-for-food subsidy and related schemes delivered by central government. | Destitute households – initially urban areas only. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluations indicate increased social status and reduced livelihood vulnerability among beneficiaries ▪ Expansion as INAS to rural areas | ▪ 4) sustaining implementation (advanced) |
| National Old Age Pension, India | National Old Age Pension Scheme introduced 1995 under National Social Assistance Programme. Central government provides basic input, states can augment this. | Elderly destitute (overlapping central and state eligibility criteria apply). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheme survives 11 years on with increased coverage (c80%) ▪ Evaluations indicate relatively effective targeting and little “leakage” or elite capture ▪ Some states increasing the pension amount (although central provision frozen at initial level) | ▪ 4) sustaining implementation (medium term) |
| Old Age Pension, Lesotho | Old Age Pension - introduced 2004. | All pensioners (70+ years old) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 90% coverage of target group ▪ Pensioners report improved financial status (creditworthiness etc) | ▪ 4) launching and sustaining implementation (recent) |
| Old Age Pension, Namibia | Old Age Pension - introduced 1949 as extension of SA pension, and expanded post-independence. | All pensioners (60+ years) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant impact on poor household incomes ▪ Injects cash into poor areas and markets ▪ Third most important source of livelihood for Namibian households | ▪ 4) sustaining implementation (advanced) |
| Old Age Grant, South Africa | Old Age Grant – originated under white rule pre-apartheid (1920s), | Elderly poor (means-tested, 60+ years). Initially racially unequal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Largest social security transfer from SA government | ▪ 4) sustaining implementation (advanced) |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|---|
| | substantially expanded post-1994 by ANC. | transfers – equalised 1994. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ c80% coverage of 60+ black Africans ▪ Studies find a significant impact on poverty of elderly, and children when in same household ▪ Beneficiaries believed to gain improved financial & social status ▪ <i>Generally</i> implemented free from corruption and fraud | |
| Social Protection, Uganda | Taskforce aimed at mainstreaming social protection within the Poverty Eradication Action Plan | Poorest and most vulnerable groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social protection included in the latest PEAP ▪ Policy discussions on a potential minimum wage are underway. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2) securing executive agreement |
| Social Protection, Zambia | Sector Working Group to mainstream social protection in the National Development Plan | Poorest and most vulnerable groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social protection strategy developed as part of NDP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2) securing executive agreement |

2. Exploring the politics of what works: towards a framework of analysis

The analytical framework developed specifically for this research project draws on the most recent debates concerning the politics of poverty reduction. From this were derived a set of seven core research questions/areas, each with a series of sub-questions to direct the case-study research projects. Each dimension relates in important ways to the others, while raising distinctive concerns regarding different aspects of both politics and the policy process in developing countries. This section outlines the state of current thinking along each dimension.

2.1 Foregrounding the political 'context'

There is a tendency to view the political context as mere background to development policy processes, rather than framing politics as potentially central to these processes. Recent research has identified at least three dimensions of the political 'context' as significant in the formation of pro-poor policies, namely the character of political competition within the polity; the particular moment of the electoral cycle (where relevant); and also the level of political stability as opposed to turbulence – or what has come to be referred to as 'politics as usual' or 'politics as crisis'.

Most observers have welcomed the apparent consolidation of the third wave of democracy as a positive move in developmental terms. Some are persuaded that politics in developing countries has entered a more progressive phase, with increased respect for human rights, democracy and good governance apparent not merely as lip-service to international policy agendas, but as having heralded a new 'politics of inclusion' which the poor are better placed than ever to take advantage of, provided their political capabilities can be developed (Houtzager and Moore 2003, Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2002). In terms of the specific politics around social service reforms, some observers note that economic and political liberalisation has increased the power of civil society organisations involved in policy advocacy (Nelson 2000), while others suggest that increased political competition, and specifically multi-party elections, can be directly linked to increased expenditure in the social sector in Africa (e.g. Block 2002, Stasavage 2003).

However, these claims have not managed to fully displace an older debate concerning the pro-poor credentials of democratic *vis-à-vis* authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes. Although this debate is particularly prone to ideological positioning as opposed to grounded analysis, there are at least some grounds for being sceptical about the pro-poor character of what might be termed 'newly democratised' states. For example, research produced for the World Bank suggested that semi-authoritarian countries were as, or more, likely to implement safety-nets than regimes with multi-party competition (Niles 1999), while the perceived success of countries such as Uganda, Cambodia and Vietnam in implementing and 'showing ownership of' PRSPs might indicate that restrictions on multi-party competition may allow regimes more room for manoeuvre. This point is emphasised in the 'developmental states' literature, which suggests that strong political leadership and the autonomy of the regime from private and civic pressures alike are beneficial to the implementation of successful development strategies (Leftwich 1995, Lockwood 2006). What some of this research suggests is that the democracy vs. authoritarianism debate – already dated by political developments – needs to be re-thought in terms of 'political institutions' rather than regime types. Here, even if elections might provide incentives for leaders to act (even where they are heavily controlled by the regime), their capacity is critically enabled and/or constrained by the character of the party system and the room for manoeuvre that this allows regimes in power (Niles 1999).⁶ Finally, and given that chronic poverty and destitution remain visible

⁶ Niles distinguishes four types of party system, and argues that democracies with stable party systems and elected authoritarian systems are most likely to be associated with social protection

phenomena in long-standing democracies, there is little evidence to suggest that democratisation is the long-term panacea for the poorest.⁷

The final distinction concerns the extent to which pro-poor interventions take place within a context of 'politics as crisis' or 'politics as usual'. Here, a 'crisis' refers to moments where outside actions and events bring imperatives requiring immediate reaction, whereas during 'politics as usual' moments, policy-making focuses on problems that are 'chosen' in relation to preferences and values. The implications for pro-poor policy reform here are mixed. Whereas broader social sector reforms are allegedly more likely to take place in a context of 'politics as usual' (Nelson 2000: 8), a 'politics of crisis' might provide fertile ground for radical and potentially pro-poor policies to emerge.

2.2 Identifying the 'drivers of change' behind pro-poor policies and programmes

The importance of understanding the long-term as well as the more immediate factors that shape development policy has recently inspired one of the more promising efforts to engage with the politics of development policy within the aid community. An analytical approach promoted by the UK's Department for International Development since 2002, known as 'Drivers of Change', focuses on the *structural, institutional* and *agency*-led factors that drive (and also resist) pro-poor change in developing countries, and seeks to incorporate an important historical perspective into thinking about policy change in developing countries.⁸

- Agents: refers to individuals or organisations such as political parties, political elites, civil servants, civil society organisations, the private sector and trade unions;
- Institutions include the rules that govern the behaviour of agents, and can be both formal and informal;
- Structural features include longer-term dimensions – including the history of state formation; demographic change; urbanisation and globalisation – or what Cowen and Shenton (1996) referred to as immanent or underlying processes of development.

In terms of agents, such drivers of change can come from a variety of institutional backgrounds, not least because the traditional boundaries of policy-making – and perhaps statehood itself – have become increasingly extended over recent years. With many developing countries now perceptible as what Harrison (2004) defines as "governance states", 'governments' can no longer be seen as the sole or perhaps even the primary agents in policy processes. A wide range of actors now play roles that sometimes go beyond lobbying to include agenda-setting and implementation, including donors, civil society organisations, international non-governmental organisations and, increasingly, private sector actors. Many international donors, particularly in heavily indebted countries, have become so closely embedded in policy processes that observers talk of a state of 'post-conditionality' (Harrison 2001), where there is often little discernible difference between internal and external policy agendas. Donors have also been critical in opening up policy processes to non-governmental actors from local and international 'civil society', as through the consultative processes at the heart of the PRSP experiment. The role played by the private sector in relation to social policy has attracted growing attention, with some "progressive

policies, while those least likely are democracies with fragmented party systems and non-elected systems.

⁷ For some, this suggests that the 'politics of inclusion' might not go far enough, and that a politics of social justice might be required to ensure that tackling entrenched poverty becomes a political priority. (Hickey and Bracking 2005).

⁸ For more on the Drivers of Change approach go to: http://www.grc-exchange.org/g_themes/politicalsystems_drivers.html#content.

business circles” promoting and funding aspects of social policy (Nelson 2000: 9).⁹ However, this tendency for new policy actors to displace more traditional policy actors, such as the legislature and political actors more broadly, has drawn increasingly strong criticism (e.g. Houtzager 2003).

The institutional context within developing countries has been a pressing concern within the international development community. This has usually centred on the charge that rational, bureaucratic norms have yet to become institutionalised, with relations of patronage and clientelism tending to dominate the logic of political decision-making and distribution in ‘public’ policy. While the majority of observers point out the negative effects of patronage and clientelism on the poor, others suggest that such relations are often the only safety-net available for the poor, offering the poor protection from destitution and the poorest a means of survival.¹⁰ Although such norms and practices are often difficult to perceive directly, it has been increasingly recognised that the success of formal poverty reduction programmes often depends on their interaction with these ‘informal’ rules of the game (e.g. d’Herdt and Exelle 2005).

The focus on structural features responds to the growing realisation that policy choices are shaped by embedded features of political economy in countries, and also that political as well as policy change is central to challenging structural forms of poverty (Kabeer 2000). It resonates with a growing sense in development studies that such underlying processes of development have been ignored in favour of a narrower focus on development interventions (Cowen and Shenton 1996, Hart 2001). The more specific finding that the uptake of social protection in Africa has been closely associated with rising inequality, urbanisation and deepening levels of state bureaucracy through processes of state formation (e.g. Feng and Gizelis 2002) further suggests the importance of adopting an historical perspective here.

2.3 Room for manoeuvre? Understanding ‘policy spaces’

The capacity of various agents to influence policy processes depends to some extent not just on the broader political context but on the specific range and character of the policy spaces that they are able to access and gain influence within. Particularly in highly indebted ‘governance’ states, such spaces range from established policy spaces and channels such as cabinet, parliamentary committees and parliament itself, through donor-inspired apparatus such as joint staff assessment meetings, with hybrids such as sector working groups and broad consultative processes such as those carried out for PRSPs in between.

Cornwall (2002) draws a distinction between policy spaces which are ‘closed’ and those which people are either ‘invited’ into, or have ‘claimed’. Closed spaces have not only been typical of (semi)authoritarian states, but of many aspects of policy-making within liberal democracies also. For example, budgetary processes have traditionally been considered the realm of experts only, and decision-making around the macroeconomic policy dimension of PRSPs remains notoriously confined to closed spaces dominated by the major IFIs (e.g. Oxfam 2004). Invited spaces, which lead to more inclusive policy processes and offer seats at the table to an often broad range of advocates bring at least the promise of influence. However, they may simply provide an arena within which existing power relations are re-enforced, such as those between dominant and subordinate policy tendencies (Kanbur 2001), leading participation to become tokenistic or even ‘tyrannical’ (Cooke and Kothari 2001). More promising are spaces which are ‘claimed’ by advocates of the poor. Here, subordinate groups have a better chance of establishing the rules of the game before

⁹ Although this tends to be more prevalent in newly open middle-income economies where ‘competition’ is bearing down on the corporate sector, there is also some evidence of a similar dynamic in low-income countries.

¹⁰ Some go further and argue that poor groups can use patronage relations to hold patrons to account (Benjamin 2000). For a brief review of this debate, see Hickey and Bracking (2005: 858-859).

traditionally dominant actors are able to re-shape these spaces in line with wider power relations. Thus, although there is an overall shift towards inclusion within existing policy spaces and a proliferation of new ones, there remains the tendency for such spaces to be governed by actors employing technologies and knowledge/s that can reproduce particular patterns of dominance.

2.4 The power of ideas: knowledge, discourse and thinking on poverty and development

Understanding which forms of knowledge have 'power' within which policy spaces, including the role of epistemic communities therein, has emerged as a central concern for research into the politics of policy-making (e.g. Brock et al 2001, Keeley and Scoones 1999). Here we find 'knowledge' being framed as an ideological resource to be utilised by different interest groups within policy processes, and (again) closely shaped by power relations. This subsection briefly considers the role of poverty data, poverty knowledge and analysis, and political discourses on poverty in shaping policy outcomes.

The traditional reliance of policy-makers on quantitative data had tended to privilege an economic understanding of poverty, thus undermining a policy-focus on broader aspects of deprivation and pushing development policy towards income-based approaches (e.g. microfinance). However, quantitative data on multiple dimensions of poverty (especially health and education) has made significant headway in recent years, as have qualitative forms of research, although in a particularly thin variant of 'participatory research' (Green and Hulme 2005). Such new forms of poverty data have, to some extent, proven influential in policy debates, with participatory poverty assessments associated with a growing focus on the gendered dimensions of poverty, and issues of vulnerability and empowerment (e.g. Brock et al 2001, Robb 2002). However, the apparent lack of data on extreme forms of poverty – whether over time or in terms of depth – may have obscured issues of destitution and chronic poverty in policy circles.

Other forms of knowledge include scientific evidence and/or case-study material that prove the success of particular approaches, and go on to have a demonstration effect. These 'formal' forms of data can be converted into stories to be told, re-told and circulated within policy circles, in order to increase the 'political persuasiveness' of pro-poor policies. Finally, to the extent that improved data and analysis on poverty issues can help stimulate public and policy-maker interest (as suggested by Nelson 2000), there is also a relationship between this dimension and 'drivers of change'.

Another aspect of poverty thinking concerns the prevalent political discourses on poverty, or those elements of political discourse within which poverty features. This has been subject to growing attention. For Nelson (2003), the likelihood of securing political support for pro-poor measures can be greatly increased if policy is shaped in terms of a discourse on 'vulnerability' rather than 'poverty', as this brings into the equation those non-poor with greater political voice than the poorest, and gives them a stake in pro-poor policies. More broadly, it has been recognised that political discourse plays a key role in shaping the political space for poverty reduction, and in allocating responsibility for both the causes of poverty and for its amelioration (Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2002). A particularly telling dimension concerns the ways in which political elites distinguish between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving poor', and how this feeds into policy debates and decisions (e.g. Hossain and Moore 2001), a tendency that has particular implications for the poorest groups. Such discourses on poverty may relate closely to broader discourses of development favoured by particular regimes, and may or may not converge with those promoted by international development agencies (Hickey 2005).

