1. In the 2022/2023 government budget, the amount allocated to social protection programs is 214.3 billion Burundian francs (BIF), or 105.4 million US dollars (USD). It represents 9% of the total budget, compared to 12.2% in 2021/2022\(^1\). This situation is explained increasing spending in the agricultural and infrastructure sectors, leading a large increase of the overall budget, and consequently a decrease in the proportion of spending on the social protection sector.

2. The sector involves various ministries and institutions, coordinated by the Permanent Executive Secretariat of the National Social Protection Commission (SEP-CNPS). This organization creates difficulties in terms of budget monitoring and programing.

3. A social transfer program «Merankabandi» has been implemented in four provinces since 2018, and has covered 56,090 households. By the end of 2022, this program will be expanded nationwide in all provinces, reaching nearly 145,000 households, ensuring a significant increase in social protection coverage.

4. More than half of Burundi’s population (51.4%) lives below the monetary poverty line\(^2\). More than five out of ten children under the age of 18 live in households that do not have sufficient means to meet their basic needs. Nearly two out of three Burundian children (64%) experience three or more deprivations\(^3\).

Thus, the extension of social protection programs such as social transfers for the most vulnerable is an effective way to combat the poverty and deprivation faced by children.

5. Social protection programs are interventions that can build resilience to the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. The new, more inclusive national social protection policy and associated strategy are being finalized and will be validated by the end of 2022. They are articulated around the life cycle to protect populations according to the needs at each age.
Recommendations

- The social protection sector requires additional resources to increase social protection coverage, to meet the needs of children and their families throughout their life cycle. The expansion of the «Merankabandi» program nationwide as well as various community-based approaches represent opportunities to strengthen social protection in Burundi. A government financial commitment to social safety nets could increase coverage.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of public spending in the sector, to identify available funding levels, bottlenecks, gaps, and solutions for sustainable internal financing of the sector.

- To carry out reflections on the development of the social register, based on the “cash for jobs” program (social net program - Merankabandi phase II) which will be implemented and will cover all the provinces of the country.

- Continue discussions for the development of the implementation of an universal health coverage. As steering committee, identify the different categories of populations in terms of needs in order to provide the necessary health coverage.

Introduction

Social protection can be understood as a set of public or private measures that contribute to guaranteeing the population’s access to health care, education and replacement income in the event of illness, maternity, unemployment, old age, disability, work-related accidents, occupational diseases and the death of a family breadwinner.

Social protection, as a cornerstone of inclusive economic growth, is omnipresent in the various planning instruments:
- Vision 2025⁴,
- the Burundi National Development Plan 2018-2027 (PND)⁵,
- the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁶ and
- the National Program for the Capitalization of Peace, Social Stability and Promotion of Economic Growth “PNCP-SS-PCE”.

The Vision 2025 intends to develop human capital by improving the health and education of the population.

The PND considers the development of social protection through:
- Promoting good governance of sustainable solutions.
- Improving people’s civil rights and freedoms, and strengthening security in return areas.
- Strengthening and scaling up basic social nets to reduce structural vulnerabilities of households and promote their livelihoods.

It’s important to remind that social protection is part of SDG 10, “Reduce inequalities between and within countries” and is one of the priority targets for the Government of Burundi. It corresponds to target 1.3, which reads: “Establish nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including social protection floors, and ensure that by 2030 a significant share of the poor and vulnerable benefit from them.”

The expansion of the «Merankabandi» program nationwide as well as various community-based approaches represent opportunities to strengthen social protection in Burundi.
The services of the Presidency of the Republic of Burundi have designed the PNCP-SS-PCE as a strategy for operationalizing the PND. It is part of the government’s priorities, which include the social protection of pensioners and other vulnerable people.

The social protection sector faces challenges, including:

- **The low level social protection coverage**, non-contributory despite free health care provided to pregnant women and children under five, medical assistance for the “indigent” who have insufficient financial resources, as well as the medical assistance card which does not cover all households, etc.

