

Social Protection for Africa's Children

Edited by
**Sudhanshu Handa,
Stephen Devereux and
Douglas Webb**



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Foreword by Frances Stewart



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Foreword

The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German pastor and Nazi opponent who died in a concentration camp)

This book argues that social protection for children is a moral imperative, yet, until recently, a grossly neglected one in analysis, aid, politics and action in Africa. Moreover, the book shows, with vivid and well-researched examples, that child protection is possible and effective even in very poor countries. This represents a dramatic and important change from previous views.

Following the continent's emergence from colonialism, dominant approaches to development focused initially on economic growth, assuming this would lift everyone out of poverty, including children. Yet growth in many African countries was anemic and the assumed "trickle down" to the poor (and especially poor children) was extremely limited. The debt crisis of the 1980s put even growth on a back burner, leading to rising poverty, worsening the already perilous position of the majority of African children. The HIV-AIDS epidemic, as well as much violent conflict, compounded the situation. The condition of poor children in Africa was both morally unacceptable and economically costly. Moreover, in those places where effective democratization spread, it also became politically unacceptable. Partly as a reaction to the way so many people, including children, had been virtually discarded, left to cope on their own in intolerable conditions, a human rights approach to development emerged in both international and national discourse. Particularly as child rights came to form an explicit and intrinsic aspect of the Human Rights approach, this provided the moral and political basis for the recognition that children should be protected from the worst economic, political and social hazards.

But recognizing a right is a long way from specifying how to realize it, and even further from establishing the political conditions in which effective action occurs. The chapters in this book provide practical meaning to the concept of "social protection for children"; and, drawing on many concrete cases, show how much can be achieved. The book also indicates that vigorous and vigilant activities by civil society are required to achieve and sustain progress.

In many analyses, even of poverty, children are invisible, and being invisible they tend to be neglected in policy. Yet paradoxically, analyses which focus on children often ignore the fact that they live in families (mostly) and in communities, and consequently interventions can be ineffective or even boomerang because they are perverted by household or community reactions. *Social Protection for Africa's Children* skillfully avoids both these potential flaws, carefully bridging the two perspectives and identifying policies which, while ultimately directed at children, may benefit children via assistance to households and communities, as well as through more direct interventions.

Africa's children will benefit greatly if policy generally comes to be informed by the findings contained here; and African societies and economies as a whole will then benefit from consequent improvements in the education, health and living standards of their children.

Frances Stewart
April 2010

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Part I

Context

