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Continuity and Rupture in Ethiopia under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

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The Expansion of Social Protection Systems in Ethiopia: Continuity or Rupture of Citizen–State Relations?

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Abstract

During the era of the EPRDF in Ethiopia (1991–2019) social protection developed in specific ways, in design and implementation. This article reflects on this period to explore how these manifestations occurred, within the context of broader state building efforts. While rapidly increasing in type and coverage, social protection benefited some and excluded others, consistently across different social protection interventions. The expansion of social protection served different purposes, with scaling services supporting political settlement and while implementation entrenched local power structures. We reflect on why these expressions took place by critically analyzing the problematization narratives in policies and strategies as well as implementation (funding, design and experience). We evaluate social protection during this era in three periods: responsive (1991–2004), donor-driven (2005–2013) and re-orientation (2014–2019). The re-visiting of the history, practice and research of social protection enables us to explore how little the expansion of social protection has altered the expected role of the government and the rights of citizens, and instead how these initiatives acted as a tool that entrenched political power and disenfranchised any form of dissent or difference.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Social Protection, Public Policy, Governance.

Introduction

Social protection developed and expanded in specific ways during the years that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) led Ethiopia (1991–2019). With the dissolution of the EPRDF in 2019, it seems an apt moment to reflect on the

social protection policies (and their implementation) of this era. Was this, as this issue of *afriche e orienti* seeks to explore, an era reflective of an intentional continuity or one of transformative rupture? Given the years of protest and unrest that led up to the political changes in 2018 as well as the instability and conflict that followed, we also think it is an opportune moment to critically reflect on the role of social protection policies and systems, which (at least theoretically) seek to foster positive transformative change, such as the elimination of hunger and extreme poverty. Based on our research on social protection during the EPRDF era, we have witnessed positive outcomes, but also that these changes do not necessarily imply system transformation. We seek to explore if the policies were indeed transformative, such as in advancing or positively redefining citizen rights via social protection rooted in enhanced citizen rights. If so, in what ways and for whom. If transformation did not occur, we explore what objectives social protection served; one alternative being a form of political settlement within a vision of the EPRDF that the people are unable to determine what is best for themselves and that an elite political vanguard ought to do so on their behalf. This broader view of social protection allows for a critical analysis not only of target improvements resulting from social protection but also of the systems they operate within and modalities of implementation that can protect or stifle freedoms and rights. Due to the consistent demands of citizens for the advancement of rights and freedoms throughout the EPRDF period (e.g. Pellerin, Cochrane forthcoming 2022), this research question continues to be relevant for understanding social protection and governance in Ethiopia.

Contributors to this issue of *afriche e orienti* explore other government decisions (e.g. ethnofederalism and the developmental state, economic liberalization and land deals) and governance (e.g. the curtailing of democratization). This article explores the specific role of social protection (broadly defined), which we organize into three phases within the EPRDF era. As we discuss below, while recognizing the positive outcomes that social protection offered, the design and implementation also have political functions, which may strengthen rights and freedoms or stifle them via political patronage as well as exclusions. For example, as we note below, Ethiopia's flagship social protection program was not implemented in all regions (nor was the coverage aligned with the areas of most need of such a program), reflective of systemic marginalization of livelihoods, geographies and ethno-linguistic identities. Based upon this, we posit that while advancements were made in social-development indicators, the experience of social protection was one of continuity in its government-citizen relationship. Furthermore, while providing goods and services, social protection contributed to discontent that eventually demanded political rupture.

As we reflect on social protection during the EPRDF era, we do not aim to offer any form of final word on the matter. Reflections are largely a critical self-assessment, which we acknowledge may be incorrect or incomplete. We draw on particular experiences, backgrounds, disciplines, while others may approach these same questions

from different vantage points and see a different horizon. While different, that does not necessarily mean such divergences are contradictory. We view this article, and the journal issue that it is a part of, as a contribution to a reflexive exercise of a contested era, one which was experienced in varied ways relating to identities and geographies, and one which was experienced differently.

In engaging in this critical reflection, we first begin by exploring the linkages between social protection and state building, which contextualizes the broader milieu within which policies and systems existed. After which, we briefly turn to the context of why social protection was so important for this era. We then examine the EPRDF era by periods of social protection policy implementation (1991-2004, 2005-2013, 2013-2019), making explicit what the "problems" were that the government was responding to. We also reflect on what was not considered to be a priority issue, implicitly, by it either being unaddressed or unfunded. We draw upon literature in this exploration, but we do not offer a systematic assessment of all research available on all policies (doing so for all social protection policies is beyond the scope of a single article). The purposive selection approach of the literature we draw upon presents some limitations. Nonetheless, we hope these reflections spur conversations and new research questions, including contributions that provide alternative perspectives to those presented here.