- **The low income level** of workers in the informal sector and the rural population⁸, which limits registration in contributory social protection systems.

- **In terms of employment, the informal sector remains predominant**, representing 91% of non-agricultural jobs. Almost 90% of unpaid work is done by women, who are therefore a particularly vulnerable group (ECVMB 2019/2020). The cumulative rate of unemployment and potential labor force for youth (15-24 years old) is 4.7% (ECVMB 2019-20). However, unemployment statistics should be taken with caution.

In the sense of the EICVMB 2019-2020, it was assumed that people working less than 40 hours per week are underemployed. The results show that 53.4% of employed persons are actually affected by underemployment.

- **A low level of sustainability of the implemented development programs**. Indeed, the beneficiaries of development projects rarely manage to keep on their achievements, so progress fade away at the end of the donors’ interventions.

- **A weak synergy**, a lack of coherence and coordination of social protection interventions.

- **A low level of protection of the population in case of social risks**, causing the loss or reduction of income, when facing social contingencies such as old age, illness, death of a person who covered the family needs.

- **A weak link** between social protection and emergency interventions.

Faced with these challenges, the government of Burundi has undertaken multiple actions, including:

- Social protection measures for free primary education and health care for children under 5 years of age and for mothers who give birth.
- Subsidizing care and medication for certain communicable diseases such as malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.
- The revitalization of the institutional, legal and regulatory framework for social protection.
- The implementation of a cash transfer program for the most vulnerable populations (Merankabandi) and its extension to the national level in 2022.
Social Protection

These measures are in line with the conclusions of the related studies. For example:

- Technical assessment for the establishment of a social protection floor in Burundi, conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and validated in 2014.
- Study of innovative financing mechanisms for social protection, validated in 2017.

These interventions are framed by the national social protection policy and strategy, also reflected in the new framework documents currently being validated. The recommended measures, mentioned above, require commitments for their implementation. These recommendations will feed into the analysis presented hereafter, in terms of trends, composition, distribution and sources of funding.

Trend of budget allocation for social protection (in BIF)

Budget allocations for social protection increased from 2017 to 2022/2023, rising from BIF 124.9 billion to BIF 214.3 billion in nominal terms, representing an overall annual growth rate of 1.1%, reflecting the political will to alleviate the economic insecurity of vulnerable populations. This upward trend remains the same in real terms (Figure 1).

As a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), budgetary allocations for social protection represent 2.6% of GDP. The proportion of the total budget allocated to social protection is 9.8% in 2022/2023, compared with 12.2% in 2021/2022 (Figure 2). It should be noted that this budget in absolute terms has increased over the last two years.

Sources: 2017-2022/2023 Budget Acts
Budget allocations in nominal terms are those that are reported relative to a given period. Budget allocations in actual terms are those that are adjusted for price increases relative to a baseline or reference.
In Burundi, the Ministry of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Human Rights and Gender (MSNASDPHG) through the Permanent Executive Secretariat of the National Social Protection Commission (SEP-CNPS) is, in principle, responsible for the coordination of social protection services.

However, several other ministries oversee interventions in this area of social protection, including the Ministry of Public Health and AIDS Control (MSPLS), the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MENRS), and the Ministry of the Environment, Agriculture and Livestock (MEAE) (Figure 3)

Credibility and budget execution

The credibility of the budgetary process is measured by the rate of execution of the budget allocated to different entities. The analysis shows that the budget execution rate is close to 100%, which reflects a good capacity to use the funds allocated to social protection and the effective implementation of programs in this sector.

Founding sources

An analysis of funding sources shows that the social protection sector is financed by external and domestic resources. The share of external aid in financing social protection decreased significantly in 2016, following the withdrawal of some partners in 2015. However, since fiscal year 2017, this downward trend has been reversed.

Fig. 6: Sources of financing for social protection, in %

Sources: Ministry of Finance, Budget and Economic Planning

Acknowledgment

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