2.5 Design and Implementation

There are two main if entwined relationships between politics and the design and implementation of pro-poor policy. The first relates to the ways in which political considerations shape the design and implementation of policies targeted towards the poorest groups (e.g. electoral calculus), while the second regards the more complex ways in which the design and implementation of the policies themselves shape the politics that surrounds them (i.e. the political sustainability of programmes may be shaped by the way in which they are designed). Recent research suggests that there are at least five key questions to ask in relation to this second dimension: which goods are being distributed, and how are these perceived by the public?; which people are set to benefit (e.g. is the policy/programme universal or targeted?); according to which principles of procedural justice will the programme be organised and delivered, including its geographical spread?; where is the intervention located, in terms of its institutional 'home' within government?; and what role is played by the street-level bureaucrats who implement the programme 'on the ground'? ¹¹

The extent to which citizens regard the goods to be distributed by governments to be both valuable and within the remit of the state to provide is held to shape wider political support for social policies. Here, there seems to be a distinction between broad-based support for services such as education and health (Bratton and Mattes 2003) and assistance to those unable to provide for themselves, especially those who are able-bodied, which are more controversial (Graham 2002: 23). It is also apparent that many citizens in Africa see a wider role for the state to provide against vulnerability than do many donor agencies (Bratton and Mattes 2003: 312).

The issue of whether poverty programmes are universal or targeted is perhaps the most contentious area of this debate. Nelson argues that "many targeted programs are politically weak. They tended to be funded meagrely from the start, and are vulnerable to cuts in hard times" (2000: 24), whereas "One reason for the political popularity of broad-based programs is that they address the risks of downwards mobility and vulnerability much more effectively than targeted programs" (Nelson 2000: 25; also Nelson 2003). This political calculus has been taken to suggest that 'more for the poor is less for the poor', in that targeted interventions are vulnerable to being cut-back by dominant interest groups who do not benefit from them (Gelbach and Pritchett 1997). However, others argue that the evidence does not support such pessimism and point to numerous examples of where regimes have distributed resources away from richer or non-poor groups, while also critiquing the model of political analysis used to derive these conclusions (e.g. Moore 2003). As such, we treat the issue here as an open question, to be dealt with empirically.

Procedural justice refers to the rules and norms established to govern access to the goods being distributed, and also the administrative capacity and will to implement them in an effective, fair and accountable way. For example, where social protection programmes are associated with elite capture and clientelistic patterns of distribution they may lose support (Graham 2002: 15, Rothstein 2002: 911-2). Britto (2005) highlights the fact that if participants do not adhere to the conditions attached to public programmes, then middle-class groups may withdraw their political support. The effectiveness criterion refers mainly to the 'demonstration effect' of programmes, whereby their sustainability can be ensured through proof of their success.

The geographical spread of poverty reduction interventions is also often highly politicised. Nelson argues that there is strong evidence to support the political advantages of starting the policy reforms off in selected states/local jurisdictions, particularly those that are most likely to show good early results (2000: 20). However, it could be argued that the politics of ethno-regional balance in many African states suggests that there may well be political pressures to adopt a less than technically optimal position in this regard. Here, getting wider political

¹¹ See Hickey (2005b) for a more detailed discussion of these factors.

support may rely on ensuring that the policy is distributed across a representative range of key political constituencies.

With particular reference to social safety nets, Pritchett (2005) highlights the importance of there being an 'institutional fit' between the mission of the policy and that of the implementing agency, suggesting the need to think through the organisational politics and cultures of the agencies charged with implementing social protection programmes. This resonates with the finding that organisational culture makes a central contribution to the successful performance of public agencies (Grindle 1997).

Finally, it has been increasingly recognised that street-level bureaucrats are critical in determining the success of policy reforms (e.g. Corbridge et al 2005). Highlighting the "crucial role of motivations and capacities of individual service providers in the quality of outputs" (Nelson 2000: 8) also draws attention to the range of inducements and incentives that might be required within public service management in ensuring policy success (*ibid*: 13), not least through winning over the officials who are essential for delivering the programme on the ground, an issue highlighted in Tendler's (1997) landmark study of decentralised health reforms in North East Brazil.

2.6 Sustaining pro-poor policies over time: towards a 'political contract' between state and citizenry?

Perhaps the overarching question regarding the politics of reaching the poorest groups concerns the sustainability of pro-poor policies over time. Such concerns have tended to be discussed in terms of 'commitment' and 'ownership' of reforms, whereby governments buy-in to reforms and sustain them over time. However, it has also been argued that such thinking offers little insight into the more substantive question concerning the ways in which the poor come to be included in a contract between the state and citizenry. Here, a contract is taken in a socio-political rather than legal sense, although the former may be expressed through the latter, as with various commitments within the Indian Constitution.¹² Substantive issues concerning the accountability of states to poor citizens are arguably of greater importance here than democratic procedures. Reaching the very poorest in a sustained way will necessarily involve re-drawing the contract between states and citizens. Such contracts tend to be formed around particularly intense periods of political activity, involving some degree of re-drawing political relations between state and citizenry. This includes moves towards independence, while elections arguably constitute a 'weaker' form of political moment around which such contracts might be re-drawn, withdrawn or consolidated.

As such, a focus on political contracts offers the analytical framework outlined in this section something of an organising concept, which draws together key aspects of the other dimensions into a more unifying perspective on the politics of reaching the poorest groups.

¹² For example, Alex de Waal's (1996, 2000) analysis of anti-famine policies in India shows that the political underpinnings of these policies lies not so much in the trappings of liberal democracy (e.g. free press, parliament) as claimed by Amartya Sen, but in a 'social contract' between state and citizenry. This emerged on the basis of mass mobilisation, whereby the nationalist leaders of Congress struck a deal with the 'masses' on the issue of famine (de Waal 2000: 14). Preventing famine formed a key plank within the anti-colonial nationalist movement, and thus of the postcolonial political settlement, a contract maintained through the institutionalisation of early warning systems, a high level of technical understanding concerning the analysis of famines and policy responses across sectors, and an educated public aware of their rights on this issue.

3. The case studies: a descriptive overview

This section presents an overview of the design and operation of each of the policies selected for the case studies. Section 4 will then go on to critically employ the framework we have developed to examine the case-study material and undertake a comparative analysis of the politics of what has worked in these cases.

3.1 Bangladesh

The (Income-Generating) Vulnerable Groups Development Programme (IGVGD / VGD) is a national programme, spread across the country's food insecure sub-districts. It was launched in 1975 as the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Programme, and involves a chain of command that runs from the coordinating Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to the Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation, down through to the Upazila implementing officers. It is at this point that the directive is sent for the grain to be delivered to the union distribution point, from where the Union Parishad takes over. Within sub-districts, programme membership involves receiving a VGD membership card, and priority is given to very poor communities, to ensure there are at least five women in each village. If not all the villages in a single union can be covered in a particular cycle, the rest are covered in the following cycle (del Ninno 2000). Union Parishad and Upazila committees carry out individual beneficiary selection. The target group is very poor rural women, who should have the following features:

- Women who are widowed, separated/deserted, divorced or whose husbands are unable to work
- Own less than 50 decimals of land
- Have irregular or low income, of around Tk 300 (around \$5 per month at current rates)
- Are dependent on wage labour, at least 100 days per year
- Lack productive assets
- Are not members of any other NGO programmes.

The inputs of the programme include a monthly ration of 30kgs of wheat (sometimes wheat and rice) and a savings facility and training programme (the Income Generating component).

Since the 2000s, the programme has been reaching between 400,000 and 500,000 women in each programme cycle of 18 months, having gradually scaled up since the 1990s. A rough estimate of the total numbers of women reached would be around 2.5 million¹³: it is the largest programme of its kind in the world exclusively targeting poor women (Akhter *et al* 2004: 83). Evaluations indicate that, although up to one quarter are unable to cope once the food aid component is removed at the end of a programme cycle, the majority of participants gain in both economic security and social status (Hossain 2006: 4-6).

When the VGD selection is made, BRAC staff selects around 80-90 per cent of the VGD intake for their IGVGD programme. At the end of the programme cycle, the IGVGD members are expected to become full members of NGO micro-credit groups. While not all become members, or even desire this (Webb 2002), reviews in the 1990s and 2000s generally confirmed that the programme was effective, both in terms of targeting extremely poor women and in helping around two thirds of beneficiaries make the transition – 'graduation' – from receiving relief to more sustainable and mainstream development activities such as micro-credit programme membership (Hossain 2006).

¹³ Some 1.8 million were to be covered in the 2000-5 period, and Hashemi (2001) claims over one million had been reached in the ten-year period till then.

3.2 Mozambique

The Unit for the Assistance of Vulnerable People (GAPVU) was created to implement a programme providing cash transfers to the urban destitute to enable them to buy food (“cash-for-food”/food subsidy), and initially established as a unit within the Ministry of Finance. However, it was then moved to the Secretariat of Social Action (SEAS), with the Ministry of Finance confined to setting the amounts to be allocated to the programme each year. In 1997 GAPVU was abolished and the entire management team dismissed amid evidence of high-level corruption, and a new body, the National Institute for Social Action (INAS), was created to continue the work of the food subsidy programme.

GAPVU initially classed 15% of the urban population as “destitute” and therefore qualifying for the food subsidy. While initial World Bank-influenced plans to redress the social costs of structural adjustment on people’s welfare focused on food transfers, consultants proposed that cash transfers would offer a more efficient alternative to the costly and poorly functioning ration scheme. The following groups were specifically targeted:

- People with salary below 50 per cent of the minimum wage;
- Elders of 60 years or more and 2 years unemployed;
- Chronic disabled people aged over 18 years;
- Families with pregnant women undernourished.

In 1991 two more groups were included in the programme, namely single mothers with more than 5 children and chronically ill people. Malnourished children and pregnant woman needed to present medical information about their nutritional status.

The programme expanded rapidly over the early 1990s, with the number of beneficiaries increasing from 2000 in 1990 to 80,000 in 1995 (although these figures may have been inflated). Post-1997, as INAS, the programme has expanded geographically to include rural areas, and in terms of activities to include food-for-work and support for income-generating projects. However, it remains very limited in reach – only 8 per cent of destitute people were beneficiaries in 2003, the year that saw the programme’s greatest coverage in terms of numbers of beneficiaries since it began. After the programme had left the Ministry of Finance, various evaluators and policy actors argued throughout the 1990s that the cash value of the food subsidy needed to be raised, as it was set too low to allow recipients to meet their basic needs. When the increase finally came after six years, it was at the lowest of the levels that had been suggested. The African Development Bank funds the programme via budget support.

The programme was initially targeted at poor migrants to urban areas and rolled-out in the 11 provincial capital towns. Rogers (1994) found that 90 percent of woman and children candidates to the program were accepted against 60-70 percent of the elderly. In 1997 the food subsidy programme of INAS supported 9 and 14 per cent of destitute people in Maputo City and Maputo Province respectively, while the coverage in Zambézia was less than slightly above one percent. In 2003 the coverage of the food subsidy program by INAS changed in favour of the least covered provinces, raising a degree of suspicion within pro-government provinces.

In terms of social impact, the programme appears to have brought small but significant gains to beneficiaries, with participants able to reduce their dependency on donations from other people, and to use the flexibility offered by the subsidy to participate in micro-finance or community saving schemes, or to set up micro-enterprises. There is also some evidence that this has increased the level of social integration experienced by some marginal people.

3.3 India

The NOAPS is one of the three elements¹⁴ of the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) that was included in the Central Budget for 1995-96 and came into effect on 15th August 1995. The NSAP is a centrally sponsored programme under which 100 per cent central assistance is extended to states to provide benefits in accordance with norms, guidelines and conditions laid down by the Central Government.

The NOAPS targets old persons who are considered destitute in the sense of not having any regular means of subsistence on their own or through financial support from family members. The targeting is done by selection of beneficiaries by *Gram Panchayats*, based on targets communicated by state government. Applicants have to be over 65 years old, and beneficiaries are expected to provide certificates of age and proof of their destitute status. The amount of the pension is modest – Rs 75 or USD 1.60 per month per beneficiary: government estimates put a subsistence income at Rs 450 per month (Kumar and Anand 2006: 46-7). However, there is considerable leeway for state governments to augment the pension amount or extend the age limit. Several states operate a Rs200 pension (including Delhi, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab – Kumar and Anand 2006: 42-44) and the reported average across the states is Rs150 (Irudaya Rajan 2004: 68).

Implementation of the programme is by districtlevel authorities with the assistance of the elected local government system (*Panchayats*). The latter assist in selection of beneficiaries and are also responsible for reporting the death of a pensioner, and have the right to stop or recover payments sanctioned on the basis of false information. The central government transfers funds directly to the district administration through District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs)/ Zilla Parishads (ZPs) in bi-annual instalments, while beneficiaries are paid through accounts in banks or other financial institutions. Cash payments are also allowed provided they are made in the public before the *Gram Sabha*. State and district-level committees are constituted for the implementation of the NSAP, and include key government department personnel, independent experts and representatives of NGOs at both levels, with MPs and council members also present at the district level. In many states, payments are delivered to beneficiaries via the post office rather than through local government officials, which has reportedly significantly decreased diversion of funds, due to “a high degree of automaticity and transparency in payments” (Farrington et al 2003: 4). The main area still open to abuse is the initial selection and registration of beneficiaries. The latter process is particularly bureaucratically onerous, thus potentially creating errors of exclusion, or opportunities to solicit bribes to speed up or bypass the process (*ibid.*).

Figures from 1999-2000 indicate 94 per cent of the pension allocation was claimed, and 92 per cent of the coverage target was achieved (Irudaya Rajan 2004: 54-58). An Asian Development Bank Institute study found that a large majority of recipients report no difficulty in availing of the pension; 96 per cent felt that the Scheme definitely made a perceptible change in the quality of their life; and that the great majority of the beneficiaries are genuinely eligible and indeed extremely poor (Kumar and Anand 2006: 50-52). Of the claimants, 37 per cent were women and 46 per cent from Scheduled Castes or Tribes: however, only 9 per cent of the total population over 60 benefited from the Scheme (Irudaya Rajan 2004: 54-66).

3.4 South Africa

South Africa was the first country in Africa to institute a state pension, in 1928. The Act entitled all ‘White’ and ‘Coloured’ residents of South Africa, aged 65 years and older¹⁵, to receive a pension, subject to an income-based means test. The ratio of white to coloured

¹⁴ The other two are the National Family Benefit Scheme (NFVS) and National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS).

¹⁵ In 1937, eligibility for women claiming the pension was reduced to 60 years.

pensions was then set at approximately 2:1. The evolution of the pension centres around two key events. Firstly, in 1944, black South Africans were given the right to claim the pension, although the transfer value was lower than that received by White and Coloured residents. (By 1947, 197,000 black South Africans were claiming the pension.) Secondly, in 1994, the Old Age Grant underwent a radical redesign as part of a wider restructuring of the state bureaucracy on the accession of the ANC to power. In a bid to ensure equality of service to all South Africans, and amid fears that provincial administration was characterised by delays, fraudulent claims and problems in accessing payment, the fourteen separate social security systems were amalgamated. The current pension is thus administered centrally by the Social Security Agency, located within the Department of Social Development, which also deals with the country's four other social grants.¹⁶ By 1993, there were 1.5 million recipients of the Old Age Pension. Today, there are 2.1 million beneficiaries from the old-age grant with a pension of R780 per month (an increase of R40 in April 2005). This costs the Department of Social Development R13.2 billion, the largest social security transfer from the South African government (ILO 2000). The pension is financed from tax income and consumes around 1.4% of GDP. The rate of increase in the pension has only been set above the rate of inflation (around 5.3 per cent) since 2001/2, so that in 2000, the pension transfer was approximately twice the median rural income and around 10 per cent of incomes in manufacturing industries (Legido-Quigley 2003).

