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The informational basis of emerging social assistance in low and middle-income countries[1]

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Abstract

The paper examines the informational basis of emerging social assistance institutions in low- and middle-income countries. The recent expansion of social assistance presents a challenge to researchers concerned with the development of welfare institutions. Diverse practices, the absence of data, and incipient conceptual frameworks are all significant obstacles to comparative analysis. The paper proposes an informational basis for social assistance in low and middle-income countries, capable of guiding the construction of a comparative database.

Keywords

Social assistance; poverty; low and middle-income countries; welfare institutions; social protection

JEL Codes

I38, P36

Introduction:

A far-reaching expansion of antipoverty transfer programmes is underway in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). It is estimated that these programmes reach between one and two billion people, depending on the range of programmes included (Barrientos, 2013; World Bank, 2015).

The spread of antipoverty transfer programmes has been accompanied by intensive discussion and debate about their design, implementation, and outcomes (Cecchini & Martínez, 2011; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Garcia & Moore, 2012; Weber, 2010). Policy debates have forged ahead; of the development of appropriate analytical frameworks enabling a deeper understanding of emerging welfare institutions.[1] Diverse practices at country level and advocacy by transnational bodies have generated uncertainty over basic concepts and indicators. Conceptual drift and limited availability of comparable data for low- and middle-income countries have contributed to slow down theorising.

The main objective of this paper is to propose an informational basis to support the comparative study of social assistance and inform the construction of a comparative database and dataset for LMICs.[2]

Why an informational base for social assistance? Sen (1997) urged readers to pay attention to the informational basis needed to evaluate principles. In his view, any "evaluative judgement depends on the truth of some information and is independent of the truth or falsity of others ...The informational basis of justice, thus specifies the variables that are directly involved in assessing the justice of alternative systems of arrangements" (Sen, 1997, p. 73).

Our interest is not with moral principles directly, but with the analysis and evaluation of a sub-set of the institutions of social justice. Defining what information is needed to study social assistance institutions is a necessary first step towards developing theories capable of explaining the emergence of welfare institutions in LMICs.

Comparative research on social assistance institutions in low and middle-income countries requires collecting and harmonising the relevant data. Several requirements apply to these data. They must be capable of characterising these institutions developed in line with specific values and objectives using core common variables and indicators. They must support comparative research on the development and evolution of social assistance institutions over time. The main elements of an appropriate informational basis consist of variables and indicators capturing the objectives, design, outcomes and sustainability of social assistance in low- and middle-income countries.[3]

In the context of LMICs, it is important to focus on social assistance for several three reasons.

First, there is a very practical reason. For the majority of the populations in these countries, social assistance is the most relevant welfare institution, especially given its

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[1] The fact that theory has lagged behind practice echoes the experience of high-income countries. Introducing the Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State, Editors note that "the welfare state was almost at the peak of its development by the time that modern welfare state theories...were formulated from the 1950s onwards"(Castles, Leibfried, Lewis, Obinger, & Person, 2012, page 5)

[2] Information on the database is available from: http://www.gdi.manchester.ac.uk/research/themes/growth-inequality-and-poverty/improving-research-infrastructure-in-social-assistance/

[3] See Atkinson (2002) for an informative discussion of the requirements of social indicators in the European Union.

rapid expansion in LMICs in the recent last two decades (Castañeda et al., 2016; ILO, 2007). Current levels of poverty and informality in LMICs underline the significance of social assistance in this context.

Second, in line with prioritarian notions of justice, societies are best evaluated from the perspective of the worst off (Barrientos, 2016). Together with the provision of basic services and employment opportunities, social assistance is central to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

Third, research on social protection institutions in low- and middle-income countries has focused primarily on social insurance and labour market regulation (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008). The recent expansion of social assistance programmes in LMICs has encouraged a fast growing body of research focused on these programmes as short-term development 'interventions', but there remains a large knowledge gap on social assistance programmes as welfare institutions. Social assistance is the 'missing link' of for welfare institutions in low- and middle-income countries (Barrientos, 2013).

Multilaterals and some regional banks have made progress in building a knowledge base on antipoverty policy, including the collection of data.[4] While extremely valuable as a contribution to fill in current knowledge gaps, their data collection is guided by specific operational requirements, policy priorities, and advocacy. The informational basis of social assistance developed in this paper, and the database it supports, draws from these efforts in important ways, but its focus and motivation are to support comparative analysis of emerging welfare institutions in LMICs.