Social protection and state building

The EPRDF political coalition, having Marxist-Leninist roots, dominated Ethiopian politics for 27 years (1991-2019). It governed with a repressive hand, silencing dissent and opposition, especially after the 2005 election. This governance approach was not limited to the political and civil society spheres, but was entrenched in everyday social and economic lives (for example, see Kassahun, Poulton 2014; Labzae, Planel 2021). Other contributions in this journal issue address this political context in great detail; what is worth emphasizing here is that the same ideological roots that drove the political decision making were also responsible for designing and implementing social protection policies and systems. Some researchers have argued that there were indications that social protection policies were not designed (or implemented) to be transformative, but rather used as political tools to entrench power. Devereux and Guenther (2009) observed that the early years of the EPRDF were marked with ideological stances, which influenced policy formations as well as the conceptualizations of social and economic challenges, such as food insecurity and poverty. The resulting policies, such as those relating to land, did not protect rural residents nor enable a transformation of the agricultural sector. The political role of these policies was consistent and was communicated with each government contact. For example, the EPRDF effectively controlled the distribution of seeds and fertilizers, creating a situation of dependency that fostered its grip on the livelihoods of the majority rural smallholder farmers (Kassahun, Poulton 2014).

Like the agricultural policies and support services, the implementation of other internationally celebrated policies, such as the land certification scheme, had parallel objectives of entrenching government control and extracting rural resources (Cochrane, Hadis 2019). Kassahun and Poulton (2014) argued that along with promoting economic growth, one of the motives of such services was extending and deepening political control. This strategy was also apparent in social protection, and was not limited to planning agencies or political offices; local level implementers of social protection were fully aware of the political imperatives (Cochrane, Tamiru 2016; Berhane *et al.* 2011). As an example, in an area where the safety net was being implemented, if someone expressed political opposition they might be excluded, or less controversially "graduated", and thereby removed from the program. In one case, a female client of the safety net was "removed from the program because she supported the opposition political party", and when she complained to three levels of government (*kebele*, *woreda*, zone), each "accused her of engaging in anti-government activity and denied her request to re-join the program" (Cochrane, Tamiru 2016: 653).

Many evaluations of social protection policies and programs, including of the safety net, have been positive and promoted the efficiency and impact of the EPRDF. One of the reasons that the politicization of them was invisible was the high number of people who met the inclusion criteria within implementation areas. For example, if two-thirds of the community met the criteria but funding only allowed for one-third to be included, the politicization of selection may not be apparent when validation exercises are conducted to see if the "right" people (who met the inclusion criteria) were indeed included. Alternatively, if "graduation" occurred in a questionable instance, authorities could quickly point to many other people who meet the criteria and need the opportunity. For some donors, the political role was explicit and they implicitly agreed with and/or accepted the trade-offs of the governance approach. One of the pending questions, however, emanating from these tacit or explicit approvals is if these same policies sowed the seeds of protest from 2012 onward that eventually forced the political ruptures due to mass discontent with the government. Or, more critically, had these policies and programs not been funded by donors for so many years, while concerns were apparent, it might not have required such a confrontational process to force political transition – one that resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. While these questions require broader analysis, we argue, at least tentatively, that the public discontent that ignited the massive uprisings that swept across the country, especially in Oromia and Amhara Regional States since 2015, were partly due to the political functions played by social protection.

Justifying this argument requires rereading the history of social protection, one that begins with the rights of citizens as opposed to the pragmatism of trade-offs. This approach may provide a new explanatory framework for social protection during the EPRDF era. As Dejene and Semela (2020) argued, such an endeavor starts with

understanding the 'problematization' of policies. In other words, not by starting with an analysis of implementation but with the narratives that informed and shaped the design of policies. This broader view allows for an assessment of systems, alongside the outputs and impacts of specific policies and programs.

Before proceeding to analyze social protection, we want to clarify that criticism of social protection is not necessarily opposition to it. We have experienced the vital role that the safety net has played in the lives of Ethiopians throughout the country. Our criticism, however, is put forward because we believe that the potential of these programs is limited and limiting in their design and implementation, thereby constraining the opportunities people experience. Social protection has the potential to help ensure basic needs are met as well as expanding opportunities; the trade-offs experienced were not the only available option. At the risk of appearing to be arguing against social protection, we seek to tread along a narrow path of critical engagement rooted in our interest to see social protection expanded, but in different, more transformative, ways. Indeed, the rights-based commitment reflected in the social protection policy, and especially that of the social protection strategy, is commendable. Similarly, the call for a national level registry system is vital in seeking to design a social protection system with policy and implementation coherence. When we offer criticism of aspects of social protection, it is not criticism of everything that has been done nor a case against it.

Social protection context

According to World Bank data,¹ which largely draws upon government sources, when Meles Zenawi became Prime Minister (after having led the EPRDF since it came to power in 1991), the economic situation in Ethiopia was bleak: gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (in current US dollars, as of 11 February 2021) was 134 dollars and 45.5% of the population lived below the national poverty line. Anthropological and ethnographic research around this period outlined how the experience of these levels of poverty were entrenched and severe (as in the works of Alula Pankhurst, Harald Aspen and Svein Ege). By the end of the first period of social protection outlined below (1991–2004), GDP per capita remained as it was (137 dollars, as of 11 February 2021) while the national poverty rate was reported to have declined to 39% (World Bank 2020). Between 1991 and 2004, improvements were made in some areas, such as life expectancy, which rose from 47.5 in 1991 to 55.2 in 2004, and gross primary school enrolment, which rose from 32% in 1991 to 68% in 2004 (while expected years of schooling rose from 2.8 years to 5.8 years). However, vulnerability to shocks was pervasive, as seen in the droughts that affected millions of people, on multiple occasions, and a serious famine event result in the loss of an estimated 100,000 lives (in 1999–2000, see Cochrane 2017).