In terms of impacts, Case and Deaton (1998) find that the social pension is effective at targeting two vulnerable groups, poor children and the elderly, in part because of the character of South African living arrangements. Means-testing prevents much leakage to non-poor households although it is estimated that 15 per cent of all claims are fraudulent (Devereux, 2001: 7). This means test measures the pensioner in isolation of other household members, which excludes most of the White population, but includes 80 per cent of black Africans over 60 years old.

Looking at socioeconomic structural implications, as power had begun to shift to the younger generation who were gaining control over cash as they sought wage-labour, the pension has helped the pendulum swing back towards the older generations and arguably even ended the younger generations' domination of access to cash. However, the possibility of financial independence is in some cases countered by an increased level of dependency, to the extent that it reinforces the 'moral pressure' on them to support other members of their family (Sagner, 2000: 548). It may have further impacts on the social status of older people and others (discussed in section 4.5 below).

3.5 Namibia

The pension was introduced by the South West African administration in 1949 as an extension of the Old Age Grant already in operation in South Africa. Black Namibians were included (at a significantly lower amount of benefit) in 1973. On independence in 1990, the new government equalised the pensionable age for both men and women at 60 years old (men had until then become pensioners at 65 years). The National Pensions Act of 1992 went on to equalise the pension amount across all racial groups (Devereux, 2001). Today the Pension stands at N\$300 (£25) per month. The pension is administered by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, who have autonomy over the delivery of the pension.

Since the equalisation of pensions, a significant reduction in corrupt diversion of pension funds and errors of inclusion appears to have been achieved through the adoption of a computerised distribution system in 1996, based on fingerprint-recognition rather than ID cards. This however depends on an extensive network of pensions offices to enable all beneficiaries (who may be infirm or living in very remote areas) to appear in person to collect

¹⁶ These are the: Disability Grant, Child Support Grant, Foster Child Grant and Care Dependency Grant.

their pension, and some errors of exclusion may result; also, some suspicious cases of non-delivery of funds to beneficiaries are still reported (Devereux 2001: 19-21). But the pension's impact is still characterised as "overwhelmingly positive" as it "injects income into pensioners' families and communities that sustains them, educates their children and stimulates local trade" (*ibid*: 50).

3.6 Lesotho

The Old Age Pension is administered by the Department of Pensions, headed by the Commissioner of Pensions, within the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. The scheme emulates the War Veterans' Pension (African Pioneer Corps Pension), which targets veterans who fought in the World Wars or Vietnam or their widowed spouses. Parliamentary debate of the pension was aired shortly before registration began and following a month long registration process, the first pensions were delivered in November 2004. All Lesotho residents over 70 years old are entitled to receive the M150 (£12.50) per month. In May 2005, there were 69,046 registered recipients, out of a total of 74,000 citizens of 70 years and over accounted for by the 2001 updated census.

Although too early to assess any long-term social impacts, there is some initial evidence that the strengthening of informal networks witnessed as a result of the Old Age Grant in South Africa is also perceivable in Lesotho.

3.7 Uganda

Social protection policies have been recently promoted by the international development agencies, most notably the World Bank as a key response to extreme forms of vulnerability, and constitute an advance on the rather weak promotion of social safety-nets during the 1980s and 1990s. In Uganda, the opportunity to promote social protection came through the third review process of the Ugandan PRSP, known as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). The review process involved the identification of a number of core issues or sectors, and also some cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender and (for the first time) social protection. The cross-cutting approach to mainstreaming social protection then adopted involved the creation of a Task Force chaired by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGSLD), which included members from that Ministry as well as two from the powerful Ministry of Finance and one member each from DFID and the World Bank. Health and Education were nominally represented, with other members brought in from the NGO sector to offer expertise on specific issues. Key methods included employing international consultants to work with local counterparts in developing briefing papers that were then circulated to some of the key sectors outlining how social protection cross-cut with their agenda, and giving 'brownbag' sessions on social protection in various ministries. One bilateral agency sought to directly build the capacity of MGSLD more broadly, particularly in terms of strategic direction – a project that has since been withdrawn to mutual dissatisfaction. The final review of the resulting PEAP included a commitment to social protection (incorporating a minimum wage). However, the first budget after the PEAP revisions did not allocate funds in this direction, and the overall Social Development Sector Strategy remained unfunded.

3.8 Zambia

The progress of the social protection agenda in Zambia to date can be tracked through the creation and activities of a Social Protection Sector Advisory Group (SP-SAG), which exists to formulate a national strategy for social protection within the context of a National Development Plan (effectively the second PRSP). Here the stand-alone approach led the Social Protection Sector Advisory Group to focus more on generating a level of expertise and

ownership *within* the sector, which was led by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, with quite marginal participation from other ministries (e.g. Finance, Health, Education) alongside the more engaged representatives from the Bank, DFID, UNICEF and ILO, and one international and one national NGO.

Following policy research and consultation, a Draft Social Protection Strategy was produced in April 2005, and will form a chapter in the forthcoming National Development Plan. The Draft Strategy states that the goal of social protection is to “contribute to the security of all Zambians by ensuring that incapacitated and low capacity households and people have sufficient income security to meet their basic needs, and protection from the worst impacts of risks and shocks”, and focuses on six objectives (each with associated targets and implementation strategy):

- Increase the ability of low capacity households to meet their basic needs;
- Reduce extreme poverty in incapacitated households;
- Reduce the vulnerability and numbers of street children;
- Improve access to health and education for people from incapacitated and low capacity households;
- Reduce the vulnerability of social protection target groups to the violation of their legal rights;
- Strengthen capacity at local and national level to deliver an effective social protection programme.

Overall, the SP-SAG process has centred on producing a coherent strategy that is likely to attract donor funding. This has been done quite successfully, and is an approach likely to find favour within the Ministry of Finance. However, concerns remain concerning the politics of the process, in terms of both internal and external levels of ownership and commitment. There is little wider appreciation of social protection amongst key policy actors in Zambia, and this may not only reflect the relative newness of the agenda, but also the strategies used to promote its mainstreaming.

4. The case-studies: a comparative analysis

This section works through the different dimensions of the analytical framework in relation to each case, before synthesising the key findings under each heading. Here we have brought together the work on ‘political context’ and ‘drivers of change’, which the reality of the case-studies revealed to be too closely entwined to separate. A summary of the key findings by case are presented in Table 2.¹⁷

4.1 Who and what were the key ‘drivers of change’ behind the formulation, promotion, implementation, and protection of these interventions?

A broad and often complex range of agents, structural features and institutional factors can be identified as the key drivers of change behind the successful policy stories discussed here. Although contextual differences do emerge as significant, comparative analysis reveals that it is also possible to draw a number of more general findings, including the significant role of structural features compared with institutional factors, and the role of agents from political rather than civil society.

¹⁷ In order to emphasise that the political context emerges as central rather than peripheral to the politics of pro-poor policy processes in our cases, it is considered here as a ‘driver’.

The studies of Bangladesh and Mozambique, albeit to different degrees, both reveal the emergence of policies in times of crisis. In Bangladesh the internal context was democratic crisis, regime change and authoritarian politics. The years 1974-5 saw a famine, the dissolution of multi-party politics and declaration of a state of emergency by the elected government, assassination of the prime minister and arrival of a military government after a series of coups. A new regime was in place and under popular pressure to prove its capacity to address hunger and poverty, as well as pressure from aid donors in a similar direction. Widespread sympathy for “destitute mothers” had developed following the rape of an estimated 200,000 women during the war of independence and the mutation of gender roles in the famine, when desperate women went out to work in contravention of social norms. Subsequent protection and indeed evolution of the programme was again influenced by executive actors under the influence of donor agencies, but now with large rural development NGOs such as BRAC and micro-finance organisations also playing a significant role. These national NGOs, but also local elites, were responsible for the distribution of food under the VGF/VGD, and both have played a role in protecting and sustaining the programme. The return to multi-party politics in 1991 did not directly alter the Vulnerable Group Development Programme (VGD), which had come to form part of a “poverty consensus” between the two main parties.

The norms of political leadership in Bengal have been important here, with “strong normative pressures on local leaders to continually re-earn their support through practical actions”; leadership “has historically been based more on mundane and practical politics than on inherited privilege, religious or ritual power” (Hossain 2006: 10). This feature combines with that of “proximity”, whereby,

“the local elites in charge are just close enough to those they are supposed to serve for the face-to-face relationships that enable possibly genuine sympathy to be combined with the important political gains of support for the poor and a reputation for honesty and compassion” (*ibid.*).

These factors have been important drivers behind both the successful and largely accountable working of the programme, and its political sustainability over time.

In Mozambique, the GAPVU food subsidy programme emerged during the final years of the civil war, prior to the onset of multi-party elections and continued to evolve during early years of peace. The civil war had destroyed a great deal of the state infrastructure that had helped generate legitimacy for the government, and heralded the arrival of poor rural migrants in the urban areas, most of which were government strongholds. It was introduced in a ‘top down’ manner, with policy formulation and implementation largely driven by a combination of executive and donor concerns, but also in response to structural pressures, most notably the waves of migration of poor people into the cities in the late 1980s. There was also a perceived need to counter the adverse impacts of IFI-led structural adjustment, and the urban cash transfer program was perceived as a way to replace the pre-existing subsidy system with minimal political and social resistance (Low et al 1999). However, the programme was maintained during the transition and establishment of electoral politics. General elections have been held every five years since 1994, with elections contested between two major parties, Frelimo and Renamo. The default position of Renamo is to oppose the policies of the incumbent Frelimo regime, although the electoral dominance of the latter has given it enough strength in parliament to progress most of its policy commitments, including GAPVU/INAS. Under democratic rule, the amount allocated to the programme stayed at a relatively low level, before finally rising in 2004, following a six-year debate. Although 2004 was the year of the third presidential and legislative elections, the link between elections and the food subsidy remains ambiguous.

By way of contrast, the National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS) in India was born in a more “business as usual” period, albeit one in which the Congress party’s hold on power was facing unprecedented challenges. The policy was introduced in 1995 by the Congress-led

coalition government, with Congress then going on to win the 1996 elections. After losing the 2000 elections, Congress re-emphasised pensions as part of a 'liberalisation with a human face' platform. However, it is possible to identify a progressive history of support for pensions in India, with internal and external actors and processes playing a role at each stage.

A pension for government employees (civil servants and soldiers) was established under colonial rule, and there was a commitment in nationalist circles during the independence struggle to maintain these in the post-independence period. During this period, the Trade Union movement campaigned to have pensions extended to all formal sector workers. However, and despite being flagged in several five-year plans, the new scheme was not announced until 1995. The social development summit in Copenhagen of the same year was significant; as is often the case with policy announcements in India, although the mid-1990s also saw a rise in government revenues, which contributed to the introduction of new schemes (Nayak et al 2005: 254). Once the Scheme was announced, the Planning Commission, and key senior civil servants with a background in rural development in the Commission and other concerned ministries, acted as policy champions to promote the NOAPS within the executive and protect it when it was under threat. Support from civil society has since become evident, with HelpAge India lobbying the government, although it is doubtful that this had a significant impact. In general, the focus of grassroots civil society in India is on land and liberalisation issues, while much of the professionalised NGO sector remains rather urban and middle-class based. Party politics has become increasingly focused on meeting the demands of the growing middle-class, and has shifted towards a politics of identity rather than economic interest and justice. Although there has been a further shift to a National Policy on Older Persons, the centrally sponsored element of the pension has not increased, and remains a minor item on the agenda. The driving force has since come from the states – some of which had old age pensions before the NOAPS (e.g. Madhya Pradesh) – and which have since supplemented the amount of monetary benefit since its introduction.

It seems apparent that structural forces played a dominant role concerning the inception and sustained implementation of pensions in South Africa. As the historian John Iliffe notes, "The National Party was to elaborate the most extensive welfare system in Africa, a system which, like the Apartheid programme, was born of urbanisation, inequality, state power and rampant technocracy" (Iliffe, 1987:142 quoted in Devereux, 2001:3). Although race was the clearest means of distinguishing between recipients of the scheme, a key and related concern amongst the apartheid regime was to restrict the rate of urbanisation and maintain the urban/rural divide between Whites and Africans.

Electoral competition provided the backdrop for some of the key shifts behind the pension schemes in South Africa (and also Namibia). When the pension was initially introduced in South Africa, "The pension rhetoric was undoubtedly useful to strengthen the political claim of the Labour Party, and later that of the Pact Government, to represent those most at risk, particularly the white poor and the white worker" (Sagner, 2000: 527). The extension of the pension to the majority of South Africans in 1994 took place in the immediate aftermath of the end of apartheid and the resulting elections. In Namibia, the extension of the pensions took place over 1990-92, in the immediate aftermath of elections and the end of colonial rule. In both cases, the distinction between 'politics as crisis' and 'politics as usual' is perhaps rather blunt in the face of a more distinctive political moment regarding the movement towards a new political settlement.

Although neither the original pensions scheme nor the extended schemes in the 1990s resulted to a significant extent from the pressure of any specific interest group, they were implemented by political parties that had close links to civil society movements. The first extension of the scheme to 'Coloured' and 'African' populations in the mid-1940s was influenced to some extent by union mobilisation which the Labour Party was keen to co-opt to deepen their support amongst core voters, and also the support of mining companies, who realised that their labour requirements were being hampered by the growing level of

destitution amongst their workforce. The Ministry of Social Welfare was also a key proponent of the pension during the 1940s, driven in part by a realisation that 'traditional' structures were failing to cope under the pressures of urbanisation and impoverishment. In the 1990s, the ANC came to power in South Africa as a broad-based movement, incorporating a range of civil society and corporatist organisations and energies, and determined to implement a wide-ranging programme of social and economic reforms to counter the inequalities wrought by apartheid government. The Ministry of Social Development remains the institutional home for the Old Age Grant, and both the Minister and the President are strong advocates for the social grants (Samson et al 2004). More ambiguously, the same Minister has also sought to move away from a welfarist model towards a form of 'developmentalism', while the Treasury, which in 2001-2 agreed to raise the rate of increase above the rate of inflation, has more recently, in 2004, issued notice that such growth may not be financially sustainable. Civil society includes some strong advocates of the social grant system as a whole, particularly the unions and church-based organisations, and actively lobbies for its retention and extension.