Research on the development of welfare institutions in high-income countries has rejected hypotheses emphasising functional responses to industrialisation or economic development (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999). A country's level of economic development exerts a strong influence upon the resources available for redistribution, and on the capacity of public agencies to implement social policies, but it does not determine by itself the specificity of welfare institutions. Political factors are key (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Huber & Stephens, 2012). The diversity of emerging welfare institutions in low and middle-income countries provides support for this view. It confirms that domestic conditions and processes play a dominant role in the emergence of welfare institutions. Developing appropriate theories to explain the emergence of social assistance requires an informational basis to build upwards from domestic processes.

The materials in this paper are divided into five main sections.

Section One examines the boundaries of social assistance. Section Two provides a brief review of poverty perspectives and interventions, connecting understandings of poverty to types of interventions. It also proposes a typology of social assistance

[4] The World Bank ASPIRE dataset (http://datatopics.worldbank.org/aspire/) provides country level analysis of social protection based on household survey data. The ILO combines social protection data from several sources to support their World Social Protection Reports. Regional development banks have developed their own databases. ECLAC manages a database of conditional cash transfers (http://dds.cepal.org/bdptc), while the Asian Development Bank developed its own social protection index and database (http://spi.adb.org/spidmz/index.jsp). Age International's PensionWatch tracks social pensions (http://www.pension-watch.net/about-social-pensions/about-social-pensions/social-pensions-database/).

programmes. Section Three examines programme design issues. Section Four discusses sustainability dimensions and indicators, especially institutionalisation, financing and politics. Section Five reviews existing approaches to identifying programme outcomes. A final section concludes.

The data collection instrument developed to construct the database can be found in the Annexe.

1. Boundaries

What are the boundaries of social assistance? It will be helpful to focus on institutions as a starting point.

Social policy comprises social protection and the provision of basic services such as health, education, housing, and others. These are transfers in kind. The terms ‘social protection’ and ‘social security’ are commonly used to describe two institutions: social insurance and social assistance.[5]

Social insurance institutions address lifecourse and work contingencies threatening the income generating capacity of workers. Typically, social insurance institutions include programmes providing cover for old age, sickness, and unemployment. Social insurance transfers are normally financed by a fund collecting regular contributions from workers and their employers. [6] By contrast, social assistance consists of budget-financed transfers of income and services addressing poverty.[7]

Figure One illustrates the main components of social policy.[8]

Figure One sets out a basic institutional framework, highlighting differences in function and financing. But the distinction between social insurance and assistance reflects a difference in their distinct underlying principles. Social insurance is grounded on a contributory principle: entitlements are dependent on having contributed to a fund. In contrast, social assistance is based on a citizenship principle: all members of society are entitled to support in the event that they fall into poverty.[9] Throughout social assistance describes programmes and policies directed by public agencies.

[5] The IMF’s Government Finance Statistics adds a third category: employer provided benefits (IMF, 2011).

[6] Here we are concerned with identifying conceptual boundaries. Practice in LMICs raises many queries: social insurance is commonly dependent on budget-financed subsidies.

[7] In high income countries, social assistance is commonly defined to include all means-tested transfers, but the term is also used to describe measures to secure minimum income protection. (Bahle, Pfeifer, & Wendt, 2012)

[8] In high-income countries, principally in Europe, the approach to social policy is often described by the term, ‘welfare state’. A welfare state broadly defined is a state committed to, and responsible for, securing full and comprehensive welfare for its citizens. The concept of a welfare regime describes the articulation of the state, market and family institutions to ensure welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

[9] Citizenship should be understood as membership not limited to nationality or voting rights.

Figure One. Social policy and components

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Social Policy</th></tr>
<tr><th>Basic service provision</th><th colspan="2">Social protection</th></tr>
<tr><td>Education, health, housing, etc.</td><td>Social insurance: Contributory programmes addressing lifecourse and employment contingencies</td><td>Social assistance: Budget-financed programmes addressing poverty and vulnerability</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Source: Author</td></tr>
</table>

There is an important distinction between emergency assistance and social assistance of particular significance in the context of LMICs. All societies have institutions providing emergency assistance to those affected by natural or man-made disasters. Emergency or humanitarian assistance provides short-term support to affected households, independently from their socio-economic status. In middle-income countries it is normally financed from budget emergency reserves. In low-income countries, emergency and humanitarian assistance is commonly financed by aid and implemented by national or international NGOs.[10] There is very little to be gained by blurring the distinction between emergency and social assistance. They have very different objectives, target groups, and financing sources.[11]

The operational requirements and advocacy of transnational bodies have led to conceptual drift. The World Bank, and other Washington-based agencies, use the term 'safety nets' to describe programmes and interventions focused on poverty reduction in developing countries and targeting groups in poverty (Grosh et al., 2008; Weigand, 2008). Crucially, safety nets include emergency and humanitarian assistance. Safety nets are, therefore, broader in scope than social assistance as defined above.