During the second (2005–2013) and third (2014–2019) social protection periods, GDP per capita rose substantially, to 856 dollars in 2019 (as of 11 February 2021). However, these increases are aggregate and averaged figures, the benefits of which

were disproportionately experienced by a minority. Demonstrative of this was that in 2017 the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative reported that 71% of Ethiopians lived in severe poverty, despite the government reporting in 2015 that only 24% of the population lived below the national poverty line (World Bank 2020). This divergence is partly due to differences in the metrics utilized, but it is also related to the way evidence is employed. With regard to some of the regularly reported human development metrics, gross primary school enrolment increased to 100% (and expected years of schooling increased to 8.8 years), life expectancy rose to 66 years, and while droughts continued to be experienced (including events that affected tens of millions of people), none turned into famine.

The human development figures mentioned above, which are reported on the country page of the World Bank and in the reports of the Government of Ethiopia, do not as prominently present other aspects of social protection needs. Examples of this include high levels of youth unemployment (28%), millions of orphaned children (3.8 million as of the last census in 2007), depending on the source, anywhere between a million and 14 million people are living with disabilities, that there is no universal old age pension, and in tandem that restrictions were increased on civil society as well as on freedoms of speech, the press and political participation (Dejene, Cochrane 2019a, 2019b). The much celebrated high and sustained economic growth (e.g. UN 2015) occurred alongside rising inequality, which negatively impacted life expectancy, education and income for those in the bottom economic quintile, but these are largely made invisible in the reporting of national aggregate data.² For those oriented to modernization and neoliberal theories, the rise of inequality is an expected destination of the growth trajectory, and thereby not of fundamental concern per se (but a transition to be managed). From the perspective of critical and dependency theories, the rise of wealth alongside inequality in the globalized economy signals a new trajectory entirely, of structures that are enabling the rich to disproportionately accumulate and protect wealth, a path dependency that requires rupture to break with.

Expansion of social protection systems

History of social protection

Forms of social protection have roots in the Imperial (-1974) and Military (1974-1991)³ governments, such as in pension schemes, as well as in social assistance, such as emergency relief programs. Some of that history has been detailed elsewhere (e.g. Woldemariam 1989; Woldegiorgis 1989; Hancock 1985; Haile 1989; Haile 1996; Lautze *et al.* 2003; Kiros 2005) and will not be covered in detail here. As an example, however, the Public Servants Pension Scheme came into effect during the Imperial regime, in 1963. This program has been modified over time, including being amended at least three times during the EPRDF regime in 2003, 2011 and 2015. At the outset, this initiative focused on providing pension coverage for retired public servants. The 2011

proclamation formalized a pension scheme for private sector workers, which gave rise to the establishment of the Private Organizations Employees' Social Security Agency (POESSA; Dejene 2019; Dejene, Cochrane 2019).

As we explore in detail below, the original design and amendment of policies were crafted in specific ways, with particular problem narratives that excluded many from inclusion or consideration. In the example of the pension scheme, despite an expansion during the EPRDF period, those working in the informal sector remain not considered nor included. We do not argue that all conceptual exclusions are politically motivated or serve the purpose of entrenching power. Rather, assessing the conceptualization of "problems" allows for an understanding of the logics of social protection, and thereby an analysis of the design and implementation. For pension schemes, these initially served public sector workers, which rewarded an inner-circle of non-elected, unrepresentative officials often hired on patronage grounds. When the pension scheme was expanded to the private sector, the expansion might be better understood as a form of political settlement, whereby political stability requires a broader distribution of resources and services. The exclusion of the informal sector, however, seems less of a political exclusion and rather more of pragmatism, as private sector companies register their workers via POESSA and have a mechanism for payment collection and pension distribution, while no such entity exists for the informal sector (and multiple demands exist for limited resources, if the government would have had to create such an entity). However, had there been an organization covering the informal sector, the political settlement might have also included the informal sector and been universal in nature. That is to say, there are political motivations for some decisions, but these do not necessarily explain all decisions; nor are we interested to re-write history such that every decision is only made to serve a political agenda.