Most of the same drivers are apparent in Namibia, although with some interesting variations. The motivation for extending the scheme to the majority black population in the 1970s, albeit at extremely unequal levels, appears to have been twofold: both to prevent widespread rural destitution, which might have been politically embarrassing and also stimulated migration to urban areas with destabilising political and economic effects; and to secure the compliance of local populations to South African rule and in particular the increased presence of the South African Defence Force as it used Namibian territory as a base for its campaigns in Angola (Devereux 2001: 8-9). In practice, coverage favoured the more compliant southern regions, suggesting that migration control rather than "hearts and minds" was the primary motivation for the policy (*ibid*: 17-18). However, some observers have noted the resonance between the new social pension and the leftist ideology of SWAPO, although given that the removal of manifest discrimination was one of the first programmes that the new government committed itself to, this policy is perhaps more closely linked to the regime's project of African nationalism.

The context in Lesotho was different again. Although part of the manifesto of the ruling party in Lesotho since 1993, the proposed pension scheme was little publicised before being introduced in mid-electoral cycle over a decade later. Only nine MPs from the ruling party attended the debate, showing the limited extent to which the policy is a key plank of the government's policy, while some opposition MPs suggested that the government was providing the pension to 'those who have not worked' as a 'political thank you' (Second reading, 17th November, 2004). Unlike in South Africa and Namibia, where the proportional representation character of the electoral system appears to have played little meaningful role, the proposal to link pension payments to constituency MPs provoked some opposition from those elected through proportional representation in Lesotho – all of whom were opposition MPs.

The private sector and civil society played no noticeable role, with trade unions much weaker in Lesotho than either Namibia or South Africa. The growing evidence base that pensions have worked to good effect in southern Africa may well have influenced the introduction of the scheme, although the role of such a 'technical consensus' has proved difficult to track in this specific case. The key actors were the Prime Minister and the Treasury, and the policy was actually announced to the Department of Pensions by the Minister of Finance, perhaps keen to promote the policy as a palliative to the Treasury's plan of increasing its tax base amongst lower income groups. Although now broadly supportive of the scheme, donors played no role here, and the IMF remains concerned over the affordability and sustainability of the scheme.

The timetable for promoting social protection in Uganda and Zambia has been determined more in accordance with the more globalised processes of poverty reduction strategy papers than of domestic politics. This is not as significant a problem in Uganda, where levels of

regime commitment to the poverty reduction strategy process are generally considered to be high, in part because the president and ruling movement have had little opposition to face regarding its programme of reform (Morrissey and Verschoor 2005).¹⁸ However, the timing of the National Development Plan in Zambia, within which the social protection strategy sits, is less favourable, with elections coming directly after its scheduled release.¹⁹ It is unclear that any incoming regime will take up genuine ownership of this strategy. More specifically, this convergence has clearly shaped some concerns within political and civil society regarding the feasibility of introducing a cash transfer scheme so close to an election campaign in which many expect the government to offer incentives in any case.

In both cases, the promotion of social protection has been led by those donor agencies with a clear working interest in this area – most notably the World Bank, DFID and also some elements of the UN system. However, there have been moves by the key social sector ministries to take ownership of the agenda, in part as a means of overcoming their historical marginality from mainstream policy debates. In both countries, advocates are struggling to move beyond the stage of securing a place for social protection within key PRSP processes, towards gaining a wider constituency of support, both within key policy circles, and more broadly in political and civil society. An influential factor at present concerns the different policy histories in each country. Whereas Uganda has a limited history of welfare provision and a chequered history of schemes allegedly targeted at the poorest groups, Zambia has a more favourable policy history. In particular, the long-standing Public Welfare Assistance Scheme that has been in place since the 1940s was revised and extended over the late 1990s. This has provided the institutional basis for a pilot cash-transfer scheme that has achieved a degree of success and has been promoted strongly both nationally and abroad (e.g. Schubert 2005). This is driving significant policy interest, and may prove the worth of the ‘demonstration’ effect.

The clearest indications of resistance in both cases thus far have come from Ministries of Finance concerned about the costs and productivity of such schemes, and also a more general sense in policy circles that such targeted policies are either not justified in the context of mass poverty, or are likely to increase dependence. An initial degree of private sector resistance to specific proposals such as the minimum wage in Uganda seems to have been somewhat weakened; the consultants employed to promote the social protection strategy organised a workshop with business leaders, with the concluding discussions focusing on the level of a minimum wage rather than its fundamental pros and cons.²⁰ Civil society movements have not promoted the social protection agenda thus far, although they are represented on the key strategic taskforces. Some national CSOs may be reluctant to join a donor-led policy agenda to the extent that some perceive donors to have become too close to the regimes (e.g. through direct budgetary support). However, the unions that have historically played a significant role in Zambia, are increasingly looking at how to extend their constituency among the growing informal workforce, and could be a long-term ally in promoting a broad-based pension scheme.

In both Uganda and Zambia, it is doubtful that the underlying structural or institutional drivers associated with the implementation of national social protection schemes are in place, either in terms of long-term demographic change (e.g. urbanisation is reversing in Zambia, while

¹⁸ Until February 2006, Uganda had operated a ‘no-party’ form of decentralised democracy, a system that allowed the ruling National Resistance Movement significant autonomy in policy-making, although with a high degree of Presidential dominance. The implications of the return to multi-party rule for poverty reduction are yet to become apparent.

¹⁹ This mistiming of PRSPs *vis-à-vis* electoral timetables is not uncommon, and again suggests that the ‘political attunement’ of the IFIs has some way to go (see Piron and Evans 2004 and World Vision 2005).

²⁰ This episode encouraged one of the consultants to produce a paper outlining the possibilities of a minimum wage in Uganda (Devereux 2004b).

inequality remains relatively low in both countries) or the types of political systems (e.g. the prevalence of often debilitating levels of patronage politics in both, the limited incentives presented by the party system in Zambia). Nonetheless, the heavy reliance of these countries on foreign aid, and the closely entwined policy agendas of the governments with donors, suggests that policies may nevertheless be forthcoming. The presidentialism and personalised character of decision-making that characterises policy-processes in both countries means that once executive actors are persuaded of the viability of the schemes, implementation can follow swiftly. Their wider take-up in regimes and political society more broadly remains another question, one which donors are now engaging with, having previously approached the process as a technical issue, ignoring the importance of involving key political constituencies. This is most apparent in the reliance on weak social sector ministries to lead on this policy agenda, a strategy that does not reflect a realistic understanding of the internal politics of policy-making.

Synthesis

While at least two of the policies studied here emerged during periods definable as ‘politics as usual’ (India, Lesotho, and also the original pension scheme in South Africa) others were direct responses to moments of crisis (Bangladesh and Mozambique). Although this gives a degree of support to Nelson’s argument that social policy reforms are more usually undertaken during periods of ‘politics as usual’, given that the key Bangladesh and Mozambique cases were more specific and targeted interventions. However, perhaps a more useful construction of political context than this divide is suggested by the cases of Namibia and South Africa. These cases of post-colonial or post-apartheid settlement – but also thinking about the role of elections in other cases – suggest that it might be more useful to think in terms of political junctures or moments, and particularly in terms of whether or not they involve efforts by the regime to redraw the social contract that exists between state and citizenry (see Section 4.6).

It is notable that the most consistent finding concerns the role of structural factors in leading to the emergence and sustained institutionalisation of pro-poor policies, particularly trends within capitalist development, state formation, urbanisation and citizenship formation. In most cases, colonial rule played a significant role across each of these dimensions. In terms of patterns of capitalist development, social protection policies have often emerged at moments whereby either the demands of capital alter or when the social impacts of liberalised capitalist economies become too great to be borne in political terms (e.g. social costs of adjustment). This reflects Karl Polanyi’s notion of the double-movement whereby,

“As economic liberalism sought to establish the dominance of the self-regulating market, pressures emerged from all sectors of society (including capital) based on ‘a principle of social protection’ that drove the public authority to use its coercive power to conserve man and nature and productive organisation” (Putzel 2002: 3, paraphrasing Polanyi 1944).

This was apparent in the drive towards welfarism in Europe, which also influenced the South African administration in the 1920s. The IFI-promoted safety nets and social funds of the late 1990s were similarly an attempt, albeit weak and unsatisfactory, to counter the social impacts of the capitalist deepening brought on by structural adjustment. The extent and type of response is also driven by an understanding of the extent to which capitalist development and accompanying social changes have undermined existing coping strategies of intergenerational protection/transfer of resources (a debate dwelt on in parliament in South Africa). There emerges a need, then, to understand the impulse towards social protection in terms of the perceived need to counter/re-embed processes of capitalist development.

Urbanisation is one of the processes that accompanies such developments in the political economy of developing countries, and which has emerged here as an influential factor. Regimes in Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia have all sought to counter the perceived ill-effects of urbanisation through social policies, albeit in different ways. In the latter two cases, this converged with a policy of racial discrimination. Discussing the 1994 reforms and organisation of the pension in the following decades, Devereux concluded that “it seems perfectly plausible that the social pension was exploited as a policy tool in this deurbanisation strategy” (2001:3). Although apartheid government constitutes an extreme version of how urban-rural dynamics are at the centre of state formation strategies, Mamdani (1996) has argued that this form of governance was in existence across much of colonial Africa. Moreover, it has directly shaped social policy in contemporary Africa, which has been systematically biased towards urban citizens as opposed to rural subjects (Mamdani 2005). As has been noted, “...the welfare system serves the urban areas more than the countryside...rural residents tend to fall outside welfare transfers in poor countries” (Feng and Gizelis 2002: 228). Although understandable to the extent that many social protection policies were first and foremost an attempt to mitigate the effects of structural adjustment, which were felt most clearly in urban areas, and also in public services, this phenomenon has deeper roots in processes of state formation and the politics of citizenship in Africa.

However, creating racial and spatial inequalities, even discriminatory social policies introduced by colonial regimes for the benefit of white citizens may have played a positive role in cutting policy channels that could later be expanded – not only in terms of the pensions in southern Africa, but also a wide range of public welfare schemes that often remain in operation to date.

Aside from the temporary closure of GAPVU for reasons of high-level corruption, the institutional norms of patronage do not appear to have been as problematic in practice as often assumed. Although provoking resistance to state-led programmes for the poorest amongst key policy actors across the board, norms of patronage and clientelism can also act as a driver towards social protection and may work in quite productive synergy with policies for the poorest in terms of conception, implementation and sustainability. In terms of conception, such policies may fulfil the needs of leaders and regimes to re-legitimise their rule by offering rewards to key constituencies – although whether this should be viewed as clientelism or a legitimate response to electoral calculus remains a moot point. In terms of implementation, the case of Bangladesh reveals the synergies that can develop between a programme targeted in a ‘rational’ manner towards the neediest groups and the political needs of local elites to be seen as protecting the poorest. If policies can be proven to work co-operatively with the forms of politics preferred by elites, this augurs well for their sustainability. The ‘norm’ of executive power and discretion within states at more nascent stages of formation, perhaps more accurately described in terms of presidentialism and populist tactics, may also be viewed as a positive driver towards social protection (witness the role of the president in introducing pensions in Lesotho). This reflects the broader tendency for anti-poverty programmes in developing countries to emerge from populist leaders, including universal primary education in Uganda and Kenya, and numerous safety nets and social funds in Latin America.

However, what remains at issue is whether or not policies and programmes that are dispensed under such forms of patronage and populist rule can be sustainable over time; do they create a sense of entitlement amongst recipients? Do key elements of the bureaucracy buy into programmes launched by diktat rather than the more technocratic processes preferred by civil servants? On the former, there is some evidence that recipients would mobilise against the withdrawal of these programmes, although this may depend on how they are designed – for example, employment-guarantee schemes in India that are constitutionally-guaranteed have led to high levels of political mobilisation (Joshi and Moore 2000), and something similar could occur with the constitutionally-guaranteed pensions in India and South Africa (see below). A recent study of state-citizenry relations in India

suggests that the pension is claimed by even marginalised individuals as of right, in a way that they cannot do with non-constitutional employment assurance schemes or primary education (Corbridge et al 2005). With regards to the latter issue of bureaucratic commitment, it is notable that civil servants in Zambia are currently arguing that poverty reduction strategies should be put on a constitutional footing in order to reduce their susceptibility to political manipulation and disruption (e.g. elections). These issues re-iterate the importance of thinking about policies for the poorest in terms of a 'political contract' between the state and citizen, a debate returned to below (Section 4.6).

A consistent finding has been that electoral competition was a fairly pervasive feature across the contexts within which our policies were introduced. This appeared to have acted as a favourable impetus towards the introduction of policies aimed at the very poorest. The driving factor here appeared to be either (a) an attempt to reach out to a new constituency or (b) more often, an effort to further deepen the support of the existing constituency, as (c) a means of retaining both power and legitimacy. As noted more broadly (e.g. Hickey and Bracking 2005: 857), the political parties that propose and/or implement such policies tend to have a particular form of political sociology;²¹ are well-institutionalised; have a programmatic agenda; and have generally managed to attain a degree of dominance *vis-à-vis* their electoral opponents. However, in India and Bangladesh the prominent parties were looking to secure their legitimacy in relation to stronger electoral opposition.²² This would tend to support the argument that the forms of political institution are as, if not more, significant than the type of electoral competition *per se* (e.g. Niles 1999). In particular, such parties may move quickly through the 'third stage' of the policy process as regards obtaining legislative approval (Nelson 2000).

Overall, the key agents involved in promoting policies and programmes for the poorest can be located within political society, and amongst the donor community. In addition to the role of political parties and party systems discussed above, other important actors include ministries of finance and social sector ministries, and political elites more generally (as discussed in relation to political discourse in Section 4.4). There is some evidence to support Kanbur's (2001) suggestion that those within the 'civil society tendency' such as social sector ministries are likely to be the key proponents of policies for the poorest, as opposed to those within the 'finance ministry tendency'. There remains a significant capacity-gap between these two tendencies, although our cases also suggest that synergistic relationships are possible, and that the weaker social sector ministries can 'win' fiscal battles with the finance tendency where broader political commitment exists.

Private sector interests emerge in some ways as more influential advocates for certain policies than civil society organisations.²³ It is notable that, again with the exception of Bangladesh, civil society organisations have only wielded a significant influence on policy inception where they have had close links to political parties.²⁴ Although somewhat predictable given the low level of civil society development in most of the cases viewed here, this might also suggest that it is particularly difficult to mobilise around certain social categories, whether framed too broadly as 'the poor', or in relation to groups outside of the formal economy. However, civil society organisations have arguably played a more significant role in protecting policies once in place, as in South Africa.

Donor agencies have unsurprisingly played a stronger role in lower income countries than in middle-income countries, and have been involved mostly in terms of promoting policies

²¹ Exploring the social basis of power within particular parties thus seems to offer a useful indicator for those seeking useful allies in promoting pro-poor policies.

²² This could be a regional difference between sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries, whereby opposition politics is (very) generally weaker in the former region.

