Social protection for all children

The situation

One out of every three Namibian children continues to grow up in a poor household. If poverty is not addressed at an early age, it risks being passed onto the next generation, perpetuating a vicious cycle that is hard to break.

Namibia has taken concrete steps to address child poverty and social exclusion through the child grant. The grant forms part of a relatively comprehensive, entirely government-funded social protection system in Namibia. The number of child grants has been on the rise in more than a decade, increasing from 9,000 in 2002 to 181,033 in June 2015 but they have not done enough to significantly lower child poverty.

One of the main reasons is that there is no general support for all poor households and children. The child grant itself is not equitable and bypasses many poor households because it is based on narrow targeting of households with an annual income of N$1,000. Added to this is the fact that many children who could benefit do not because they do not have identity documents needed to apply for a grant, or the money does not reach them because they do not live with the recipient of the grant.

There is also increasing evidence globally that cash alone does not reduce poverty and social exclusion. Cash combined with care, in other words, access to grants in combination with access to quality education, social welfare, nutrition and health care make the greatest difference in children’s lives.

Namibia’s Fourth National Development Plan recommends that the Government significantly expands access to child grants or puts in place universal access to the grants for all children below age 18. Simulations of data from the National Household Income Expenditure Survey 2009/10 demonstrate that if all children received a child grant, child poverty would be reduced from the current 34 per cent to 9 per cent, and extreme child poverty would be eliminated.
UNICEF in action

Reducing child poverty has a profound positive impact on the child, their family and the rest of society. It breaks the cycle of social exclusion and builds a generation of educated and productive adults. UNICEF is strongly committed to reducing child poverty in Namibia. It aims to help the Government build an adequately resourced social protection system by 2018 that progressively supports all families with children.

Results for children

With UNICEF support, a strong evidence base and advocacy were built between 2010 and 2013 to demonstrate the value and the cost of expanding child grants to all children. The Child Poverty Study (2012) and the Qualitative Grant Assessment (2012) revealed how the current social protection system was not able to lower child poverty sufficiently. This generated broad-based support for the reform of the child welfare system.

A scale-up proposal was developed with UNICEF support in 2013. This was complemented by the development of Namibian Model (NAMOD), a tax-benefit micro-simulation software model. NAMOD demonstrated that child poverty could be reduced significantly with the introduction of a universal child grant.

In 2014, the three Ministries in Namibia working on social protection benefited from a study tour on child grants in South Africa, helping shape their understanding of the merits of the universal approach. In addition, a UNICEF-commissioned assessment of funding mechanisms identified options for sustainable funding and the feasibility of expanding child grants. These key steps informed, in 2014, a Cabinet submission to expand access to child grants from orphans to other vulnerable children living in households with an annual income of N$1,000, as well as adjustments to the Child Care and Protection Act (adopted in 2015) to include a legal provision that allows for a gradual expansion of child grants.

In 2015, the Government of Namibia (GRN) declared war on poverty and established the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. The new Ministry provides opportunities for greater coordination in national social protection efforts.

What more needs to be done?

For the first time in history, the international community has agreed on a specific global target on child poverty (Sustainable Development Goal [SDG]#1, target #1.2). This is a significant development. Social protection is a critical component of poverty reduction strategies. Guided by the SDG framework, UNICEF will scale up its support to accelerate access to social protection for all children, by:

- Supporting the GRN to build systems to generate evidence on child poverty, both in its monetary and non-monetary forms (multiple deprivations),
- Providing joint UN support to GRN to develop a child-sensitive national social protection policy framework and coordination mechanism to coordinate national action on the eradication of poverty and inequities,
- Promoting one-stop approaches to strengthen access to social protection for the most vulnerable, through partnerships between Government agencies on the ground,
- Providing support to the implementation of the Child Care and Protection Act, including provisions on social grants,
- Providing operational support to review the social welfare workforce and the social grant administration system and promoting approaches that combine social assistance with family welfare services,
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the impact of expanded child grants on child well-being.

Partners in social protection

- International Labour Organization
- Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
- Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration
- National Statistics Agency
- Social Security Commission
- United Nations Development Programme