The ILO refers to social assistance programmes as 'non-contributory social protection'. From their perspective, the key issue is whether entitlements are dependent on having contributed to a fund. In recent publications, the World Bank defined social safety nets as "noncontributory measures designed to provide regular and reliable support to poor and vulnerable people. They are also referred to as safety nets, social assistance, or social transfers and are a component of larger social protection systems." (World Bank, 2015, page 4). This is closer to the definition of social assistance employed in this paper. 'Regular and reliable support' effectively precludes emergency and humanitarian assistance. The conceptual drift is explained by operational requirements and the advocacy of transnational organisations and therefore unlikely to arrive at a fixed point any time soon.[12]

[10] Transfers in cash are increasingly common in emergency or humanitarian assistance; and there is also a great deal of interest in linking up short-term emergency assistance with longer-term institutions (Harvey, 2007). However, not all transfers in cash are social assistance or antipoverty transfers.

[11] In low-income countries, donor agencies have recently shifted their priorities from supporting repeated rounds of emergency assistance to supporting medium-term programmes, providing regular transfers in cash and/or in kind (Department for International Development, 2005). This transition is an important factor explaining the uncertainty about the boundaries surrounding emergency and social assistance.

[12] Space limitations preclude a critical examination of safety nets and non-contributory social protection.

Attention to the conceptual boundaries of social assistance will be essential in defining the informational basis of social assistance. Applying these boundaries in practice will require considerable care.

2. Poverty and intervention types

This section examines the relationship between perspectives on poverty and stylised intervention models. Social assistance institutions embed society's response to poverty and disadvantage. They reflect particular understandings of the factors explaining poverty as well as of the feasibility and effectiveness of specific forms of intervention. The discussion below connects three main forms of intervention or 'ideal types' to three stylised explanations of poverty.[13]

In the context of social assistance, we shall identify three nested perspectives on poverty: poverty as consumption deficits; poverty as asset deficits; and poverty as social inclusion deficits (Barrientos, 2013).

The canonical view of poverty associates it with significant consumption deficits. Households are in poverty because they lack the financial capacity to ensure a basic standard of living. This understanding of poverty underpins the identification of 'absolute' poverty lines. Food poverty lines - also described as ‘extreme poverty lines’ - identify the cost of a basic basket of goods satisfying a minimum caloric intake. Moderate poverty lines add the costs of basic services. Income maintenance schemes - once the core of social assistance in high income countries - are designed to ensure that households living below the poverty line receive subsidies equivalent to the poverty gap (Atkinson, 1995; Marx & Nelson, 2012). From this poverty perspective, social assistance subsidises consumption among households in poverty. [14]

An alternative understanding of poverty emphasises low productivity. Households are in poverty because their productive resources can guarantee, at best, a level of income below the poverty line. Asset deficits enforce deficient living standards. Asset deficits might reflect insufficient levels of assets and/or constraints in household’s ability to deploy assets to maximise productivity (Banerjee, 2000). From this perspective, consumption subsidies will not prove sufficient to ensure a permanent exit from poverty without policies that facilitate asset accumulation or improved asset allocation among households in poverty. As will be seen below, this perspective has become hugely influential in the design of emerging social assistance in LMICS.

A third understanding of poverty acknowledges the role of consumption subsidies and asset accumulation in addressing poverty, but highlights a further explanatory factor - restricted social inclusion. From this perspective, poverty shows up as consumption deficits, perhaps due to asset deficits or constraints. But these are rooted in conditions impeding full participation of disadvantaged households in society and the economy.

[13] The discussion aims at generalisation. It leaves aside for the time being other relevant questions, such as whose understanding of poverty is dominant - as in power resources theory (Huber & Stephens, 2012; Korpi, 2006); and the role of pre-existing institutions - as in the neo-institutionalist approach (Iversen & Soskice, 2009).

[14] In the golden age of European welfare states, income maintenance schemes had a key economic role as income stabilisers, preventing demand shocks from spiralling into economic crises.

Interventions to eradicate poverty will not be successful in the absence of policies pursuing social inclusion for households in poverty.[15]

In LMICs, the expansion of social assistance has centred on flagship programmes. The reasons behind a programme approach to social protection are complex and often country specific.[16] Diversity in programme design across developing countries makes it necessary to identify 'ideal types'.[17] Analytically, it will be useful to classify social assistance programmes into three main categories: pure income transfers; income transfers combined with asset accumulation; and integrated poverty reduction programmes (Barrientos, 2013).

These 'ideal types' match directly with the three understandings of poverty introduced above, providing an entry point for their conceptual underpinnings.[18] Figure Two connects these poverty perspectives with their ideal types.