²³ Our research indicated that this role was growing. For example, the new Bolsa Escola programme in Mozambique, a conditional 'cash-for-education' programme, is funded by Brazilian businessmen.

²⁴ This finding is supported in recent research in Brazil (Lavalle et al 2005).

designed to counter the effects of liberalisation or deal with specific catastrophes. It is also questionable as to whether their recent efforts to promote 'nationally owned' social protection policies are well-informed by the politics of what has worked well in longer-standing schemes in poor countries – or a focus on the poorest. For example, the dominance of the World Bank's Social Risk Management (SRM) approach to social protection in Uganda and Zambia tends to underplay the role of the state, and focus more on the transitory than chronically poor.

4.2 The role of 'policy spaces'

In Bangladesh, Mozambique, India and Lesotho, policy discussion and formulation appears to have been restricted to political elite circles. For Bangladesh, Hossain notes "a peculiarity of pro-poor politics in Bangladesh, namely its highly personalised, social relationship dependent character. It appears to be commonly through the personal connections of pro-poor activists with political clout – typically NGO leaders – that important policies with impact on the poor get made" (Hossain 2006: 14). In Mozambique, policy was discussed in central government, particularly within the Ministry of Finance – although the Secretariat for Social Action (SEAS) and later INAS, as responsible ministries, were also sites of policy discussion and discussion of the politics of maintaining and protecting the programme. Although the sub-ministry responsible for its implementation was moved out of the MoF, this still proved influential in the later development of the programme – particularly attempts to raise the amount of the subsidy - because of its control of government expenditure. The programme was also discussed in government–donor fora, and within donor agencies. Civil society was not involved, and as a political space was not well developed at the time: colonialism had restricted freedom of association. On independence, government policy and political philosophy for many years largely excluded independent CSOs from its vision of legitimate political life (Braathen and Palmero 2001).

The NOAPS in India was shaped in national political and administrative elite spaces, although it has since been subject to debate and contestation in parliament. The Planning Commission has been the focus of many of the struggles over pension policy implementation and survival in India, as well as other key ministries (e.g. Rural Development). Implementation issues have now entered wider civil society/media dialogue, although it appears that the NOAPS has not generally engaged mass political debate and interest.

The pension in Lesotho was determined within closed executive policy spaces, with the Cabinet deciding to include the policy in its 2004 Budget. There had been no public announcement or debate in parliament prior to this, and the Bill was rushed through without a first reading.²⁵ The Minister of Finance and Development Planning returned from one such Cabinet meeting on the Budget and announced to the Department of Pensions that a payment to old people was to be included in the current budget and the amendments to the budget had to be made immediately before being aired in parliament, some three days later. It is notable, however, that even the minimal debate on the policy that Parliament held was shaped both by the design of the pension and the proportionately-represented element of the electoral system, with PR-elected MPs opposing certain design elements of the policy (see Section 4.4 below).

Parliament played host to some key battles regarding the conception and extension of pensions in South Africa during the middle decades of the twentieth century. As discussed below, these debates involved opposing camps, one favouring welfarist arguments the other concerned with dependency and 'crowding out' traditional forms of intergenerational support. This space appears to have allowed for a fairly full discussion of the pension policy, and a

²⁵ This is not entirely unusual with 'progressive' policies; for example, the Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia was similarly rushed through as a means of averting a clash with national political elites opposed to such a reorganisation of state power.

means through which political constituencies were formed, although the most significant shifts did not occur until the 1994 elections dramatically altered the composition of parliament.

In Uganda and Zambia, the sector working groups established as one of the new modalities of public sector management within recipient states have provided a key space through which donors have sought to promote new policy initiatives, including social protection. In these cases, further space has been opened by the three-yearly reviews of poverty reduction strategies, providing a regular opportunity to promote new policy agendas and approaches. Such spaces include donor and civil society actors as well as state officials.

However, there is little evidence that the character of these spaces has led to any significant re-ordering of power relations between these actors, despite the rhetoric of ownership which suggests that moves towards embedding a pro-poor focus within governments, in part through the creation of new policy spaces, can transform relations between donors and regimes on the one hand, and regimes and civil society on the other. In Zambia, donors have remained dominant within the Social Protection Sector Advisory Group, with Ministry of Community Development officials often struggling to engage fully with technocratic debates and a new agenda on top of their existing workloads. Importantly, the key Ministry of Finance sent only low-level representation to the group, although higher levels were impressed by the technically strong and financially realistic character of the strategy that emerged. Lacking a dedicated policy space, the main problem in Uganda was in accessing other sector working groups such as Education and Health – spaces that were already full of existing policy debates and spending commitments. Moreover, the extent to which such spaces have become fully embedded within national decision-making processes varies. They remain subordinate to other spaces, most notably those that determine spending priorities: for example, the Social Development Sector Strategy was passed but not allocated a budget by the Ministry of Finance when considered in relation to MTEF constraints.

Synthesis

Overall, then, policy spaces do not generally emerge as defining features concerning the production and implementation of successful pro-poor policies. As many of our interventions have emerged from closed policy spaces as ones into which pro-poor advocates were either invited or have claimed. In many ways, spaces seem to offer merely the context within which key actors and debates operate rather than providing a more independent and defining influence. However, there is some evidence that this may be changing. When most of these policies were proposed, very few policy spaces existed – and none could be seen as having been ‘claimed’ by the poor or their advocates. As such spaces multiply under the pressures of both deeper democratisation and the participatory approach currently lauded by international development agencies, and pro-poor representatives develop the capacities to advocate, the character and role of such spaces may re-emerge as a more critical issue. Finally, it is worth remembering that this research has not been able to track in detail the influence of those informal spaces within which decisions are often made in developing countries.

4.3 Poverty knowledge and analysis: towards evidence-based policy-making?

Our cases suggest that while poverty data plays an important role in terms of policy design and implementation of successful interventions, a more important role in their conception and targeting is played by poverty analysis, particularly concerning different understanding/s within policy circles over different categories of poverty and also how poverty is caused.

The use of a poverty line has proved important where means testing is used, notably in Mozambique and South Africa. In Mozambique, narrowly quantitative conceptions of poverty, based on income and nutritional targets, were influential. The qualification benchmark of

'destitution' was set at 60% of the poverty line income, which was itself determined by a household survey of twelve cities and related to the cost of purchasing basic food consumption needs. In Bangladesh, a Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping system was used to identify food insecure regions for the VGD (296 Upazilas/sub-districts of 464), while later analyses of vulnerability among the target group by NGOs influenced the move towards a 'graduated' microfinance programme, and thus away from the 'unproductive' poor. Social protection advocates in both Uganda and Zambia bemoan the low level and status of vulnerability data in each country, as these are seen as essential to the promotion and implementation of social protection policies. However, there are doubts here as to whether the recent moves to develop vulnerability assessments in each case will advance a policy focus on the poorest groups, especially the chronically poor. The recent assessments in Zambia are narrowly focused on food security and arguably too technocratic to promote wider debate. The recent Vulnerability Assessment in Uganda focuses on ways of predicting who may be poor in the next period rather than the longevity of poverty, although there are signs that discussions of vulnerability are moving beyond the 'Social Development' ghetto.

The fact that notions of destitution and ultrapoverty are accepted concepts within some policy circles provides a welcome signal that disaggregated views of poverty are taken seriously within some countries, and this might in part be driven by the fact that measurements of such types of poverty can be relatively easily derived from existing cross-sectional data. The same cannot be said for the issues of duration that underpin the notion of chronic poverty, and the finding in South Africa that "chronic poverty is not an analytical category used by policy-makers or corporate donors or NGOs in the design of their programmes" (Aliber, 2001:3), is reflected in all of our studies. It is likely that this lacuna is closely related in part to the lack of extensive panel datasets in the countries studied here.

In terms of how the causes of poverty are understood in key policy circles, it is notable that several interventions were driven in part by the conviction that the intended recipients were not to blame for their poverty. In Bangladesh, India, South Africa and Mozambique recipients were seen as victims of wider forces beyond their control – for example, Frelimo saw poverty as an externally imposed problem, mainly a problem of underdevelopment caused by colonialism and later conflict, with post-colonial Indian governments also identifying poverty as caused by poor colonial governance. In Bangladesh, the gendered dimension of poverty was a significant new realisation that emerged after the liberation war and through the famine of 1974. This resonates with the more general finding that popular and elite support for pro-poor policies rests to an extent on whether the causes of poverty are linked to a perceived 'lack of effort' by the poor or 'wider forces' (Gelbach and Pritchett 1997, Pritchett 2005).

However, contemporary poverty analysis tends to offer little support for such positions on causality. On the one hand, causality itself is not a central focus for mainstream poverty analysis, which prefers to focus on identifying the correlates and characteristics of poverty, through survey data and participatory research respectively. Second, there remains a bias towards identifying 'internal' and 'residual' factors as the key causal mechanisms behind impoverishment as opposed to external factors (e.g. Ruggeri Laderchi et al 2003, Townsend 1993). This reduces the extent to which wider forces are accounted for, and may thus reduce elite sympathy for the poorest groups.

Overall, poverty analysis and data emerge as an area of growing importance in relation to the politics of what works for the poorest. Understandings of causality have been driving factors, and poverty analysis could usefully shift to this focus, with attention to the relational as well as the residual factors likely to enhance elite sympathies. Enhanced panel datasets – in terms of scope, quality and quantity would greatly benefit efforts to make chronicity a policy issue. Finally, evidence of the successful impact of interventions on poverty may prove to be vital in protecting and extending programmes, suggesting that attention to baseline data and monitoring and evaluation will therefore be critical to long-term political sustainability.

4.4 Ideologies of development and discourses on poverty

Although each of our cases underlines the significance of prevailing discourses of development and poverty in shaping the response of regimes to the poorest groups, this is perhaps where contextual differences emerge most strongly. It is also revealed as a dimension of politics that is subject to significant shifts over time. Nonetheless, some broad categories emerge for comparison, particularly in terms of: shifting ideologies of development, elite concepts of the 'deserving' poor and their fear of creating dependency, and discourses around the proper role of the state in responding to the poorest groups.

In Bangladesh, the discourse that underpinned the VGD linked the concepts of mothers and soldiers in 'political motherhood', and emerged as the public response to the rape of an estimated 200,000 Bangladeshi women by Pakistani soldiers during the war of independence:

"Destitute mothers" became "symbols of the sacrifices made to give birth to the new nation...(and)...it is still possible in the present day to hear the VGD programme described as the 'dustho mata' or 'destitute mothers' card' (Hossain 2006: 10).

At the national level, the regime was instinctively conservative, but nationalistic, and forced to respond to a context of crisis, not least around state legitimacy following the failure of the first independence regime to deal with the crisis. The programme was also welcomed locally, where local elites conceive of poverty as being morally unacceptable.

The programme's shift to a developmentalist approach – whereby micro-credit was introduced as a key component of the VGD, thus to some extent re-directing the programme towards the more capacitated rather than most destitute poor – was heavily influenced by "a new gender ideology favoured by donors, government and NGOs: ... a distinctly feminised grassroots capitalism", fuelled by the apparent success of the strong micro-credit NGOs in Bangladesh (e.g. Grameen Bank). This is also a shift that is apparent in relation to the Old Age Grant in South Africa, where the Minister for Social Development recently announced that "We have changed the paradigm within which we operate from welfarism to social development as reflected in our change of name" (cited in Aliber 2001:1), perhaps also heralding a stronger focus on the 'productive' than the 'unproductive' poor.

In the same year as the pragmatic regime in Bangladesh was introducing the VGF, Frelimo took power in Mozambique as a highly ideological leftist movement, with a state-centric modernisation and industrialisation strategy for development. The party imagined that poverty would be addressed through the modernisation of the economy – first state-led, latterly free market-led: "Economic institutions ... were expected to produce welfare services for the population ... the poor have mainly been defined as people in the countryside – peasants who have not yet been incorporated into modern forms of life" (Braathen and Palmero 2001: 279). This divide between the urban as "modern" and the rural as "underdeveloped", inherited from colonial thinking but given first a state-socialist and latterly a neo-liberal economic twist, made Mozambique "a 'bifurcated' state par excellence, and one could expect that the legacy of 'centralised despotism' would severely constrain the attempts to bring poverty and/or poor people's concerns into public policy-making" (*ibid*: 280).

In India, the notions of social justice and the modern conception of the welfare state that provides for all has been a theme running through the mainstream of Indian political discourse since the struggle for independence.²⁶ It became "the lodestar of the Constituent Assembly of India" in 1947, when "the leading lights of the Assembly were clear that without social and economic democracy, political democracy had no meaning in a poor country like

²⁶ Concepts of social security can also be traced in Indian social and philosophical thought for well over 1000 years (Irudaya Rajan 2004: 47).

India” (Kumar and Anand 2006: 9). Article 41 of the Constitution enjoins the State “within the limits of its economic capacity and development, to make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement...” (emphasis added) (*ibid.*).

While the emphasis in Indian development discourse in the 1950s was on economic development, the period of rising rural unrest of the late 1960s prompted Indira Gandhi’s Congress government to adopt the slogan “Eradicate Poverty” in 1971, which brought resounding electoral success. Poverty eradication was set as a central responsibility for the state and seen as a morally unacceptable phenomenon. Despite the move towards more market-orientated solutions to economic and social problems of the 1980s and 1990s, the association of modernisation with the principle of deepening of democracy and the welfare state paradigm continued, with social sector spending increasing further in the 1990s. More specifically, development policy in India has often been directed towards specific categories of citizen – for example, development policies in the 1960s were framed in terms of ‘victory to the soldier, victory to the peasant’. However, this politics of citizenship has taken a different turn more recently, with the rise of the BJP and accompanying politics of identity tending to distract from the politics of justice that underpinned earlier efforts to challenge inequalities and poverty.

The moral duty of the state to provide for its most vulnerable citizens is also a recurring theme amongst the southern African countries that have implemented social pensions. This was a key element of the discourse around the initial pension scheme in South Africa, and through subsequent parliamentary debates. A prime target here were soldiers, the ‘*outstryders*’ who had fought for the Boers in the Anglo-Boer war and whose current poverty was seen as the outcome of circumstances outside of their control, and as citizens were seen as ‘*primus inter pares*’ (Sagner 2000). The Lesotho pension was also modelled on a war veterans’ scheme. The government of Lesotho explicitly states its responsibility for the poorest groups, and links this to the prevailing discourse on poverty promoted by international agencies:

“It is the policy of the Lesotho Government to care for the most vulnerable group in the society, notably, senior citizens from the age of seventy years and above by providing social protection against old age. The aim of this policy is to increase the living standards and reduction of poverty, in line with the development strategies of Lesotho as outlined in the National Vision and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme.” (Lesotho Government, 2004.)