Other forms of social protection also took formal shape in the Imperial era. According to Lautze *et al.* (2003), official disaster response started around the mid-1960s, after a prolonged call for a response to the disasters of the Wollo and Tigray famines of the 1950s and the 1960s. No institutions were present at that time to facilitate relief and disaster response efforts, which was the institutional situation until the establishment of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) in 1974 (see Woldegiorgis 1989; Seifu 2013; Adugna 2014). Efforts before the establishment of the RRC were fragmented and were led by small ad hoc committees. Other policy responses took shape during the 1970s as well, such as those related to food security, including the sanction on grain export in April 1973. This was followed by the resettlement of people from famine-hit areas, as stipulated in the founding document of the RRC (Adugna 2014). With regard to the narrative shaping these responses, politics and governance were not considered. The founding document of the RRC, which Woldegiorgis (1989) suggests was the last decree signed by the Emperor before the demise of his reign, conceived famine only as a natural disaster. The preamble of the founding document states, "Whereas the

recent drought and other natural disasters in our country have occasioned hardship in our beloved people [...] The commission was founded to identify and make known the problems and their degree in the area of the country that are affected by natural disaster [...]” (quoted in Wolde Giorgis 1989: 121). Like the pension schemes, the absences highlight what is not seen, or what is made invisible.

During the Imperial period, some of the barriers to change were explicitly institutional. For example, some political aides blocked the reports of the Wollo famine from reaching Emperor, for “the sense of the Emperor” not to be affected with such “bad news”. This also included downplaying the efforts of parliamentary representatives from the respective areas appealing for a government response to tackle the disasters (Woldemariam 1989). Haile (1989, 1996) blamed the Imperial regime for being opaque and irresponsible in its handling of the famine disasters and in its failure of protecting citizens. The blame of the Imperial regime’s unresponsiveness also came from the international media, especially that of Jonathan Dimpleby’s exposé (Adugna 2014). For some observers, these mishandlings of disaster response emanated from institutional hypocrisy and rigidity (Woldemariam 1984; Wolde Giorgis 1989). Reflective of these political causes, protest against the Imperial government began in the 1960s, driven particularly by the student movement, who called for political changes – notably that land be given to those who worked on it. These events, particularly famine and vulnerability to it, were key factors that contributed to the eventual downfall of the Imperial government in 1974.

The Military regime, also known as the Derg, took power after the Imperial government extended the role of the RRC and launched massive resettlement campaigns, which many observers reported as a failure (Rahmato 1989; Hancock 1985; Woldegiorgis 1989). In some instances, the Military regime employed emergency food aid as a coercive tool to force people in situations of extreme vulnerability to agree to participate in resettlement schemes (Terry 2002). Rahmato (1989) described the results of the resettlement programs as fostering a crisis, pointing to failures of institutional capacity, mismanagement, and poor planning. The crisis was compounded by resource shortages and infrastructural issues, including the lack of roads, which made disaster response operations difficult, and delayed at best (Adugna 2014). The lack of political and institutional responses, and/or the misguided or poorly planned ones, contributed to significant loss of life, resulting in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives in the mid-1980s (Woldemariam 1989; Woldegiorgis 1989). While scholars during the Imperial period had yet to identify the key governance role in famine, during the Military Derg period, and specifically in the 1980s, this was recognized by Ethiopian scholars, notably Mesfin Woldemariam. Internationally, Amartya Sen was making similar arguments.

We present this brief history to situate the context that the EPRDF arrived in, which we use to analyze the decision making regarding social protection. Having a brief background also reduces the potential to present an ahistorical assessment, which

neglects the inherited challenges as well as the lessons learned in implementing social policy up until that point. The following sub-sections focus on the EPRDF era beginning from 1991, and we divide the EPRDF era into three social protection sub-sections, based largely on social protection implementation shifts we view as significant. During the first period (1991–2004) the new government was dealing with a range of pressing needs, from the impacts of drought to the continued ramifications of the Military government policies, such as in the large-scale resettlement and villagization schemes. We view social protection during this period as largely being reactive, often responding to address issues after they had emerged. The second period (2005–2013) is one wherein donors played an outsized role in designing and funding new social protection programs, most notably the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), which was designed to be more proactive, in providing longer-term predictable transfers. This was also a period wherein political shifts highlighted threats to the EPRDF and when the government aimed to fashion itself as a government focused on "development". The flagship social protection program that was launched not only served in meeting needs in more planned ways, but it also served the political needs of the ruling coalition. We view the final period (2013–2019) as an attempt at re-orientation, wherein new priorities were identified and locally-developed plans and strategies were put in place, but were selectively funded. We cover these three sections in turn, alongside some analysis of the academic discourse respectively.

Reactive policy: 1991–2004

When the EPRDF came to power, famine remained one of the most pressing challenges for people and threats to political stability. In the first years of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991–1995), leading voices described the causes and experiences of famine and called for the new government to act (e.g. de Waal 1991; Rahmato 1991; Pankhurst 1992; Hurni 1993; Webb *et al.* 1994). This emphasis was well understood by the leaders of the revolution against the Military regime, the Derg government, as they experienced how famine was a critical contributing factor to turning of the tide against both the Imperial and Military governments. The TPLF (later the EPRDF with the TPLF as the coalition leader) explicitly utilized food aid as a way to win the war (and was supported to do so by external actors; see: Cochrane 2017; Gill 2010). While the new constitution of 1995 outlined economic (Article 89:2–3) and social (Article 90:1) objectives and responsibilities, these were limited by the phrase "to the extent the country's resources permit", resulting in limited (or contestable) citizen rights as well as subjectivity about how resources are utilized (FDRE 1995). This limitation impacted social protection provisions, with resource limitations given as justifications for partial commitments (Dejene, Semela 2020), and the pushing of further developments to yet-to-funded future or subsequent initiatives. The constitution did create avenues for new forms of citizen engagement and activism, but also granted the government power to disregard

citizen demands based upon this clause. The resource limitation – while a real and legitimate challenge – was operationalized as a justification for some of the exclusions that we highlight throughout the EPRDF era.