Figure Two. Poverty perspectives and intervention types

Understanding of poverty	*'Ideal type' of social assistance programme*
Poverty as consumption deficit	Pure income transfers
Poverty as low productivity due to asset constraints	Income transfers combined with asset accumulation Human development income transfers Employment guarantees
Poverty as inclusion deficits	Integrated antipoverty transfer programmes
Source: (Barrientos, 2013)	

Pure income transfers

These include cash transfers targeting households in poverty and categorical transfers for groups considered to be particularly vulnerable. Some pure income transfers are focused on households in extreme poverty. Children and family allowances, and social pensions are good examples of pure income transfers. South Africa's social assistance is organised in the main through means-tested categorical grants focused on older people, people with disabilities and children.

[15] It is beyond the scope of this paper to review this literature on social exclusion and the role of social inclusion, see Saunders (2003).
[16] They include fiscal constraints, political opposition, knowledge gaps and uncertainty, the time window of international aid, and the hubris of silver bullets in international development policy.
[17] For an insightful discussion on the role of 'ideal types' in the study of welfare institutions, see Arts and Gellissen (2002). As they point out, 'ideal types' are a means to develop theory as they "emphasise the 'essential' features of a situation considered as a whole" and enable "simultaneous knowledge of the ideal-type and the real-type" (page 139), progressing analysis from the 'what' to the 'why'.
[18] This is in contrast to a functional approach to classification. Grosh et al. (2008) distinguish between: programmes providing unconditional transfers in cash or in kind, including cash, near cash transfers and vouchers, in-kind food transfers such as school-based feeding programmes and nutritional supplements; income generating programmes including workfare or public works programmes; and programmes enhancing human capital and access to basic services, including conditional transfers and fee waivers for health and education.

Income transfers combined with asset accumulation

These include programmes providing income transfers alongside policies aimed at facilitating the accumulation of productive assets. The term 'asset' is used in its broadest sense here to include human, physical and financial assets. Linking direct transfers to interventions aimed at asset accumulation is expected to strengthen the productive capacity of households in poverty.

This 'ideal type' includes two families of programmes now common in developing countries. The first delivers programmes combining direct transfers with interventions, which facilitate household's investment in human development, in particular education and health. Mexico's *Oportunidades* and Brazil's *Bolsa Família* are well known examples of this family of programmes.

The second includes programmes that combine direct transfers with interventions facilitating physical asset protection and accumulation. Examples include India's *National Employment Guarantee Scheme* (infrastructure or community assets) and Ethiopia's *Productive Safety Net Programme* (household and community assets). They can also be described as employment guarantee programmes.[19]

Integrated poverty reduction programmes

An important innovation in social assistance, these combine a range of interventions, which focus on the lowest income households. BRAC's *Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction – Targeting the Ultra Poor* provides an integrated and sequential set of interventions for strengthening nutrition and health, as well as training in preparation for the transfer of productive assets. Chile's *Chile Solidario*, China's *Di Bao* and South Korea's *Minimum Living Standards Scheme* are additional examples. Their distinguishing feature is a focus on improving social inclusion.

The underlying understanding of poverty underpinning these programmes provides a conceptual basis for this typology. The 'ideal types' of interventions help progress analysis from the 'what' to the 'why'. Pure transfers rely on an understanding of poverty as largely to do with deficits in income or consumption. Transfers are expected to remedy these deficits and thus reduce poverty. Income transfers combined with asset accumulation share a broader understanding of poverty. They pay attention to deficits in income or consumption but, important as these are, they also aim to address deficits in productive assets. Integrated poverty reduction programmes share a multidimensional understanding of poverty, but are primarily distinguished by their focus on social inclusion. The 'ideal types' are nested, in that all three address consumption deficits, but the second also addresses asset deficits, while integrated poverty reduction programmes focus on improving social inclusion in addition to consumption and asset deficits.

3. Programme design

This section considers what information is required to characterise social assistance provision in LMICs. It will focus on core design issues and then identify information needed to profile these. The core design elements are: entry and exit; conditions; and transfer design and level.

[19] This family of programmes can also accommodate climate change adaptation and environmental protection programmes. The Chars Livelihood Programme in Bangladesh is an early prototype.

Entry and exit

The primary objective of social assistance programmes is to address poverty, but few social assistance programmes in LMICs explicitly seek to reach the entire population in poverty. Most programmes aim to reach a specific sub-set of the population in poverty: people in extreme poverty; older people; children; people with disabilities; or other groups. These constitute the target population for the programme.

In practice, social assistance programmes select beneficiaries according to particular rules. Targeting and beneficiary selection are two distinct features of a social assistance programme. A programme might target older people in poverty, but only select people older than 70, or widows, for participation. Programme entry conditions include selection rules and procedural requisites, for example, that applicants are registered.