However, pensions in southern Africa should also be seen as part of regimes’ broader political project of development. In Lesotho, this involves an egalitarian, redistributive philosophy of the current government.²⁷ Nationalist and leftist political discourses played a significant role in South Africa and Namibia. However, this support for social pensions now sits in an uneasy relationship to the neoliberal focus of GEAR, the main development project of the South African government, suggesting a tension between welfarist and developmental approaches within the ruling regime that may (re)shape the Old Age Grant in future years.

The moral duty of the state to protect the poorest citizens has arguably been watered-down in Uganda and particularly Zambia, where discussions of social protection frequently draw attention to the state’s limited capacity to respond.

In both Uganda and Zambia, the prevailing discourse around issues of poverty and development tend to emphasise the importance of ‘productivity’ and assisting the ‘economically active’ poor. This discourse is evident in presidential and budgetary speeches, and emerges strongly in flagship poverty reduction programmes, such as the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture in Uganda (Hickey 2005) and agricultural subsidies for ‘vulnerable but viable farmers’ in Zambia, both of which exclude those chronically poor who

²⁷ In 2005, the free primary school education was extended to cover all years of primary school.

lack labour and other key assets. While there is a recognition within some policy circles in Uganda that some people were 'left behind' during the poverty-reducing growth spells of the early-mid 1990s, the persistence and deepening of poverty over the past three decades in Zambia has led to a tendency to generalise about the levels and duration of poverty, such that an apparent majority of Zambians see themselves as poor and deserving of assistance. This large middle ground of poor people raises problems for schemes that would seek to target particular sections of the poor. Finally, it is important to note that a negative view of the state strongly informs the dominant approach to social protection in each country, namely the World Bank's 'Social Risk Management' (SRM) approach. Applied to low-income countries, this approach tends to place the onus on communities to respond to their problems, rather than the state.

Synthesis

Overall, and although expressed discursively, political discourses around poverty and poverty policy have a material impact on policies designed to reach the poorest groups. This is most apparent in terms of shifting ideologies of development, elite conceptions of the 'deserving' poor and their fear of creating dependency amongst the poor, and discourses around the proper role of the state in responding to the poorest groups.

A wide range of development discourses can offer the ideological underpinning required for policies directed towards the poorest groups, from radical discourses of a leftist and anti-colonial character, through nationalist approaches of different political hues, to a focus on 'liberalisation with a human face'. To an extent this offers support to claims that:

"...the impulse for social protection experienced so deeply within society can be mobilised by any number of political tendencies or would-be aspirants to social and political power. This could be a political party of any stripe, a religious movement, a charismatic populist appealing to ethnic or caste identity, a warlord or a fascist" (Putzel 2002: 3).

Moreover, discourses change over time, with certain trajectories identified here having potentially contradictory implications for the politics of pro-poorest interventions. For example, a shift from a 'welfarist' to 'developmentalist' approach is apparent in several cases (Bangladesh, Mozambique, South Africa) including those where donors are keen *not* to advocate social protection as a welfarist response. This shift, which arguably distracts from a focus on the very poorest, is closely related to fears of creating dependency, and concerns over the fiscal and administrative capacities of the state in poor countries. Overlapping with this is a shift from a needs-based to a rights-based approach – e.g. South Africa, India – which implies a stronger role for key duty bearers such as the state, and seeks to secure a minimum standard of living for people as of right rather than as an act of charity or patronage (Piron 2004). The only constant over this time period appears to be an agreement in South Asia concerning the 'moral unacceptability' of extreme forms of poverty.

Although different, both of the above shifts in discourses of development emphasise an agency-centred understanding of how development and empowerment work, whereby the poor are cast as agents of their own recovery. Such discourses are problematic when the focus is the politics of what works for the poorest, partly because of the finding here that pro-poor advocates have played a limited role, and by the more general finding that the poorest groups are the ones most lacking the agency to represent themselves (Clever 2005, Wood 2003).

The cases underline the extent to which projects of nation-building have and continue to be closely related to the ideologies and practices of development in some poor countries. Several interventions emerged at critical moments in relation to processes of state formation and nation-building, with interventions often targeted (initially at least) towards those perceived to have acted as primary citizens, as through sacrifices made in war or more

general public service. This suggests that recent calls for nation-building to be brought back into focus are well founded (Ghani and Lockhart 2006).

A more consistent concern amongst political elites is a fear of creating dependency. This concern runs across both space and time, and can be seen to have directly shaped the policy measures discussed here. Devereux (2001) notes that the pension debate in South Africa has been framed in these terms for decades, and it closely informs the levels at which grants have been set. In Mozambique, the amount of the subsidy was extremely low initially, and continued to be deliberately set well below the minimum wage to discourage dependency. This issue also shapes the character of the goods provided through such interventions. So, the importance of avoiding dependency was also an argument used to justify the introduction of the policy – it was felt that the existing food provision policy did encourage dependency, whereas a cash subsidy would not, an argument that is only slowly gathering credibility in Zambia.²⁸ These fears may provide another example of where programmes may work politically without working for the poorest – as McCord (2005) points out in her analysis of public works programmes in South Africa, there is little evidence that setting transfers at such a low level is required to keep inclusion errors down, or fits with the aim of reducing severe forms of poverty. Actual evidence to support claims that dependency results from such policies is rarely available.

In part, this debate relates to fears that the state may crowd out either market- or community-based forms of response to the poorest, a belief that has interestingly characterised both the views of the National Party in South Africa and the World Bank's approach to social protection, which also warns against 'crowding-out' community-based initiatives. Given the historical centrality of some form of developmental state as a key driver of pro-poor policies (Leftwich 1995), and the tendency to see the state as morally responsible in many cases, this appears to be another moment where current mainstream development discourse is at odds with the historical evidence on the politics of social protection. Interestingly, survey evidence strongly suggests that citizens in southern Africa do tend to hold the state responsible for providing key social services (Bratton and Mattes 2003), and thus have a more active state in mind than does the current post-Washington consensus.

Finally, the apparently perennial tendency of elites to view certain groups as deserving and others as undeserving remains central to the politics of social protection. Selected categories of citizens have provided the focus in Bangladesh, Mozambique, India, South Africa and Namibia, both in current schemes and their historical antecedents (also see the PWAS in Zambia). How the state views the entwined processes of state and citizenship formation has been and continues to be critical.²⁹

4.5 Design and Implementation: critical issues

The following issues of design and implementation emerge as being politically significant: institutional fit, the use of existing policy channels, the political implications of design, with particular reference to targeting, and issues concerning the political impact of the programmes, with particular regards to closely related processes such as citizenship formation and clientelism, and state accountability and elite capture.

In Bangladesh, beneficiary selection is carried out at an extremely decentralised level, through a Union VGD women's selection committee and an Upazila VGD Implementation Committee. By the 2000s, Women Union Parishad Members were charged with selecting

²⁸ It was also argued for on the grounds of its flexibility – households could use cash for medical or educational as well as nutritional needs.

²⁹ As has been noted, the post-colonial state has yet to see its subjects as equal citizens before it, but rather tends to view them through various technologies of governmentality, including those related to development programmes (Corbridge et al 2005).

VGD beneficiaries. The Union committee prepares a list which then goes up the chain of command: to the Upazila and then to the district VGD committee chair (who is the District Commissioner) and to the Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate. The process of selecting VGD cardholders is informally scrutinised by the community as well as officially by all the relevant committees, NGO partners and monitors from WFP and the ministries. As a result, there is little controversy about who gets selected into the programme – although there is always concern about who gets left out (see del Ninno 2000 and Akhter et al 2004).

It is important to note that women exert considerable agency in efforts to gain inclusion in the programme, particularly in terms of actively lobbying local elites and NGO staff to be selected (Martin and Hulme 2003). Another study found more than two-thirds who attempted but failed to join were told their turn would come, and that “persistent expression of demand by applicants played a very important role” (Akhter et al 2004: 96). At least part of the politics of the VGD programme is thus a politics of claims – although most often framed not as rights but as moral and customary obligations – and made on local representatives under face-to-face conditions. The programme thus builds on key social characteristics of hierarchy and patronage to help meet its objectives. This becomes clearest when it is recognised that many Union Parishad officials actually keep the cards that entitle the recipients to programme membership; this means they retain overall control, and the resources of the programme remain in their gift.

The selection of beneficiaries for income generation training creates an enduring tension between the political and the developmental goals of the programme. It is usually the older and less physically and mentally able women who are excluded by BRAC. It is difficult for the VGD to fulfil local political goals involving the display of sympathy to the helpless elderly poor as well as achieve sustainability and high rates of ‘graduation’ into conventional development programmes.

Overall, targeting within sub-districts seems to meet both political and technical demands. Mass poverty enables this, as there are many more technically-eligible Bangladeshi women than can be met by the programme’s resources, so it is possible for local elites to exercise patronage and discretion in the selection of individual beneficiaries from within a pool of people, all of whom qualify for VGD. Elites are subject to a high degree of community scrutiny of their actions and total capture is avoided. Where they exercise latitude to serve political ends, this frequently converges with local norms of procedural justice, such as the distribution of some VGD food to women without VGD cards who beg for it on distribution days.³⁰

There is also a particular politics concerning how funds are targeted to particular sub-districts. While the programme’s funding is divided evenly between WFP, bilateral donors and the Government, their different modes of distribution are instructive: while WFP and other donors target their resources to areas designated ‘very highly’ or ‘highly’ food-insecure, some of the resources put in by Government go to areas which are less food-insecure, albeit targeted at women vulnerable to food insecurity therein. This difference neatly summarises the major political differences between each funder: for donors, including WFP, the goal is straightforwardly that of maximising poverty reduction and food security impacts. Government, by contrast, needs to maximise its influence with the local political class, as well as to enable them to reach as many very poor women as possible. These different goals frequently create tensions, not least over whether the resources being distributed are charity or developmental resources: governmental actors tend to treat them as the former, while donors and NGOs prefer the latter.

The relocation of Mozambique’s GAPVU from the Ministry of Finance to the Secretariat for Social Action ensured that it would sit in a ministry with a clear mandate for looking after the

³⁰ It might also be that the VGD programme remains relatively free from damaging levels of corruption because other government schemes offer greater resources for local elite corruption or diversion.

needy. However, the fact that this ministry's budgetary share is less than 2% of total Government expenditure on priority areas (namely agriculture, education, health, infrastructures and governance), raised fears that the programme might become marginalised. These appeared to be realised during the 1990s, when it took INAS six years to persuade the treasury to raise the amount of the cash transfer above its very low level. Following the replacement of GAPVU with INAS, there has been less evidence of local level corruption, although figures for beneficiaries indicate a tendency of local community leaders to enrol relatives on the scheme. Evaluation evidence suggests that the social status of beneficiaries has improved – the need for them to engage in stigmatised activities such as begging is reduced and their capacity to engage in community action such as local saving schemes has increased.

In India, according to the Asian Development Bank, "Evaluations of the NOAPS scheme have shown the scheme is well functioning in terms of targeting and implementation without corruption and interference" (ADB 2004: 30), and it compares well to other resource-transfer schemes in India in terms of low levels of leakage and misappropriation (Farrington et al 2003: 1, 8-9). This relative lack of corruption is closely related to the fact that benefits are transferred directly into the accounts of beneficiaries, but also because the amounts involved are small. As such, "...the other side of this particular coin is that the economically and socially low status of beneficiaries, and their spatially sparse distribution, makes them of little interest to politicians as potential 'vote banks', so that there is little political incentive to expand the scheme" (Nayak et al 2005: 249). Moreover, the politics of patronage is not entirely absent, with beneficiaries usually selected through the recommendations of local leaders or local middlemen – one study revealed that many eligible families had not received their pensions owing to lack of contact with persons having local influence (Nayak et al 2005: 255). The targeting process could also be improved, to the extent that (a) the criteria for identifying destitute are not clear and different states follow their own norms and (b) birth certificates are still issued only to a small part of the population, making documenting proof of age a cumbersome and arbitrary process (ADB 2004).

It seems that the success of the design and implementation is state-specific, and shaped by the politics of decentralisation – particularly concerning the strength of local governance and the issue of centre-local co-ordination. The scheme works at its best in states where the system of local self-governance (Panchayati system) is working well, as opposed to those where decentralised local governance is weak.³¹ In terms of central-local relations, there are too many entities involved in implementation without clear demarcation of responsibilities, with the result that there is limited ownership within the implementing agencies (ADB 2004).³²

In South Africa, pressure from Treasury over the fiscal sustainability of the pensions surfaces continuously in the debate, with an announcement in 2004 that the current rate of increase of social grants cannot be maintained beyond the medium term (Veenstra, 2004, cited in Pelham 2007). However, the Old Age Grant has been confirmed by academics to have had an important redistributive effect amongst the South African population. It is the most effective social programme in targeting and reaching economically vulnerable groups (Ferreira 1999, Case and Deaton 1998, Ardington and Lund 1995, Haarmann, 2000, cited in Pelham 2007). It is possible to infer from Sagner's (2000) research that the pension helped *restore* social networks, particularly in relation to the moral significance attached to the

³¹ A further study suggests that the success of the NOAPS depended largely on the attitudes and motivations of the implementing agencies (CARD 2002a: 94, cited in Kumar and Anand 2006).

³² The ADB study notes that: "...although the Ministry of Rural Development is the executing agency at the center, the agencies at the state level may be departments of labor, social welfare, or medical. These state departments have little or no interaction with the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs), nor do they have any role in the flow of funds that are transferred directly from the center to the DRDAs. Consequently, state implementing agencies have little ownership in the NOAPS" (2004: 30).

convention of pooling pension money, which was also a sign of valuing 'family welfare' over 'self-interest.' In return the pensioner gains respect and status, and also benefits from closer integration into familial/kinship networks. As 75 per cent of recipients are women, this may have longer-term implications for the gender power balance. The impact of HIV/AIDS and the growing number of 'AIDS orphans' may make the role of the pension increasingly important, by enabling older people to care for grandchildren.

In Namibia, the universalist approach has been challenged within current debates, with some raising the possibility of targeting or means-testing to reduce the fiscal burden of the universal pension. While this has obvious appeal in terms of the 'deserving poor' discourse, it would risk a serious political challenge from the wealthy white minority and perhaps also the growing black business elite, whose taxes are an important source of finance for the pension and who would be excluded by any meaningful poverty targeting (Devereux 2001: 22-25). Over the long-term, a universal rather than targeted benefit may be better for the poorest groups. It is also interesting to note that the pension in Namibia is located within one of the more mainstream ministries, namely the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

The pension scheme in Lesotho appears to have been designed with a mixture of forethought and abandon concerning issues of political sustainability. On the one hand, the scheme is designed in a way that allows local MPs to claim credit for its distribution. This assured its passage through parliament, although galvanising the opposition of those MPs elected through proportional representation. However, the rushed introduction of the pension in Lesotho has meant that a wide range of bureaucratic and administrative issues were not clearly thought through. At worst, these oversights may well leave the programme vulnerable to inefficiency, delays and corruption, and also undermine its long-term political sustainability. For example, the programme does not acknowledge issues of security (during pension delivery), justice, and potential fraudulent claims or corruption on the part of administrators. There is no clearly defined structure of administration, despite concerns being raised over this in parliamentary debate (and later covered in supplementary Regulations after the passing of the Bill). The official complaints system is unclear and inappropriate, with overlapping responsibilities accorded to community chiefs. Critically, there is also no process of monitoring or evaluation of the pension, so that government is not able to check its performance over time. Furthermore, it has failed to learn from the experience gained through another government cash transfer programme, the Public Assistance.³³ This *ad hoc* approach has already stimulated many concerns amongst pensioners and government officials alike. Officials have already raised questions concerning issues of administration, registration and delays over delivery, the complaints procedure, and pensioners' fears about security, thus raising the possibility that local political support may be fragile.

