

Chapter 6

Endnote

What social protection might encompass is currently a contested space in the framing of the debate and the practice. There are many players and many claimants for priority social protection measures. The World Bank and other multilaterals have given strong support to CCTs as an intervention to support the poor in the adjustment process. This domination is most evident in Central and South America. In Africa the establishment of social action investment funds has been a common response especially with public works programmes. Social protection has been seen as donor driven with many short-term pilots. At the national level, administrative capacity to carry out good social protection strategies is a common problem.

The global discourse on social protection encompasses several sectors including food and income security, social assistance and governance. Social protection delivery systems and implementation arrangements vary, from contributory pensions, conditional and unconditional cash transfers, tax-financed social insurance and public service delivery in health, education and nutrition, in-kind payment for services, community cash and in-kind contributions, provision for social housing and related infrastructure to support communities, social barter and social obligations. Since both state and non-state actors implement these arrangements, it is difficult to agree on one particular definition of social protection.

Each donor agency or multilateral organisation has its own definition of social protection, reflecting its particular mandate. But these definitions do not encompass care work, domestic work, community work, subsistence work, social obligations and more. Social protection should also be about access to land and property, traditional modes of social support and safety nets that are particular to cultures, and about safe structures and places where the mobility of women and children is not threatened or hindered. The challenges faced by women, children and men, highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5, provide evidence that a great deal more thinking about social protection is required. We need to listen for the silences, for whose voices are not being heard, which stories are not being told, what issues are not present.

In research on the unpaid carers of those living with HIV, a critical feature was time poverty (Waring et al. 2011). A large number of social protection initiatives entail a constant presumption that a person is work-ready or available to access forms of market or social protection paid work. Our carers had no time to do anything else but care. When labour is not available for sale, what might 'social protection' mean? How can it assist unpaid caring work and support the lives of all in the household? Unpaid 24/7 carers are not mentioned or envisaged in the global discourse on social protection.

This group of carers is large and getting larger. As well as the carers of those living with HIV, there are the family members, partners, loved ones, caring for the frail elderly, for those with non-communicable conditions, in particular diabetes and cancer, and those who care for people who live with severe physical or mental disabilities requiring full-time care.

When we locate these invisible carers in a global migrant labour market we can see that the cohort of those the state depends on for this unpaid labour are often those migrating to urban areas or other countries as temporary labour to work in paid domestic work, often as paid caregivers. When we turn to the demographic phenomena of the millions of ‘missing’ caregivers – for example in China, India and South Korea as a result of amniocentesis and sex selection – the pool of unpaid caregivers shrinks.

In a national context, while the social protection agenda is often grounded in government policy and fiscal arenas, bilateral and multilateral institutions also drive some issues on the agenda. While the different institutions understand the concept of social protection or of the social protection floor differently, they agree that social protection is about protection from adversity.

Whatever the governance system, a core responsibility and a measure of the legitimacy of governments is to protect the people they govern against physical harm or economic hardship (Devereux et al. 2011). This underscores the central role for governments in protecting people from adversity. However, as observed by UNDP Associate Deputy Administrator, Rebeca Grynspan, in a plenary address to the 2012 Association for Women’s Rights in Development Forum, with the global economic downturn ‘there is a hollowing out of the welfare state [...] and this creates more unpaid work’.

How then can the debate about social protection capture the lives of women, children and other outsiders? How can policies targeted at protection and prevention go beyond limited economic outcomes and address access to assets and property and other transformative policy measures for the dispossessed and disenfranchised?

To do this, social protection must empower those drawn into its ambit and create agency and engagement. The literature on social protection is saturated with the language of vulnerability and risk. The concept of vulnerabilities disempowers, reducing women and children’s agency and productivity to trembling inadequacy in the face of adversity. People and communities need to be supported from their strengths and capabilities rather than reduced to the vulnerable to be protected.

This volume attempts to show that such support is possible. It tells of how women in Korea insisted on a form of social protection that fitted the realities of the lives of elderly men as well as women and as a consequence the scheme has increased the health of the elderly and contributed to an expanding economy through employment creation. It has shown in its case study of VAMP that sex workers’ organising in India is a form of social protection, and a source of individual and collective strength. The

production of locally available and affordable menstrual pads, also in India, shows how social protection can be an instrument of redistribution, while a school milk programme in New Zealand demonstrates that local collective forms of organising can strengthen the ethical capital of a society. The community land watchdog groups created by GROOTS in Kenya have socially protected widows, orphans and HIV-infected women by protecting their livelihoods and respecting their dignity. Compensation for the care of the disabled in Denmark shows the critical role that state actors can play.

The anticipatory and transformative social protection framework that we articulate in this volume gives rise to policies of social protection that capture the patchwork nature of women's lives, their texture and integrity,¹³ and the cohesiveness of the disparate parts. It responds to the ways in which women's fractious and assorted responsibilities and coping strategies are woven into a cohesive whole. The paid work in women's lives cannot be taken out of this patchwork quilt and treated as a divisible entity, different in quality and kind from the work women do to stitch together family, community, church, schools, friendships and the other aspects of their lives.

The discourses and paradigms of the literature of social protection do not reflect the texture and integrity of human lives. We need a discourse of social protection in a language of agency, of dignity, of capability and contribution, and of meaningful social relationships, that captures the complexity of human lives, particularly the lives of women.