Social assistance programmes rely on a combination of selection techniques (Coady, Grosh, & Hoddinott, 2004). Categorical programmes select participants on individual characteristics. Income, assets, and means tests identify household resources. Proxy means tests identify household resources based on a range of household characteristics, excluding income. Geographic selection selects households living in locations with acute deprivation. Community selection delegates programme selection to local leaders and communities. Transfer design might enable households to self-select for social assistance programmes, for example including a work requirement for programme participation.

Participation rates measure the reach of social assistance programmes. Deficiencies in programme design or implementation can significantly reduce these.[20]

To date, the literature on exit conditions is scarce. To a large extent, practice takes it for granted that failure to satisfy entry conditions will lead to exit from a programme (Villa & Barrientos, 2016). This applies to programmes with demographic entry conditions. Programmes with entry conditions based on socio-economic status often rely on recertifying entry conditions at regular intervals. Failure to meet conditions might also lead to sanctions, including suspension in programme participation. A handful of programmes have time-limited participation.

Conditions

All social assistance programmes involve conditions to access transfers, for example entitlement requisites like proof of identity.

An innovation in LMICs is the use of conditions aimed at human capital accumulation attached to the receipt of transfers. A class of social assistance programmes, described as conditional cash transfers in international development policy debates,

[20] Participation rates are commonly described as 'coverage rates'. As the *State of Safety Nets* 2015 (2015) notes, coverage is a descriptor borrowed from social insurance and related to the coverage of risks. It is less useful in the context of citizenship-based social assistance. For example, all Brazilian families with per capita income less than a defined level are entitled to participate in Bolsa Família. Legal 'coverage' is therefore 100% of the population. Due to labour market volatility, participation rates (the share of the population in poverty participating in the programme at a set point in time) are significantly less than 100% of the target population (Soares, 2010).

makes the continuation of transfers dependent on participant households attending primary health care and ensuring that their children enrol and attend school. (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). The main motivation behind human development conditions is to ensure a minimum level of household investment. Human development conditions might include using services like immunisation and health care or nutrition training; as well as enrolling and attending school

Employment guarantee programmes make entitlements dependent on participant households providing labour. The motivation behind these conditions is to facilitate self-selection for households in poverty. Provided that programme transfers are set below market earnings, households with access to market employment are unlikely to participate.

Transfers

Most social assistance transfers in LMICs have a cash component, associated services and in kind transfers. The income transfer is usually the main component. It can be fixed for all participants, or variable depending on participant characteristics. Typically human development conditional transfers have a basic consumption transfer and additional transfers depending on the number and grade of school children. Pure income transfers for older people might vary according to age, with larger transfers for older participants. Additional components might include preferential access to services, such as health care, and in kind transfers like nutrition supplements for children. Supply side subsidies might facilitate service provision.

Transfer levels are best assessed against household income or consumption. Social pensions might be linked to a poverty line, but shared within households in practice. With variable transfers, total household transfer will depend on household composition, but normally comes with a ceiling to ameliorate fertility incentives.[21] With household transfers, identifying the designated recipient reveals information on the assumptions made by programme designers. Child focused transfers; human development transfers in particular, often designate the mother as the recipient. The payment method provides useful information on the potential private costs of transfers. The regularity and reliability of transfer payments has a strong influence on household investment and planning.

Entry and exit regulations, conditions, and transfer design provide core information on social assistance programmes.[22]

4. Sustainability

How sustainable are emerging social assistance institutions in LMICs? With a handful of exceptions, South Africa for example, social assistance programmes are comparatively new institutions in LMICs. Despite this, they are in the process of developing stable and resilient structures. This section examines the informational basis needed to assess their ongoing institutionalisation, paying particular attention to financing and political sustainability.

[21] Empirical literature has not found any reliable evidence of such fertility incentives (Stecklov, Winters, Tood, & Regalia, 2007).

[22] Several studies discuss design issues in detail (Barrientos, 2013; Cecchini & Madariaga, 2011a, 2011b; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009; Grosh et al., 2008; Paes-Sousa, Regalia, & Stampini, 2013).

Institutionalisation

With variation across regions and sub-regions, emerging social assistance institutions in LMICs show rapid institutional development. In the pioneering middle income countries, an initial focus on flagship programmes has given way to institution building.

In Latin America, ministries of social development have been established with the purpose of managing and coordinating antipoverty transfer programmes (Cecchini & Madariaga, 2011b).

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, social assistance programmes have been bolted onto existing welfare institutions of a different type.

