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Population–Poverty–Inequality Nexus and Social Protection in Africa

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Abstract

This study examines how social protection policies and programmes can help in poverty and inequality reduction in Africa. The study covers 38 African countries and engages the fixed and random effects models utilising data sourced from the World Development Indicators, Gini Index and Country Policy Institutional Assessment for the period 2000–2017. A remarkable finding, *among other things*, from the study is that a 1% increase in the provision of social protection will decrease poverty and inequality by 58% and 26%, respectively. The results imply that the provision of social protection contributes to poverty and inequality reduction in Africa. Therefore, the study recommends that the efficient provision of social protection should be implemented through in-kind and in-cash supports, among others, in order to reduce the level of poverty and inequality in Africa. Although, social protection appears to be an essential strategy for reducing, to a more considerable extent, poverty and, to a relatively lesser extent, inequality in Africa, there are

also regional variations. Thus, the study submits that the type (s) of social protection policies may need to differ from one region to the other.

Introduction

While the global rate of poverty has declined by more than half since 2000; two in ten people in Africa are still living on less than the international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day (Fiszbein et al. [2014](#); Bakhshinyan et al. [2019](#); Osabohien et al. [2018a, b](#)). Though, significant progress has been made in many countries within Eastern and South-eastern Asia, up to 42% of the population in African countries are still living below the poverty line (Matthew et al. [2019a](#); Azuh et al. [2016](#)). It has been argued that the high poverty rate in Africa is caused majorly by increased level of unemployment (Matthew et al. [2020](#)).

There should be a sustainable increase in the level of employment through the provision of adequate social protection policies and programmes to control the issues of poverty and inequality in Africa (Matthew et al. [2019a, b](#); Osabohien et al. [2019a, b, c](#)). Employment sustainability and promotion of equality should be associated with economic growth; because, when people are employed, there will be an improvement in welfare and the overall economic growth (United Nations Development Programme UNDP [2006](#)). Besides, the implementation of social protection programmes and policies is essential to cushioning the effects of economic risks and disasters. These risks and disasters include low agricultural output, low income, high unemployment rate, drought, which can result in famine amongst others. When these economic risks and disasters are controlled, the poverty level will be reduced, and thus, economic growth will be boosted (Igharo et al. [2020](#); Bakhshinyan et al. [2019](#); Osabohien et al. [2019b](#); Gentilini and Omamo [2011](#)).

The human population may seem to be an environment enclosed with individuals which the growth of its population changes over time (Li and Zhang [2010](#)). The world population as at 2017 was about 7.3 billion, with China having a total population of 1372 million, followed by India (1314 million), United States of America (321 million), Indonesia (256 million), Brazil (205 million), Pakistan (199 million), and Nigeria occupied the seventh position with a total population of 189 million. The projected population by 2050 puts

India as first, with 1660 million persons, followed by China (1366) million, United States (398 million), and Nigeria (397 million) being the fourth (UNDESA POP DIV [2017](#); Matthew et al. [2019b](#)).

Pison ([2017](#)) posited that with a rapid increase in the population in Africa, which increased to 140 and 750 million as of 1900 and 2000, respectively and further increased to a billion people in 2010. According to the United Nations “medium scenario” projections, this figure will rise to more than 2.5 billion in 2050 and more than 4.39 billion in 2100. The value represents 39% of the world’s population by 2100, as against 16% in 2015. Similarly, as regards the inequality rate in Africa, a study by Aigbokhan ([2000](#)) showed increased levels of inequality and poverty using nationwide surveys for 1985/86, 1992/93 and 1996/97 with the inequality level ranging between 22% in 1985/86, 23.5% in 1992/93 and rising to 25% in 1996/97 in Africa. However, the inequality level is said to have worsened, with the average rates being 28%, 30%, 31% and 33% in 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015 respectively in Africa (Matthew et al. [2020](#)). The high population figures, in conjunction with the poor economic performance account for why there is a high level of poverty, inequality, increasing rate of crime, usually witnessed in most developing countries, including Africa. Therefore, if practical efforts are not made to curb the growth of the population in Africa, there will be a high rate of inequality and poverty in Africa (Azuh et al. [2016](#), [2017](#)).

The need to address extreme poverty, rising inequality, as well as risk and vulnerability, has led to an expansion of a set of instruments broadly classified as social protection. By social protection, we mean a collection of programmes and policies that address risk, vulnerability, inequality, and poverty through a system of transfers in cash or in-kind. The last decade has seen an expansion of social protection in the number of African countries (e.g. Liberia, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Guinea, Benin, Uganda) that have established relatively cash transfer programmes to enhance rural livelihood (Hanlon et al. [2010](#); Fiszbein et al. [2014](#)). Thus, it is argued that social protection is one of the strategies to

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