The first major social protection policy of the EPRDF was the Developmental Social Welfare Policy (DSWP) (1996-2013/14). This policy was in place for 17 years until the incumbent Social Protection Policy replaced it in November 2014. The objectives of the DSWP were three: "1) expand participatory developmental social welfare programs and services; 2) Study the causes of social problems and develop preventive measure based on knowledge generated by such studies; 3) Rehabilitate members of society who are already suffering from various social problems and require special treatment and attention" (MoLSA 1996: 65). The DSWP's focus was mainly limited to preventive and rehabilitative programs (Dejene 2019; Dejene, Semela 2020). The essence of developmental social welfare programs lacked clarity in the policy, and largely went under-funded in terms of implementation. In practice, reactive emergency response predominated the activity of social protection, and often was reliant upon the support of external partners (Devereux, Sharp 2003). It was not until the 2002/03 drought and food insecurity crises that social protection began to take a more proactive form (Lavers 2016a). The implementation shift followed the 2002/03 drought, but it is also worth noting that the organizational and ideological shifts preceded this point, so as to enable these outcomes. It is for this reason that Lavers (2016a) points to 2001/02 as a key point for categorizing social protection shifts, as in that period political power was centralized (and opposition pushed out), alongside which government agencies were reorganized and sectoral strategies developed. We see these as similar categorizations, with Lavers focusing on the ideological and internal shifts while we have focused on the outcomes and implementation emanating from them.

The limitations of the first manifestations of social protection in the EPRDF era, though the degree varies from one intervention to the other, relates to the "problematization' of issues and "subjectification' of beneficiaries; limiting the policy direction towards rehabilitative issues, and paradoxically pushing the responsibility of providing social services to the community, especially in the case of the DSWP. This increasingly came into contestation with the political re-orientation to a developmental state theory, which the EPRDF-led government increasingly subscribed to (or selectively, in combination with the ethnofederalism). The Ethiopian developmental state proved to be highly interventionist (Dejene, Cochrane 2019a; Dejene, Semela 2020), but the policy confined social protection to short-term instrumental goals. According to Humphrey (1999), the 1993 disaster response policy limits, in strong terms, any able-bodied persons from receiving benefits – an explicit fear the government held of fostering dependency. The assumption in this framing was that "able-bodied' people would be able to work themselves out of any situation. This extended itself into the provisions of the DSWP, which listed categorical, rehabilitative schemes for limited groups of the community,

focusing on the disabled and other vulnerable groups (see Dejene 2019; Dejene, Semela 2020). Subsequent disasters, in the form of the 2003 drought (Kiros 2005), and more recent ones like the 2015, 2016 and 2017 drought-induced food insecurity crises (Dejene 2019; Dejene, Cochrane 2019) made it evident that the embedded assumptions regarding the causes of vulnerability were ill-conceived. For example, the problematization missed temporal aspects, such as the impact of seasonality (Dercon, Krishnan 2000) as well as the differential poverty alleviation impacts of economic growth on rural and urban areas (Bigsten *et al.* 2003). Although the evidence-base is not robust, there are indications that implementation politicized, with forms of support being aligned with explicit political party affiliation (de Waal 2015).

Donor funded policy: 2005-2013

Although the DSWP was still in effect, we outline the post-2005 period as a new period of social protection policy. This is for two reasons. First, the PSNP, which is Africa's second largest safety net program that has benefitted over eight million people in rural Ethiopia, was launched, largely being designed and funded by foreign donors. The donors involved were not only active in Ethiopia, but were part of a broader trend of supporting the expansion of social protection across the continent (Ojong, Cochrane 2021), replicating best practices and importing modalities. While we have characterized this period as being donor funded, which it primarily was, donors can only effectively act with the approval of the government, and in this case the motivations of the period can be explained, as outlined by Lavers and Hickey (2016) as motivated by political settlement in response to contestation. The second reason that 2005 stands out was the 2005 election, within which the EPRDF lost some urban areas, which resulted in a significant shift in governance direction (explicitly moving away from democratization). The shift in governance had direct implications for social protection implementation. Famine has attracted much attention in Ethiopia due to its severity and potential for large losses of life. Most of the interventions that aimed to tackle the famine crises, however, tended to be responsive (and costly) or seasonal/temporary (and not addressing root causes of vulnerability). Following the 2002 food insecurity situation and cognizant of the limitations of a responsive system, the Government of Ethiopia issued the 2002 Food Security Strategy (FSS). The policy was guided by targeting, stated as being "mainly to the chronically food insecure moisture deficit and pastoral areas" (FDRE 2002: 1). The need for a predictable transfer rather than a reactive relief approach was realized in the PSNP in 2005. In its approach, however, the PSNP furthered the conception of the food insecurity challenge as a "geographical" phenomenon, as reflected in the FSS. Retrospectively, the practice does not align with this plan. Notable in the geographic exclusions are the overlaps with politics; Afar and Somali, wherein pastoral livelihoods are common and moisture deficit areas, had political parties that were not members of the EPRDF coalition, and remained neglected from social service provisions (Berhane