In Africa, especially outside Southern Africa, social assistance is heavily influenced by international donors and is in the early stages of development, (Davis et al., 2016; Monchuk, 2014; Niño-Zarazúa, Barrientos, Hickey, & Hulme, 2012) (Monchuk, 2014)

Welfare institutions in Southern Africa have long developed around social assistance so that its recent expansion had a ready-made set of institutions (Seekings, 2015).

Asia shows considerable diversity (Asian Development Bank, 2013; Weber, 2010). The most developed countries in the region had well established social insurance institutions, but the 1997 financial crisis led to the expansion of social assistance (Kwon & Holliday, 2006).

The financial crisis also led to the emergence of social assistance in LMICs like Indonesia and the Philippines. South Asian countries with a predominantly rural population have relied on employment guarantees.

Assessing processes of institutionalisation is challenging when defining an informational base for social assistance (CEPAL, 2015). An incipient literature defines the different dimensions of institutionalisation together with empirical counterparts. Székely (2015) develops an institutionalisation index and is able to show improvements in institutionalisation in Latin American social assistance and social policy.[23] The focus will be on the agencies responsible for managing social assistance, programme rules and information flows.

Programme agencies and their legal frameworks provide important information on the degree to which social assistance programmes are embedded in governmental structures. A stylised institutionalisation path starts with time limited pilot programmes introduced by presidential order. Progressive scaling up requires participant registration, supporting legislation, budget accountability, operational norms, monitoring and evaluation and cross-sectoral government coordination. Innovations in social

[23] The dimensions selected include: ministry with main responsibility for poverty reduction; national strategy for poverty reduction; monitoring and evaluation; legal framework establishing specific responsibilities and capacities; adequate budget; coordination mechanisms; social accountability and participation; programme operational rules; beneficiary registration; and legal norms relating to the conduct of public agencies and officials. This approach to the institutionalisation of social policy emphasises the efficacy of social policy. Perhaps a more encompassing focus would highlight the institutions needed to ensure (social) citizenship (Székely, 2015). Székely cites a definition of welfare institutions by Braun and Veléz as defined by "(i) the presence of a long-term strategy; (ii) the continuity of actors; (iii) the existence of coordination spaces; (v) the development of technical capacities; (v) the presence of mechanisms for the collection and analysis of reliable information; and (vi) the participation of social actors" (Székely, 2015, page 13)

assistance in LMICs have highlighted the crucial role of information and information flows. Registries follow up on the population at risk, while monitoring and evaluation tracks the effectiveness of programmes.

Finance

Few indicators provide better clues as to the sustainability of social assistance programmes than their financing. Budget allocations and disbursements provide information on the resources available to programme agencies. Shown as a share of GDP or government expenditure, social assistance expenditure indicates the resources allocated to direct poverty reduction. However, there is no benchmark level of social assistance expenditure. In practice, countries with higher poverty incidence show lower social assistance expenditure as a share of GDP than countries with relatively lower poverty incidence. And there is no direct correlation between a country's level of economic development and its social assistance expenditure level (Barrientos, 2013; Weigand & Grosh, 2008). To an important extent, social assistance expenditure depends on the configuration of welfare institutions. Countries with large-scale and comprehensive social insurance spend less on social assistance than countries with dominant social assistance institutions.

As regards sustainability, the extent to which social assistance programmes are financed by government revenues is key (Barrientos, 2013). Reliance on international aid highlights sustainability issues. Where social assistance programmes are financed by domestic revenues, the sources of those revenues are also informative. Reliance on natural resource revenues from primary products suggests dependence on international markets. Contribution to social assistance programmes from social insurance schemes indicates a measure of solidarity.

Politics

Emerging social assistance institutions require political support to be sustainable. To an extent, the degree of institutionalisation provides information on the stability and embedded-ness of social assistance programmes. Social assistance programmes that are buttressed by an appropriate legal framework, with medium term financial provision acknowledged in government budget cycles; and with operations that are subject to scrutiny and evaluation - are more likely to be sustainable.

Literature on social insurance and welfare states with dominant social insurance links the emergence and sustainability of welfare institutions to the interests of specific social groups (Baldwin, 1990; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Huber & Stephens, 2012; Iversen & Soskice, 2006; Korpi, 2006). These studies focus mainly on horizontal redistribution. In comparison, social assistance reflects vertical redistribution. Interest-based explanations of welfare institutions have limited explanatory power in the context of the expansion of social assistance in LMICs. Political conditions conducive to broad-based social contracts might throw light on the sustainability of the social assistance institutions there (Hopenhayn, Maldonado Valera, Martinez, Rico, & Sojo, 2014; Maldonado Valera, 2015).