Efforts to mainstream social protection in Uganda and Zambia have also raised some important issues concerning policy design, particularly in terms of (a) the different approaches to mainstreaming and (b) the choice of institutional champions. There are a variety of different approaches to mainstreaming policy agendas, and our cases illustrate two of these, namely the 'cross-cutting' approach in Uganda, whereby the PRSP revision process was divided into a series of core areas and cross-cutting themes including social protection, and the 'stand-alone' approach in Zambia, where social protection was one of the key sectors. In Uganda, the Social Protection Task Force sought to involve the Ministry of Finance, target key ministers and mobilise international consultants. However, it was still seen as owned by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), a Ministry with little capacity and limited experience of promoting policy issues. It is notable that gender had more success than social protection as a cross-cutting issue, to some extent

³³ The Public Assistance consists of a monthly transfer of M100 (£8.33), free medical costs and a coffin, for the poorest citizens assessed, registered and administered by the District Health Officer. When a beneficiary of the PA reaches 70, they graduate over to the Pension and new beneficiaries enrolled on the PA.

because it had a good level of buy-in among key actors within the MoF, and because the previous two rounds of PPA research had strongly flagged gender as a key issue.

In Zambia, the key strategy has been to produce a sector-wide plan for social protection that would be coherent and attractive to donor funding and builds on the success of existing social protection projects. It has only lately become concerned with the issue of how to ensure wider GoZ ownership of this policy agenda, and has not engaged with the difficult task of building institutional capacity within the MCDSS beyond the provision of social protection training workshops.

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. The cross-cutting approach insists that the attention of more powerful policy actors is sought by a smaller advocacy group; the stand-alone approach may allow a new sector to display technical competence and make a reasonable budgetary case, but also seems to have bred a degree of insularity that prevents moves towards the wider engagement that will ultimately be required for social protection policies to be mainstreamed. While the former approach requires a great deal of capacity to work well, the latter can be treated as a more technocratic affair. A key issue here is that social protection is a difficult policy agenda to mainstream in both technical and political terms. Technically, the social protection agenda is: largely the creation of international agencies; fairly new; also poorly defined and very broad; and comes with a lexicon of technocratic terminology. As such, the time-period offered by a PRSP revision process has proved to be too short to secure the requisite level of exposure and coverage required for an agenda to take hold. Politically, its promotion has tended to rely on the weakest policy actors available to take it forward, namely social sector ministries. Overall, the suggestion that states should undergo a specific capacity-audit – which, if failed, should deter them from undertaking social protection (Besley et al 2003) – would not yield positive results if applied only to the key policy champions in these countries. As such, and although there are signs of increased political attunement amongst donors in each case – as with efforts to build the capacity of MGLSD in Uganda and to develop a wider political constituency for social protection in Zambia – there remains a significant gap between these efforts and the underlying politics required to catalyse and sustain successful pro-poor reforms.

Synthesis

The issue of institutional fit does emerge as important. While the role of social sector agencies is critical in terms of providing a natural home and advocacy base for policies targeted at the poorest and most vulnerable groups, such actors lack the institutional weight to promote or sustain significant policy initiatives. Securing political support from the more powerful actors within Kanbur's 'Ministry of Finance' tendency is essential, but very difficult for actors that have historically been marginalised within policy processes. Such ministries are prone to frequent changes of leader and also mandate, and are often outside the plethora of capacity-building initiatives that donors have funded over recent years.³⁴ In terms of getting the right institutional mix between different policy actors, the Lesotho case may offer a way forward here, given that the Department of Pensions is situated within the Ministry of Finance. Similarly, it appears that GAPVU in Mozambique received stronger political protection and greater and more sustained increases in the value of the programme while it sat within Finance as opposed to a social sector ministry. The case of Namibia offers a further variant, in that traditionally 'strong' and 'weak' variants of the civil society tendency have been institutionally merged in a single Ministry of Health and Social Services.

It is very instructive to note that many of the success stories here were designed to build on existing policy initiatives – this is particularly the case with the pensions, but there are also signs of this happening in Zambia, where efforts to generate a cash-transfer scheme are

³⁴ DFID recently withdrew its capacity-building support for MGLSD due to what it perceived to be the slow rate of progress.

working through the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme. At one level, this reinforces the argument that the trajectory of colonial and post-colonial rule can play a defining role in relation to contemporary forms of social protection in Africa, and might indicate a degree of path dependency in policy choices. Such policy instruments offer windows of opportunity through which to launch 'new' initiatives and are arguably more likely to secure commitment than new initiatives.

In terms of the politics of policy/programme design, two of the key issues concern decentralisation and targeting. The level of decentralisation employed within each case varies, and few simple conclusions can be drawn concerning the links between these levels and the relative success of the programmes. On the one hand, there appears to be positive relationship in Bangladesh and India, where the programmes converge positively with local political cultures of accountability and devolved levels of authority. On the other hand, the South African case seems to have benefited from a move towards centralising provision within a central state agency. Although the defining factors here are likely to be highly contextual, general issues of local administrative capacity, central-local relations and political culture appear to play important roles across cases.

In terms of targeting, the cases analysed here offer little direct evidence in support of Gelbrach and Pritchett's theory that the more closely targeted the programme, the less the poor will get. Although the universalism of the Namibian pension has undoubtedly helped secure wider political buy-in (Devereux 2001), the popularity of universal approaches does not necessarily imply the obverse for targeted programmes. Both Mozambique and Bangladesh have sustained their programmes for well over one or two decades respectively, and have seen their scope and funding rise over that time (albeit to a lesser extent in Mozambique). The case of India is similar, in that the amount has not been raised centrally, but has been virtually doubled at state level. The fact that the rate of increase for the means-tested pension in South Africa has been set at above the rate of inflation further suggests that targeted programmes can become politically sustainable. With the exception of India, all of these countries have experienced economic decline at various points during the lifetime of these programmes. In the future, it will be instructive to examine the extent to which the targeted and means-tested character of the South African leads the Old Age Grant to come under greater pressure than its universalist counterpart in Namibia.

However, some of the longer-lasting targeted programmes do include large numbers of those from the larger and arguably more politically important group of 'vulnerable' rather than destitute people (Nelson 2003). This also appears to be the case in Zambia, where there is a greater concern within policy circles concerning the problems of graduation and also downwards mobility than the depth or severity of poverty. This again constitutes a reminder that the poor cannot be seen as a political constituency. From this position, governments are more likely to target named groups or social categories such as the elderly, whether or not they are the poorest. Moreover, the character of the beneficiary group may be a further mediating factor concerning the political sustainability of targeted programmes, with the elderly being widely recognised as 'deserving' of their benefit.

There are a number of ways in which the design of these programmes has sought to integrate both technical and political imperatives, in ways that have helped secure political sustainability. This occurred in Lesotho, with regards to allowing constituency MPs to retain credit, and in Bangladesh, where the localised distribution of the IGVD has dovetailed with the political imperatives of the patronage system. Although much has been written about the perils of patronage for social protection, there seems to be greater room for accommodation between contrary forms of politics than usually predicted. Moreover, such approaches may at the same time be encouraging shifts from clientelism to citizenship, and challenge existing power relations in favour of marginal groups. It is notable that the Bangladeshi programme requires that would-be recipients must engage actively and lobby on their own behalf to enforce the contract. As our case-study research noted, much here:

“...depends on the willingness and ability to articulate and assert need – a highly political act – in a context of patriarchy and social hierarchy. This undoubtedly helps to reduce the possibility that the ineligible will be selected, and it also creates strong incentives on local elites to maintain pressure on central Government to disburse the necessary resources.” (Hossain 2006)

As with other cases that require political mobilisation to take effect (e.g. Joshi and Moore 2000), there is the potential for genuine benefits here in terms of strengthening the political capabilities of poor groups and increasing levels of state accountability. In South Africa, some research suggests that pension transfers helped fund the *restoration* of social networks. In relation to this, Sagner and Mtati (1999) argue that the practice of pension sharing in South Africa can develop obligations as well as fulfil the rights of citizenship. Here, the pension has provided older people with a means by which they can be re-integrated into the household, linking to wider calls for cohesion. However, it is possible that the pension in South Africa is not playing as unifying a role as it might. For those in formal employment there is a broader and more developed range of social insurance benefits and, given their employment situation, there is greater opportunity to extend this range of benefits through measures available in the workplace. This partition tends to reify rather than challenge the disparity between rich and poor (Olivier, 2003:6, cited in Pelham 2007). Others note that pensions may lead to increased inter-generational exploitation and tension (Sagner and Mtati 1999). More broadly, the general rule that social policies create constituencies that will actively lobby for the continuation of policies appears to have already begun: as has been noted, “Once governments have made a commitment to pension provision, it is difficult to stop” (HelpAge 2004: 38).

4.6 Did the intervention emerge in relation to a ‘political contract’ between state and citizenry, or has it come to form part of such a contract?

As discussed earlier, one way of thinking about the politics of social protection is in terms of a ‘contract’ between the state and citizenry, whereby a tacit agreement is made concerning state responsibility for certain groups, either permanently or in certain circumstances. The basis of these contracts might vary, but tends to involve moments of political change that lead to new political settlements and a degree of popular mobilisation that acts as either an impetus for the contract being formed, and/or its protection over time. Of the cases discussed here, the pensions in South Africa and Namibia derive and draw strength from such a contract, while the scheme in India is moving towards this position. The VGD in Bangladesh is underpinned by a two-fold contract between recipients and local elites on the one hand, and between local and national elites on the other. Although we lack clear evidence that there would be significant popular mobilisation against efforts to roll-back these policies, there are some signs that recipients would act as empowered citizens in this regard. The case of state-citizen contracts around development policy in Mozambique is confused by the high-level of donor-dependency, and it is as yet too early to judge for Lesotho, Zambia and Uganda.

In an analytical sense, the trajectory of the pension scheme in South Africa (and Namibia) closely reflects the historical development of different contracts and settlements between state and citizens over time. It was originally intended as a means of extending the contract of the incumbent Labour Party regime to white working-class voters, thus increasing their loyalty towards the state (Sagner 2000: 527). The discourse was one of “the state’s moral duty to help its needy older citizens and the entitlement of poverty-stricken older whites to such public assistance” (Sagner 2000: 527-528), although it is questionable as to whether this constituted a ‘gift’ of reciprocity, as opposed to the establishment of an entitlement. In the 1990s, these policies were transformed into a progressive form of social protection aimed at reversing previous discrimination as the terms of the broader social contract altered. The erosion of apartheid, including the homelands policy, brought more citizens within the

contract, a process accelerated and institutionalised in South Africa through the instalment of the ANC. This was part of a wider move by the new regime to forge a new political settlement, characterised by an extensive debate calling for a basic income grant or household grants for poor families, and the enshrining of access to social security as a right in the Bill of Rights (Olivier, 2003, cited in Pelham 2007).

The VGD programme in Bangladesh does link the poor to the state – but not in a simple political contract:

“One part of the contract thus connects the very poor to the community, requiring effective political leaders to attract the resources necessary to address the local problem. The second part of the contract connects the local elite to the central Government and the institutions and organisations that implement its programmes, including its partners among the donors and NGOs.” (Hossain 2006: 21)

At local level the contract may be as much social as political, relying on traditions of customary obligations of elites to provide famine relief that have evolved locally over many generations. More broadly, the programme was institutionalised by the second post-independence regime, still very much in the context of nation-building and establishing general legitimacy for the state. Nonetheless, the programme’s longevity and roots in the early crises of the new nation suggest “something of an established norm that the government is ... responsible for supporting the poorest and most vulnerable with food aid. Vitality, Government has demonstrated that it can manage this important task” (Hossain 2006) – thus setting the standard for future regimes. As discussed above, it is the only policy discussed here that involves active lobbying amongst the recipients, a powerful means of ensuring local level accountability.

In Mozambique, although it seems likely that there would be some resistance to the removal of the food subsidy programme, the formation of a durable political contract or substantial policy constituency is questionable. The severely limited coverage is perhaps a problem here, as perhaps is the high level of donor input to the scheme. As de Waal (1996) notes with regards the formation of anti-famine contracts in Africa over the twentieth century, these only occurred in ‘aid-free’ zones.

In India, the NOAPS clearly forms part of a longer-term understanding that it is the duty of the state to care for the poor. However, whether this has gone further to constitute a contract, and whether there is a mobilised policy constituency, is not clear. There appears to be little in the way of an organised elderly citizen’s lobby or CSO network. Nonetheless, it does have a clear resonance with elite-popular relations, and has become one of the important parameters for the political elite to express their attentiveness to the problem of the elderly. It is even further used by some elites to claim that they are acting selflessly for social justice by helping lower caste recipients in this way. Although this reflects a local rather than a national-level political contract, it is notable that since the introduction of the NOAPS, the government went on to announce a “National Policy on Older Persons” in 1999, through which the regime claims direct responsibility for pensioners.³⁵

³⁵ The policy “aims to strengthen the legitimate place of older people in society and to help older people live the last phase of their lives with purpose, dignity, and peace. The State will support older persons, provide protection against abuse and exploitation, seek their participation and provide care services to improve the quality of their lives” (HelpAge International 2004: 81).