2020, Cochrane, Rao 2019). Conversely, a disproportionate number of PSNP clients were based in Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and SNNP, which are not necessarily reflective of demographics or severity of need (Berhane 2020), but were reflective of the coalition of political parties comprising the EPRDF.

The PSNP has two major components: (1) direct support (DS) and (2) public works (PW). The PW targets vulnerable households with able-bodied members who are expected to participate in infrastructural development activities, like the construction of feeder-roads and environmental protection activities. The DS targets the old-age, disabled and labour-constrained households, who are not required to contribute labour to receive the safety net support. Lactating mothers and pregnant women in the PW stream are temporarily placed in the DS component, who are not required to work during that time period. The PSNP is designed as a predictable transfer modality to address periodic drought-induced shocks (Devereux, Guenthe 2009; Berhane *et al.* 2016).⁴ The fourth phase of the PSNP ran from 2015-2020 and had an estimated cost of US\$4 billion (World Bank 2013). While this is demonstrative of a significant investment into social protection, and specifically in the area of food security, the PSNP has not stopped the need for additional annual emergency food support due to production failures, which is usually blamed on weather fluctuations by the government (Prášková 2018).

The PSNP aimed to provide an alternative to the expensive and re-occurring emergency relief operations, particularly in response to drought. Rahmato (2013) noted that since the 1970s relief operations have cost billions of dollars, with little impact in curbing the periodic famine events. According to Devereux *et al.* (2006: 1), the opposite happened; "dependency on food aid has steadily increased over time, as has the number of chronically food insecure Ethiopians". Writing shortly after the establishment of the PSNP, Devereux *et al.* (2006: 1) outlined its purpose as "a gradual shift away from a system dominated by emergency humanitarian aid to productive safety net system resources via multi-year framework". The two principles that guided the PSNP were predictability and avoiding aid dependency (Devereux *et al.* 2006: 2). In addition, the PSNP was designed to support clients beyond rehabilitative and responsive interventions with the introduction of components that included the Household Asset Building Program (see Berhane *et al.* 2011), which was later subsumed under the livelihood promotion component of PSNP IV (see Dejene 2019). These aimed to address vulnerabilities and enhance the ability to graduated clients to be resilient to shocks.

Ethiopia launched the Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) in 2012 as a pilot program in 13 Districts in four regions (again, within the regions of Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region - SNNPR and Tigray), notably making similar exclusions as was done with the PSNP. While this paper is not able to cover all the available evidence on these social protection initiatives, the CBHI is reported to benefit nearly one million people (Berhane 2020). Service provision for the CBHI is done via health extension services within communities, but can be accessed at

district and zonal hospitals following referral. A recent study indicated that enrollment in CBHI in one of the regions that piloted the program (SNNPR) is at 12.8% (Nageso, Tefera, Kenei 2020). This suggests that while outcomes appear positive (Berhane 2020), the inclusions/exclusions that are seen in other social protection programs may be replicated in CBHI, but more research is needed to better understand its implementation. For Lavers (2016b), as we noted in the PSNP, alongside the provision of a needed service, there are important political drivers, which aim to maintain support via service provision (notably in politically and demographically important regions). While many of these programs were donor-funded and served political objectives at the federal level, the interaction that people had with these initiatives at the implementation level were heavily regulated and controlled by local elites (e.g. Cochrane, Tamiru 2016; Lavers, Mohammed, Wolde Selassie 2020). This process influences who, at the local level, benefits from these services, while in tandem acting as a means to entrench political power (e.g. Berhanu, Poulton 2014; Lavers, Haile, Mesfin 2020). As the state expanded its distribution of goods and services as a means of securing broader political stability, local level implementation often entrenched other forms of political power and control, both of which the donors supporting and funding these initiatives either implicitly supported or were selectively silent about.

Also during this time period, Ethiopia implemented a National Plan of Action for the Elderly (2005-2015). This specific policy document promised welfare provisions for the old-age population. However, it relied on community contributions to accomplish its goals and was not funded by the government nor donors. A great majority of the old-age population do not have a sustained social protection system (85%), the exception being those who are covered through the formal pension system (15%; Berhane 2020) or as direct support beneficiaries of the PSNP. This includes the old-age population with disabilities and/or who are caring for orphaned and vulnerable children. In the following policy period (2014-2019), the needs of the old-age population were acknowledged (Dejene 2019), but no funding was allocated for new programming.