5. Assessing outcomes

The expansion of social assistance programmes in LMICs has been associated with a improvement in the incidence of programme impact evaluations. Social assistance programmes in LMICs have paid much greater attention to the evaluation of programme outcomes (Barrientos & Villa, 2015).

Income transfers combined with asset accumulation show a markedly high incidence of programme evaluation. Human development income transfer programmes in particular have been extensively evaluated. This is in contrast to pure income transfers, which show lower outcome evaluation intensity. Programmes outcomes estimated using reliable data and appropriate implementation of statistical methods provide valuable information.

Typically, impact evaluation studies rely on regression discontinuity design, difference in difference, and instrumental variables techniques to measure outcomes - with varying degrees of success.

The availability of quasi-experimental evaluation datasets has encouraged research into unintended programme effects, both positive and negative.

The incidence of impact evaluation has supported meta-studies comparing measured effects from different programmes (Baird, Ferreira, Ozler, & Woolcock, 2013; Bastagli et al., 2016). Work on meta-studies highlights the limitations of quasi-experimental evaluation methods in a comparative context. Measured outcomes of impact evaluation studies are context specific. Estimated programme outcome studies have high internal validity but their external validity is restricted by context (Angrist & Pischke, 2008). Research has concentrated on a handful of programmes with better quality data. The dimensionality of published outcomes often requires standardisation.

The dataset includes a selection of measured programme outcomes with a focus on explicit programme objectives.

Conclusions

Researchers interested in the comparative study of emergent welfare institutions in low and middle-income countries face considerable challenges. Limited availability of comparable data and conceptual drift associated with operational needs and the advocacy of multilateral international bodies are two such challenges. This paper argues that the absence of a well-defined informational basis of emergent social assistance in LMICs is at the root of these challenges. An informational basis defines the variables and indicators required to support evaluative judgements on 'alternative systems of arrangements' to paraphrase Sen. Developing appropriate theories of emergent welfare institutions in LMICs requires comparative research, which in turn requires an informational basis to guide data collection and conceptualisation. Finally, this paper proposes an informational basis for social assistance programmes in LMICs.

The paper began by identifying the boundaries of social assistance with respect to other social policies and emergency assistance.

It then explored three main poverty perspectives: poverty as consumption deficits; poverty as low productivity; and poverty as limited inclusion. These support the classification of social assistance programmes into three matching ‘ideal types’ - pure income transfers; income transfers combined with asset accumulation; and integrated antipoverty programmes.

A brief examination of core design elements followed defining the characteristics of social assistance programmes. The discussion on sustainability that followed highlighted social assistance programmes as institutions. It focused on three specific dimensions: financing and politics. It also discussed the relevance of programme outcomes.

Together, boundaries, programme types, design elements and institutional dimensions identify an informational basis for social assistance.

The informational basis developed in the paper will guide the collection and harmonisation of data on social assistance programmes in LMICs.

An instrument developed for this purpose is described in the Annexe . It provides empirical counterparts to the elements of the informational basis proposed in the paper.

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Annexe
Social assistance in low and middle-income countries: Database Codebook

Name	Variable definition	Format
codeN	<u>Country code:</u> ISO3 numeric	Numeric
codeA	<u>Country code:</u> ISO3 Alpha	String
country	*<u>Country:</u>* Identifies the country in which the respective programme is implemented.	String
region	*<u>Region:</u>* Indicates the region the country is part of, according to the World Bank regional classification (World Bank, 2013).	Categorical: 1=Europe & Central Asia 2=East Asia & Pacific 3=South Asia 4=Middle East & North Africa 5=Sub-Saharan Africa 6=Latin America &Caribbean
year	*<u>Year:</u>* Indicates the year (2000-2015) the programme data applies to.	Numeric
	A. Programme Characteristics	
title	*<u>Programme title</u>:* Identifies the name of the programme in the original language, if available, otherwise in English.	String
start	*<u>Start date:</u>* Indicates the year the programme began operations.	Numeric
end	*<u>End date:</u>* Indicates the year the programme ended operations, if applicable.	Numeric
rep	*<u>Replace:</u>* Identifies whether the current programme replaced an earlier programme.	Dummy: O=No 1=Yes
repwhich	*<u>Name of the programme replaced:</u>* If replace = 1, indicates the name of the old programme	String
protype	*<u>Programme type</u>: I*dentifies the type of programme based on their underlying approach to poverty. Only one category to be selected.	Categorical: 1=Pure income transfers 2=Income transfers plus community assets 3=Income transfers plus human capital investment 4=Integrated antipoverty transfer programmes
profunc	*<u>Programme function:</u>* Classifies programmes according to function from World Bank (2015). Several categories can be selected, as programmes might have more than one function. A conditional cash transfer plus complementary services should be entered	Categorical: 1=Conditional cash transfer 2=Unconditional cash transfer 3=Old age pension 4=Disability pension 5=In-kind transfer 6=Employment guarantee

