



OP-ED

THE STATUS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN ZAMBIA

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Social protection comprises a wide range of activities (policies and programs), which aim to protect and promote the welfare and livelihoods of the poorest and those most vulnerable to risks and shocks. **Social protection therefore, plays a critical role in realising human rights, reducing poverty and inequality, and supporting inclusive growth.** Not only does it help to prevent individuals and their families from falling or remaining in poverty, it also contributes to economic growth by raising labour productivity and enhancing social stability.

In Zambia, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services under the Department of Social Welfare expedites Government's social protection programs with the assistance of other line ministries, various development partners, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders.

Approximately 4.2 million people across the country are beneficiaries of various social protection programmes, which include the **Social Cash Transfer (SCT), Food Security Pack, Emergency Cash Transfer and Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Support Program** among others. In the 2021 National Budget, 4.8 Billion Kwacha was allocated to Social Protection programmes, which are critical in cushioning the negative impacts of poverty and vulnerability, more so with the COVID-19 pandemic, which made the already poor sections of society even more vulnerable.

The Social Cash Transfer Programme is one of the measures that Government has put in place to reduce poverty levels in Zambia in line with the second pillar of the Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP). The Social Cash Transfer Programme is a component of the Social Protection mechanism, which seeks to reduce the vulnerability of low income households with regard to consumption and access to basic services. The Scheme is a response to the HIV and AIDS Pandemic, which had led to a growing number of households with no adult breadwinner as well as households being headed by elderly persons, children and chronically ill persons.

In the 2021 National Budget, Government allocated K2.3 Billion towards the Social Cash Transfer programme which is the largest social safety net programme being implemented. Government increased targeted beneficiary households on the Social Cash Transfer from 700,000 to 994,000. Similarly, the transfer amount has been increased to reflect the inflationary adjusted amount from K90 to K110, which is paid bi-monthly, amounting to K220. Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) receive twice that amount which is K220, paid bi-monthly which amounts to K440.

An audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor General on the benefits of the Social Cash Transfer in Gwembe District, reported a positive impact of the programme in improving the number of meals beneficiaries consume per day. The audit also reported an increase in household assets among beneficiaries such as **access to land solar power, small livestock, ploughs, brick houses, bicycles, chairs, radios and beds, among others**. There has also been a notable increase in nutrition particularly among children, access to education, health and improved sanitation among beneficiary households.

As a way of keeping children in school and improving nutrition, Government is implementing the **Home-Grown School Feeding programme** for school going children in grades 1-7 through the Ministry of General Education, with about **1,250,000 beneficiaries**. Other programs include, the **Food Security Pack**, where Government has increased the number of beneficiaries from **80,000 in 2020 to 288,492 in 2021**. Government has also increased the budgetary allocation towards the **Food Security Pack programme from K122.2 Million in 2020 to K1.1 Billion in 2021**.

Other strides made by Government include; **90,202** persons supported under the **Floods and Droughts Emergency Cash Transfers** and **258,000** households supported under the **COVID-19 Emergency Cash Transfers**. This support comes in the form of K600 cash per month and food packs to last at least 6 months. This was a direct response to the disruption in livelihoods due to the pandemic as well as to address the newly created sub-group that was at risk of poverty.

In order to safeguard the lives of persons in the informal sector, Government has extended social security coverage where **28,706 persons in the informal sector have been registered with the National Pensions Scheme Authority (NAPSA)**. Government has also adjusted the **minimum wage for domestic workers upwards from K522 to K993**. In order to ensure that retirees live a decent life after work, Government has allocated K1 Billion towards the Public Service Pension Fund.

In conclusion, the Zambian Government has made tremendous strides regarding the provision of social protection programmes, which is a clear illustration of how political will and a favourable political space can sustain such programmes. As a way of improving the provision of social protection programmes in Zambia, **PMRC would like to urge Government to migrate the Social Cash Transfer programme and other cash transfer programmes from the traditional cash transfers to electronic platforms which have the potential to cut costs, reduce leakages, improve accessibility and provide better security compared to physically delivering cash to fixed pay points**.



Mrs. Bernadette Deka Zulu
PMRC Executive Director

For more details, interviews or queries about this PMRC Media Statement, please contact:

POLICY MONITORING AND RESEARCH CENTRE

Ministry of National Development Planning Complex,
Corner of Nationalist and John Mbita Roads, Ridgeway, Lusaka.
Tel: +260 211 269 717 | +260 979 015 660
<http://pmrczambia.com>