In the post 2005 election era (a greatly contested election wherein the EPRDF lost many urban areas), there were instances of displacement in the name of investment and development in urban areas (particularly in Addis Ababa) and peripheries (particularly for foreign investment; Rahmato 2019). These were top-down decisions of the EPRDF-led government, made with questionable consent of the public affected by those measures. These are not social policies; we highlight them as demonstrative of the governance shifts taking place within the broader societal realm. With regard to freedoms, this period saw significant restrictions on civil society, political participation, freedom of speech and the press. Many of these changes were done in the name of development, which draws the connection to social protection: some of the social protection initiatives that aimed to support the urban poor- and middle-income citizens in the form of subsidized condominium housing displaced peri-urban inhabitants from

their land and livelihoods. While the donor supported PSNP was handing out food and cash to selected clients, other "developmental" decisions worked to dispossess and silence. These present examples of policy (in)coherence through which new social challenges were created while others were alleviated (Dejene, Cochrane 2019). Serving the urbanites (e.g. with housing), in politically contested geographies, provided support to those the government needed to win support from, which could be viewed as a form of political settlement as in the expansion of pensions.

Reorientation of social policy (2014-2019)

In 2014, the Government of Ethiopia issued the incumbent social protection policy that, among others, included "promotive" and "transformative" dimensions (MoLSA 2012). The incumbent social protection policy has five focus areas. These are: 1) Promoting Development Safety Net; 2) Promoting Employment Opportunities and Improving Living Conditions; 3) Promoting Social Insurance; 4) Promoting the Fair Enjoyment of Basic Services; and 5) Providing Legal Protection and Support for Citizens Exposed to Violence and Oppression. Many of these focus areas were continuations of practices that had emerged, as in the safety net and social insurance. This policy was supported in 2016 with a social protection strategy. The 2016 National Social Protection Strategy elaborated on new additions to social protection, such as outlining the legal protection and support for citizens exposed to abuse, exploitation and violence.

62 The social protection strategy outlined three rationales for social protection in a progressive manner: the constitutionally enshrined citizen rights for social protection, Ethiopia's responsibility, as party to UN and AU documents, to formulate social protection policies and strategies, and the importance of social protection for overall human development (MoLSA 2016: 7). The social protection strategic document is foresighted, with aspirations to build "a sustainable system", aligned with the emergent Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda. According to the strategic document a "sustainable social protection system requires new institutional arrangement that will enhance co-ordination; strengthen capacities for implementation; and develop systems and tools, such as the Single (National) Registry System (SRS) also known as the Common (or National) Beneficiary Registry System (CBRS)" (MoLSA 2016: 8). These coordination aims were not realized during the EPRDF period. In the new policy and strategy era, what we find of particular interest is not who or what is missed per se, but what is funded (and what is not). This, we argue, identifies the priorities of the government whilst they participate in the international conversations of broader and more inclusive social protection (and provides insight into the logic of its decision making in its final years).

The siloed practices of emergency relief pursued prior to the PSNP manifested themselves in periodic appeals for aid on an annual basis and organizing ad hoc distributions (see Berhane *et al.* 2016). The PSNP continued and developed during this time period, as

articulated in the PSNP IV (2015–2020) implementation manual (PIM). It included an objective to improve rural society's resilience to shocks and enhance their food security status. The PIM promised to regularly measure the achievement of the program goal using indicators that among others include, "household dietary diversity and number of different income sources" (MoA 2014: 2–3). With a decade of PSNP implementation passed, in this time period it began to be possible to assess the long-term impacts of the PSNP. Evaluations of the program suggested mixed results; for example, positive contributions were seen in the food security situation of client households (Berhane *et al.* 2011, Berhane *et al.* 2013; Dejene 2019) but minimal impacts on asset accumulation (Devereux 2006; Berhane *et al.* 2011). One of the aims of the PSNP was diversifying income sources of client households towards minimizing vulnerability to shocks with the resources provided through the program, which seemed less realized (Berhane *et al.* 2011; Dejene 2019).⁵ Additionally, diversification has been noted as much more complex (e.g. Cochrane, Cafer 2018), and is not always a signal of resilience, as was being assumed.

One notable expansion in social protection was the inclusion of urban areas in the safety net. The urban poor had not been included in the safety net until the introduction of the Urban Productive Safety Net Program (UPSNP) in 2016. In the EPRDF years, the UPSNP remained in its beginning stages, with pilots implemented and expansions planned. The UPSNP pilot programs were operational in all of the regional capitals, targeting about 604,000 people, with three quarters of resources in the UPSNP pilot phase directed to Addis Ababa (MoLSA 2016). The UPSNP is planned to expand to 83 cities, with the support of a World Bank 400 million dollars grant.⁶ Given its relative newness and limited implementation scope, limited evidence is available to assess if the politicization of inclusion and exclusion are manifesting themselves within the UPSNP.

