

Social protection coverage—Sudan case study

Fabianna Bacil, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

Comprehensive social protection systems are key for mitigating poverty and promoting development. For this reason, the enhancement of social protection coverage is also one of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1: “End poverty in all its forms and everywhere”. In partnership with the Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (NENA) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the IPC-IG has developed a toolkit (Bacil et al., 2020) to calculate the extent to which the population is covered against the risks that affect them throughout their life cycle, going beyond the usual approaches to measuring social protection coverage, which tend to equate programme participation with social protection coverage. The toolkit was applied to the case of Sudan (Bacil and Silva, 2020), using the National Household Budget and Poverty Survey (NHBS) 2014-2015.

The National Household Budget and Poverty Survey 2014-2015

The exercise of estimating the coverage of social protection relies on the quality of the information available. The Sudanese Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) conducted the NHBS with the aim of gathering socio-economic information about the population of the country. The sample comprises 11,953 households across the 18 Sudanese states. The results are representative at the national level, the urban/rural level and the state level (CBS 2017). The NHBS enables the identification of social groups by age, gender and place of residence, and six risks: out of school, unemployment, insufficient earnings, crop failure and livestock issues, and natural disaster.

Social protection coverage

A total of 1,099,474 households were estimated to receive at least one of the six types of economic transfers covered by the 2014-2015 NHBS questionnaire, corresponding to 18 per cent of the total number of households in Sudan. This amounts to 6,405,377 people (19 per cent of the population) living in households assisted by at least one social protection scheme. The informal provision of social protection—namely, that provided by family members outside the household—is significant in Sudan, while the provision of benefits by the government remains relatively low. Based on national definitions of poverty, 21.8 per cent of people living in extreme poverty receive some type of economic support, as do 19.7 per cent of those living in poverty and 17.2 per cent of those not considered poor.

The coverage rate of the Sudanese formal social protection system is low regardless of the methodology used to measure it. If participation in a scheme is deemed enough for a person to be considered protected, government programmes reach less than 3 per cent of women and men in rural and urban areas.

Using the methodology proposed in the toolkit, which aims to measure the extent to which the diverse risks faced by different

groups in a given society are covered, shows that government provision of social protection in Sudan makes the smallest contribution to mitigating risks, with an average protection coverage rate of only 0.4 per cent, compared to an average of 1.3 per cent for informal social protection and 42.4 per cent for what is termed ‘individual coverage’ (40.3 per cent being through a person’s own income, and 2.1 per cent through access to credit).

The same pattern can be observed if the focus is placed solely on farmers. Considering all risks that affect them, the highest protection rate is achieved through individual coverage (29.9 per cent), followed by informal social protection (1.1 per cent) and, lastly, formal social protection schemes (0.3 per cent). Moreover, this is true for all age groups (0–5, 6–11, 18–60 and above 60 years) in both rural and urban places of residence.

Steps forward

The study indicates a significant social protection coverage gap in Sudan. In other words, the benefits currently provided by the government are insufficient to address the risks that affect the population throughout the life cycle, thus hampering people’s livelihoods and the country’s development.

In this sense, even though the expansion of social protection programme participation is crucial to enhance the Sudanese social protection coverage rate, it is important to keep in mind that this is not the only relevant aspect. The type and level of benefit need to be capable of addressing the risks that different groups face. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the risks that affect each section of the population and design interventions suited to mitigate them.

The availability of reliable data is essential to enable an accurate measurement of the coverage rate and guide evidence-based policymaking. Therefore, it is important to overcome current NHBS limitations. Foremost, the questionnaire should include detailed questions on economic transfers, disaggregating their source and enquiring about their value and frequency. The text and order of questions also need to be reviewed, as the way they are framed can interfere with respondents’ answers. The supporting documentation should also provide more information to allow the application of statistical inference. Another important improvement would be the inclusion of questions that provide more detail on social groups, such as the identification of respondents’ employment sector (formal and informal).

References:

- Bacil, F., and W. Silva. 2020. *Social protection coverage—Sudan case study*. Brasília and Cairo: International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa.
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