Table 2: The politics of what works in reducing poverty: key findings by case

| Programme → | Bangladesh VGD | Mozambique GAPVU/INAS | India NOAPS | Lesotho Pensions | South Africa Old Age Grant | Namibia Pensions | Uganda Social Protection | Zambia Social Protection |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| Dimensions ↓ | | | | | | | | |
| Context (when policy / programme was introduced) | Politics as crisis (post- famine and post-conflict) Military rule (leader brought in by coup in 1975, the same year that programme was introduced) | Politics as crisis (ongoing civil conflict) Single-party system (multi- party elections introduced from 1994) Latter phase of structural adjustment | Politics as usual Multi-party democracy End of electoral cycle Ruling party under electoral pressure | Politics as usual Mid-term of electoral cycle Multi-party parliamentary democracy within a monarchical constitution Dominant ruling party Mixed electoral system (partial PR) | (a) <i>Old scheme</i> Politics as usual Close to elections (b) <i>New scheme</i> Post-apartheid democracy Introduced just after elections Dominant ruling party | (a) <i>Old scheme</i> Politics as usual No elections (b) <i>New scheme</i> Post-colonial democracy Introduced in election year Dominant ruling party | Mid-term of electoral cycle Review of PEAP 'Hegemonic' party system; set for move to multi-partyism Presidential 'commitment' to the poverty agenda | End of electoral cycle Review of NDP Party in power weakly constituted Party system: creates disincentives to pro-poor policy making Ongoing Constitutional review |
| Drivers of Change | Famine and conflict, especially the plight of women therein Local elites who gain legitimacy from programme Cross-party | Urbanisation Donor agenda around the social dimensions of adjustment Social Sector Ministry Finance | Electoral pressures on ruling party Trade union movement, although little other civil society pressure; very few NGOs of/for the | Populist prime minister Possible <i>quid pro quo</i> for increasing income tax base Some resistance from PR MPs | (a) <i>Old scheme</i> Maintain dominant ideology of racial discrimination Private sector (mining corps) Limited civil | (a) <i>Old scheme</i> As South Africa, plus: Need to gain legitimacy for external military involvement | Donor agencies Marginal social sector ministry Little buy-in / some opposition from Finance Ministries Civil society weakly engaged | Donor agencies Marginal social sector ministry Little buy-in / some opposition from Finance Ministries |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| | <p>support helps sustain the programme</p> <p>Large NGO influenced development of the programme</p> | <p>Ministry resisted increase in size of transfer</p> | <p>elderly</p> <p>States raise size of transfer</p> <p>A shift from the politics of justice to the politics of identity reduces focus on material issues</p> | <p>Donors now offer broad support, except IMF</p> | <p>society pressure except unions</p> <p>Seeking to deepen electoral base</p> <p>A means of controlling urbanisation</p> <p><i>(b) New scheme</i> Reformist regime after end of apartheid</p> <p>Strong civil society support for social grants</p> <p>Treasury concerns that increases not sustainable</p> | <p><i>(b) New scheme</i> Reformist regime after end of colonial administration</p> | <p>Mixed response from private sector</p> <p>Little policy history</p> <p>Some mainstream social sector ministries opposed to a specific/targeted approach</p> | <p>Civil society weakly engaged, although unions could play a stronger role</p> <p>Pilot-project success</p> |
| Policy spaces | <p>Executive / bureaucratic</p> <p>Closed</p> | <p>Council of Ministers</p> <p>Closed</p> | <p>Parliament</p> | <p>Parliament</p> <p>Very little time allowed for debate</p> | <p>Parliament</p> <p>Well-debated</p> <p>Ministry of Social Development</p> | <p>Parliament</p> | <p>Social Protection Task Force</p> <p>Invited</p> <p>Global SRM seminars</p> | <p>SP-Sector Advisory Group</p> <p>Invited</p> <p>Global SRM seminars</p> |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Poverty knowledge</p> | <p>Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping system was used to identify food insecure regions</p> <p>Poverty seen as product of external causes</p> <p>Limited panel data</p> | <p>Poverty line used to define destitution and target groups</p> <p>Poverty seen as product of external causes</p> <p>Limited panel data</p> | <p>Poverty seen as product of external causes</p> <p>Some good panel datasets</p> | <p>Absence of baseline data and monitoring and evaluation means that poverty impact will be difficult to track</p> <p>Limited panel data</p> | <p>Pro-poor outcomes of the pension could now help protect the policy</p> <p>Poverty seen as product of external causes</p> <p>One good panel dataset</p> | <p>Pro-poor outcomes of the pension could now help protect the policy</p> <p>Poverty seen as product of external causes</p> <p>Limited panel data</p> | <p>Limited data on vulnerability</p> <p>Social protection seen as a complex, technocratic agenda</p> <p>Some good panel datasets</p> | <p>Limited data on vulnerability</p> <p>Social protection seen as a complex, technocratic agenda</p> <p>Limited panel data</p> |
| <p>Discourse</p> | <p>Little ideology of development</p> <p>Poverty as 'morally unacceptable'</p> <p>Nation-building project underway</p> | <p>Nation-building project underway</p> <p>Waning leftist influence</p> <p>Concerns with breeding dependency</p> | <p>Pro-development discourse based on leftists/anti-colonial tendencies</p> <p>'Liberalisation with a human face'</p> | <p>Moral duty of the state to protect the poor</p> <p>Reciprocity – a reward for the elderly</p> <p>Links to poverty reduction</p> <p>Towards a welfare state</p> | <p>(a) <i>Old scheme</i> Patriarchy</p> <p>Deserving poor</p> <p>Moral duty of the state to protect the poor</p> <p>Concerns with breeding dependency</p> <p>(b) <i>New scheme</i> Nationalism</p> <p>Pension framed as a</p> | <p>(a) <i>Old scheme</i> As South Africa</p> <p>(b) <i>New scheme</i> Framed as a right</p> <p>Left wing ideology of</p> | <p>Concerns with breeding dependency</p> <p>Some groups definitely seen as 'deserving', although a deepening bias towards the 'productive' poor</p> <p>Growth-oriented policy regimes</p> <p>Nation-building project still underway</p> | <p>Concerns with breeding dependency</p> <p>Some groups definitely seen as 'deserving', although a deepening bias towards the 'productive' poor</p> <p>Growth-oriented policy regimes</p> <p>Little sense of a nation-building project</p> |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|---|
| | | | | | right Some links to leftist ideology although neoliberalism now the dominant development project | regime Nationalism Pension framed as a right | | |
| Design and Implementation | Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to the Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation Local elites central to disbursements Targeted at destitute women | Began within Ministry of Finance, then moved to Secretariat of State for Social Action Rolled out in regional capitals Targeted at destitute households | Located within Ministry of Rural Development at national level State level : departments of labour, social welfare, or medical Centralised approach Payments made direct to accounts | Located within Dept of Pensions in Min of Finance Based on an existing pensions scheme Universal for all citizens above 70 years of age Little planning on key design issues | Located within the Social Security Agency, Min of Social Development Based on an existing pensions scheme Centralised approach Means-tested by income | Located within Ministry of Health and Social Services Based on an existing pensions scheme Universal for all citizens above 60 years of age Electronic identification of recipients | Located within Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development | Located within Ministry of Community Development and Social Services Existing policy channel for social protection |
| A political contract? | A dual-levelled contract: between local elites and local communities, and between local and national elites. | Not clear; donor funding an obstacle here? | Development and prevention from extreme poverty part of the original post-independence settlement | Too early to say | (a) <i>Old scheme</i> Extension of contract to poor whites and soldiers (b) <i>New</i> | (a) <i>Old scheme</i> (b) <i>New</i> | Too early to say A broad contract around certain development issues exists, predominantly | Too early to say The PWAS could be a basis for a contract to be developed, as |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|-------------------------------|--|
| | | | <p>Has deteriorated</p> <p>Part of the Bill of Rights, and limited evidence that pension is now seen as a right</p> | | <p><i>scheme</i> Yes – extension of contract to black majority</p> <p>Part of the Bill of Rights</p> | <p><i>scheme</i> Yes – extension of contract to black majority</p> | <p>with rural populations</p> | <p>could framing social protection as a 'right' within the constitutional review</p> |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|-------------------------------|--|

5. Key findings: an overview

This section returns to the overall problematic established in Section One, concerning the need to (a) understand the particular forms of politics that matter for successful poverty reduction initiatives in developing countries, and (b) assess the extent to which today's more 'politically attuned' thinking around development policy was capturing such lessons. An important caveat here is that, as with all things political, *context matters*. It has proved very difficult to mobilise any general conclusions that can offer adequate explanations for the particular reasons for success in each case. The most that can be done is to identify some general tendencies which remain tentative in lieu of further empirical testing and theoretical refinement. With this in mind, we now outline the most instructive points that can be drawn out of the above comparative analysis.

In terms of drivers of change, structural factors are central, suggesting a need to focus on the *longue durée*. This does not make things easier in terms of reaching the poorest any faster, or in terms of giving development agencies a sense of optimism regarding the pace of change. However, it may lead to more realistic expectations of what constitutes the politics of the possible for different regimes at particular points in time. Moreover, it is clear that events matter. The 'politics of crisis' rather than 'politics as usual' can provide more fertile ground for pro-poor policies to emerge (e.g. famine in Bangladesh), a different finding to more general social sector reforms, which have been found to take place more in a context of 'politics as usual' (Nelson 2000: 8). The potential and perhaps sudden opening of windows of opportunity needs to be constantly monitored and responded to. Moreover, political events matter even more, particularly when they lead to changes in the terms of political settlements. It is at these moments that the political space to act is expanded (e.g. because of the legitimacy of new regimes, absence/defeat of opposition) and contracts between states and citizens may come up for re-negotiation.

Although elections can offer significant incentives for regimes to implement pro-poor policies, this is only likely to occur in contexts where well-institutionalised, programmatic political parties are in a position to capitalise on this, most notably from a position of electoral dominance. Indeed, actors from political society emerge as having historically played more significant roles in promoting pro-poorest policies than those from civil society (unions aside). This suggests the need to rethink the current civil society paradigm in international development, and to re-focus more clearly on political actors, particularly political elites, leaders and political parties. It might also suggest that the apparent crisis with representative democracy, for which various forms of participatory democracy are seen as the remedies, is somewhat exaggerated, and that agents and processes of representative democracy exert a degree of disciplinary power over power-holders that more discretionary participatory processes lack (e.g. Brown 2004). However, civil society 'participation' of poor people may be of more importance to pro-poor policy in terms of sustaining policies over time and ensuring their accountable delivery, rather than in their conception and implementation.

The design of pro-poor policies carries strong political implications. First, our cases offer further evidence that targeted interventions are not as politically problematic as some have argued (Ravallion 2003), perhaps particularly so if they are targeted broadly enough to include some of the vulnerable 'middle-poor' as opposed to only the poorest.³⁶ Second, there are strong incentives to build 'new' policies on existing ones, for reasons of ownership, continuity and also to further develop any contractual relationship/s that may have been established around the existing channel. Finally, policies and programmes can and perhaps

³⁶ A further way through this debate is to consider the embedding of targeted initiatives within broad programs, as with health reforms in Colombia, which focused on efficiency and quality as well as pro-poor measures (Nelson 2000: 25). 'Issue linkage' thus acts as a means by which policies can appeal across class-boundaries, as with participatory budgeting in Brazil, which sought not only to bring in marginal groups and areas into decision-making processes and shift public service spending in a pro-poor direction – it also spoke loudly to middle-class concerns with municipal waste and corruption.

should be designed in a way that maintains political as well as technical optimality. This might involve working with – rather than in direct opposition to – local patronage structures, especially where there is evidence that the moral reciprocity and forms of accountability that can reside in such relationships supersede the exploitative characteristics of the same relationships. Although there clearly remains scope for the latter to take over – as with GAPVU at one point – this relates to the wider point that the politics of reaching the poorest can involve virtuous circles.

The institutional location and inter-institutional arrangements for delivering pro-poorest policies are critical. Although the issue of ‘fit’ is central, it might be less important than ensuring that such programmes offer serious roles and responsibilities to different policy tendencies, with particular care taken to include those with the greatest political capacity. Hybrid institutional solutions should be further explored here. In terms of decentralisation, the evidence is mixed, and contextual issues of administrative capacity, political culture and particular histories of state formation emerge as central. Along with the growing evidence that decentralisation can only be linked positively with poverty reduction in a handful of cases (e.g. Crook and Sverrisson 2001), this might suggest that the enthusiasm for decentralisation amongst many donor agencies is grounded more in ideology than empirical evidence.

Recent debates concerning policy spaces and poverty data might be less important than focusing more clearly on policy actors and discourses. None of the existing initiatives studied here evolved from ‘open’ policy spaces that had been claimed by pro-poor advocates, and few were catalysed by new findings/data. It is likely, however, that the absence of certain approaches to poverty analysis – particularly concerning the absence of panel data, a lack of appreciation of the structural/external causes of poverty and minimal attention paid in policy circles to the problem of chronic poverty – constitute genuine obstacles. Each issue constitutes a significant opportunity for action amongst donors, states and academics.

Understanding the links between political discourses of development and pro-poor policies is highly instructive. Focusing on discourse offers a window onto the political project of the regime and of the attitudes of the political class more broadly. Such insights can be very useful in terms of framing policy agendas in productive alignment with progressive elements of mainstream political discourse.³⁷ Several cases demonstrate the ways how mainstream discourses have shifted in ways that tend to elide the specific problems faced by the poorest groups, most notably the shift from welfarism to developmentalism, and towards agent-centred policies and frames of analysis. Given the danger that the MDGs will encourage a focus on the ‘easily-assisted poor’, such approaches need to be challenged if the poorest are to become a key focus. Finally, a focus on elites and political discourse can help remind us that ‘what works politically’, in terms of development policy agendas, is not the same as what might work for the poorest.

There is an increasingly important global dimension to the politics of reaching the poorest. Global actors and thinking have a significant influence over national-level policies in highly-indebted countries in particular, although international movements can catalyse policy change even in more established and autonomous democracies.³⁸ What is concerning to note here, is that the current international policy agendas on poverty reduction not only pay such little attention to the poorest strata amongst the poor, but also offer prescriptions that have a limited resonance, at best, with the political findings here. A prime example of this is the World Bank’s model of SRM, which emphasises the role of communities rather than the state, and of the transient rather than chronically poor. The apparent reluctance to promote the role of developmental states is particularly problematic.

³⁷ Policies tend to be targeted at particular categories of ‘deserving’ citizen, with whom advocates of apparently ‘less deserving’ groups might be advised to develop ‘issue linkages’.

³⁸ In terms of policies for the poorest, Britto (2005) argues from the Latin American experience that the key role that donors play is not in initiating pro-poor policies, but ensuring the dissemination of results from success cases started by national policy-makers.

Finally, what clearly emerges is that poverty policy is rarely about poverty, but responds to a variety of institutional, structural and actor-led pressures. Policies do not simply emerge as a response to a clear need, but respond “to a larger arena of contestation where other issues are at stake and both national and international actors have a large say” (Villareal 2002: 83), issues that include the prevailing development ideology of the regime, and the need to secure leadership status. It is towards a fuller understanding of these issues that this report has worked. What has emerged here is a strong sense that while development agencies (and academics) have become more attuned to the politics of poverty reduction in poor countries and are moving further in this direction, they continue to look in the wrong places at least some of the time. This is particularly the case regarding the importance of political society, the links between poverty analysis and political discourse, the role of the developmental state and the importance of political contracts. However, these findings also needed to be tested more fully through more in-depth case-study research, which seeks to uncover more of the informal as well as formal aspects of policy-making in poor countries and studies a range of policies beyond social protection, and through the refinement of the analytical approaches used to understand the politics of poverty reduction, such as the one employed here.

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