

Social protection in Sudan: system overview and programme mapping

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Sudan has been garnering increasing international attention over the past two years as goes through considerable changes in its internal political settings. After the end of President Omar al-Bashir's regime in April 2019, as a result of a civil-led movement also referred to as the Sudanese Revolution, a new constitutional declaration was signed and an interim government (composed of a Sovereign Council, a Legislative Council and a Council of Ministers headed by a civilian Prime Minister) was established. Since the installation of the new administration, national expectations regarding the improvement of living conditions have increased and social protection is now, more than ever, recognised by national authorities as a key priority. The commitment of the interim government to social welfare is reflected in the Constitutional Declaration, which recognises the State's role in achieving social development through the provision of education, health care, housing and social insurance.

State-provided social protection schemes are not entirely new in Sudan. The country already had a tradition in providing income, consumption goods and other basic services, such as health and education, to poor and marginalised people. A report by Machado (2020) compiles information on these schemes, aiming to contribute to the literature by providing evidence on the state of social assistance and social insurance programmes in the country as of late 2019. It is divided into two parts: the first provides a quick overview of the main institutions in charge of social protection as well as the key policy and legal instruments that guide and regulate the system, while the second offers a detailed description of Sudan's main social protection programmes, including key information such as institutional set up, benefits provided, coverage, targeting mechanisms used to identify beneficiaries, financing structure, administrative databases, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

This mapping is the result of a joint effort between the International Policy Centre Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), Sudan's Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MoLSD), the Commission on Social Safety and Poverty Reduction (CSSPR), and UNICEF Sudan. MoLSD is the main institution responsible for social protection policies and programmes in the country. In total, 19 units (some being semi-autonomous agencies with a high level of independence) fall under the purview of the Ministry, including:

- 1) the CSSPR, which emerged from the Centre for Coordinating Poverty Reduction Projects (established in 2002) to conduct research related to poverty and poverty reduction efforts. The organisation was introduced in early 2018 and is now in charge of implementing the government's flagship programmes—Shamel and the national cash transfer scheme. Both programmes are provided technical support by international development agencies, such as the World Bank and UNICEF, as detailed in the report;

- 2) the Zakat Fund, which is the most comprehensive source of social protection in Sudan, reaching up to 3.7 million Sudanese families (as of 2018). Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam: it is considered a religious duty for the wealthy to help those in need. The Fund (established and organised the State) provides assistance in many forms, including unconditional cash transfers, payment of health insurance fees for poor people, micro-credit, livelihood programmes, and temporary assistance to families during Ramadan or emergencies;
- 3) the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). Established in 1994, the NHIF is the main health insurance provider in Sudan, consisting of both non-contributory and contributory branches. In 1996, membership became compulsory for both government and private-sector employees. In 2008, the government started to include poor and vulnerable families, but it was only in 2016 that the Health Insurance Act established that every Sudanese should be covered by health insurance or have access to health care services; and
- 4) the National Pension and Social Insurance Fund, which is responsible for the provision of pensions and social insurance to the government, private and public sectors.

While the mapping highlights the diversity of social protection schemes available in the country, information collected also signals that, in several cases, their effective implementation has suffered significantly from the effects of Sudan's most recent fiscal and macroeconomic crisis. For example, cash transfer disbursements were hampered in April 2018 by a combination of insufficient budget allocation and the low amount of national currency in circulation.

It is important to note that this research was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic (which has been a major shock to social protection in the country). Even so, by providing an overview of the situation of Sudan's social protection system in late 2019, the mapping provides an important starting point for any reform efforts and helps identify challenges and future areas of research. Moreover, it aims to serve as a reference document for international partners that wish to support the Government of Sudan in its efforts to enhance the provision of social protection in the country.

Reference:

Bilo, C., A. C. Machado, and F. Bacil. 2020. *Social Protection in Sudan: System overview and programme mapping*. Research Report No. 53. Brasília and Khartoum: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, Sudan's Ministry of Labour and Social Development and United Nations Children's Fund.