Another initiative revised during the final years of the EPRDF was the National Nutrition Program (NNP). The government introduced a revised version of the NNP, an extension of the previous version that had been in effect since 2008. The new NNP (2013–2015) restated the Government of Ethiopia (GoE)'s commitment towards "accelerating implementation of the multisectorally harmonized National Nutrition Program to have a positive impact on nutrition and on the overall wellbeing of the nation". This revised NNP (2013–2015) was designed to address both long-term and short-term nutrition goals in Ethiopia. The program outlined the plan for a package of proven, cost-effective nutrition interventions that would break the cycle of malnutrition and ensure child survival and health. The document, however, also identifies the shortage of resources as a challenge towards fulfilling its goals. The resources that were available, were utilized in specific ways – similar to the experience of the PSNP, agricultural extension support services, CBHI, amongst others. As of a 2019 assessment by the World Bank, the NPP selected inclusion areas by district, but only in four regions: Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR,

Tigray (World Bank 2019). Again, these reflect the political coalition members of the EPRDF, to the exclusion of others. Despite these explicit exclusions the government's commitment to the program was praised with its progressive growth in contributions amounting to 1.1 billion dollars for the period 2016–2020 (World Bank 2019: vi). During the final years of the EPRDF, social protection did undergo changes: the safety net expanded to urban areas, nutrition services were expanded, and a new National Social Protection Strategy was developed. While multi-sectoral and problem-based approaches were not new, the National Nutrition Plan did present a new way of working, which had the potential to mitigate some of the policy incoherence that was experienced in the previous period. At the same time, many of the experiences of social protection continued the status quo: food insecurity remained as a political threat and a focus in social protection, while demographically and politically important allies were prioritized over those in most need. The rise of protest throughout these years deepened the political purposes of social protection; with implementation staff tasked to collect votes, and make explicit threats that services would be cut if votes were not cast for the ruling party (e.g. Cochrane, Tamiru 2016). The lack of funding for certain populations, such as those living with disabilities and elders, remained noted but unfunded. In its final years, political repression increased, such as in the form of mass arrests, until the political transition of 2018, and then the ending of the EPRDF in 2019. While we do not suggest that the politicization of social protection was a direct cause of these protests, we do argue that they were one of the many ways of governance that fostered discontent and resulted in demands for change.

Conclusion

The Government of Ethiopia and its partners negotiated and re-oriented social protection focus areas during the EPRDF era. We explored these shifts in three periods: (1) a responsive and costly activities, (2) donor-led expansion of proactive programming, and (3) attempts at reorientations, albeit ones that largely continued the political orientation of social protection which restricted freedoms and opportunities. The priorities and absences identified in each period highlight the ways in which social protection goals can be met (e.g. as in preventing famine) but also serve parallel objectives. These parallel objectives are not, however, consistent. At the federal level, funding prioritized demographically and politically important regions, while at the local level inclusion and exclusion entrenched political power and stifled opposition. We do not argue that all social protection activities are politicized to the same extent, in some instances we highlight how the logic of political settlement explains why the EPRDF was motivated to invest in social protection programs.

Reflecting on the EPRDF era, one of the key lessons for the future is that short-term gains might be achieved through authoritarian means, but these will not be sustained nor will they be effective in the long-term if they work to restrict freedoms and constrain

opportunities. The fall of the EPRDF is demonstrative of this – it enabled significant positive economic and social gains, but mass discontent forced political transition that would result in its dissolution. We encourage researchers to draw upon this point of our reflection and to further consider the linkages between social protection in democratizing authoritarian regimes. This reflection suggests that in order for social protection to have positive transformative impacts there needs to be a re-visioning and re-conceptualization of the root causes of vulnerability, which point toward the realm of governance. The need for re-orientation is crucial especially for post-EPRDF Ethiopia, should the government be committed to pursue a pathway that could support the poor to live to their full potential and have the required supports to do so. In parallel, universalizing social protection services, such as for those living with disabilities and the old-age population, who are not covered in the formal social protection/pension services as they currently exist, requires bold political leadership and commitment. The policies, funding choices, and modalities the new government implements have the opportunity to enable transformation. However, this will require significant shifts of the entire system within which social protection exists.

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NOTES:

- 1 - *World Bank DataBank – Ethiopia*, "World Bank", accessed 11 February 2021: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ethiopia>.
- 2 - *Ethiopia*, "HDR", 2020: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ETH>.
- 3 - We include the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which governed from 1987 to 1991 in this grouping, as the leader of the two were the same and for our purposes of analysing social protection policy do not see any divergence of policy specific to this era that would necessitate it being separated.
- 4 - See also S. Devereux, R. Sabates-Wheeler, R. Slater, M. Tefera, T. Brown, A. Teshome, *Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP): 2008 Assessment Report*, "Cashdividend.net", December 2008: <https://www.cashdividend.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Devereux-et-al.-2008.pdf>.
- 5 - See also S. Devereux, R. Sabates-Wheeler, R. Slater, M. Tefera, T. Brown, A. Teshome, *Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP): 2008 Assessment Report*, cit.
- 6 - *World Bank Group Boosts Support for Improved Livelihoods of Ethiopia's Urban Poor and Disadvantage Youth*, "World Bank", 30 September 2020: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/09/30/world-bank-group-boosts-support-for-improved-livelihoods-of-ethiopias-urban-poor-and-disadvantage-youth>.

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