	as <17> .	7= Complementary services 8 = Other
proobj	*Programme objectives:* Indicates the main objectives of the programme, as stated in the programme documentation.	String
pilot	*Pilot:* Identifies whether the programme is a pilot project in the corresponding year.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
target	*Target population:* Identifies the main target population of the programme. Several categories can be selected, e.g. for a pension for people with disabilities and older people <34> should be entered.	Categorical: 1=All households 2= Households with children aged 18 and younger 3=People in old age 4=People with disabilities 5=People of working age 6= Women 7=Other
categ1	*Categorical 1*: Takes the value 1 if the programme covers all within a population group or category, and 0 if it selects participants within the category	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
categ2	*Categorical 2:* If Categ1=0, it describes the population group covered in words.	String
inctest	*Income test:* Identifies whether an income test is used to select participants.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
meanstest	*Means test:* Identifies whether a means test is used to select participants.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
proxytest	*Proxy-means test:* Identifies whether a proxy-means test is used to select participants.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
geotar	*Geographic targeting:* Identifies whether participants are selected based on their geographic location.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
comtar	*Community targeting:* Identifies whether participants are selected through community participation.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
demtar	*Demographic targeting:* Identifies whether participants are selected based on demographic characteristics, e.g. age or gender.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
selfselect	*Self-selection:* Identifies whether participants self-select into the programme. Identifies programmes open to all who demand it.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
assets	*Asset targeting*: Identifies whether selection includes an asset test.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
partind	*Participation – individual level*: Measures the number of participating individuals,	Numeric

	including the recipient and her/his family group.	
parthh	*Participation – household level:* Measures the number of participating households.	Numeric
recip	*Recipient*: Identifies the direct recipient of the transfer.	Categorical: 1=Child carer 2=Pensioner 3=Disabled 4=Worker 5=Household head 6=Female household member 7=Other
compo1	*Programme components 1*: Identifies whether the programme has a single or several components.	Dummy: 0=Single 1=Several
compo2	*Programme components 2*: If compo1 =1, it lists and describes the components in words.	String
payreg1	*Payment regularity 1:* Measures the interval between transfer payments (for the first component).	Categorical: 1=Daily 2=Weekly 3=Biweekly 4=Monthly 5=Bimonthly 6=Quarterly 7=Every 6 months 8=Yearly
payreg2	*Payment regularity 2:* Measures the interval between transfer payments for the second component if several.	Categorical: 1=Daily 2=Weekly 3=Biweekly 4=Monthly 5=Bimonthly 6=Quarterly 7=Every 6 months 8=Yearly
payreg3	*Payment regularity 3:* Measures the interval between transfer payments for the third component if several.	Categorical: 1=Daily 2=Weekly 3=Biweekly 4=Monthly 5=Bimonthly 6=Quarterly 7=Every 6 months 8=Yearly
transmin	*Transfer amount – minimum:* Measures the minimum level of transfer per month in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric
transmax	*Transfer amount – maximum:* Measures the maximum level of transfer per month in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric

transav	*Transfer amount – average:* Measures the average level of transfer per month in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric
transfix	*Transfer amount – fixed:* Measures the fixed level of transfer per month in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric
transcompo	*Transfer amount – components:* If a programme has several components, it indicates the transfer level per month in domestic currency at current prices for each component in words.	String
paymethod	*Payment method:* Report on the most common payment methods. Several categories can be selected.	Categorical: 1= Cash 2= Prepaid card 3= Magnetic bank card 4= Voucher 5= Bank transfer 6= Mobile payment points 7= Cell phone payments 8= Other
level	*Level of reporting:* Indicates whether the transfer amounts are reported at the individual level or the household level.	Categorical: 1=Individual level 2=Household level
recertif	*Recertification:* Reports whether the programme requires recertification of eligibility.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
period1	*Guaranteed transfer period 1:* Identifies whether there is a fixed period of time during which transfers are guaranteed, or a fixed period before recertification is required.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
period2	*Guaranteed transfer period 2:* If *period*1= 1, it indicates the fixed period of time during which transfers are guaranteed in years or fraction of a year. 97, 98 and 99 are reserved for particular cases. 97 applies to cases where continuation of payment depends on the continuation of a specific condition, as might be the case for disability allowances. 98 applies to cases where the transfer is subject to children being enrolled in school. 99 indicates the transfer period is guaranteed during the life of the participant.	Numeric: 97=Subject to continuation of the condition 98=As long as children are in school 99=For life
conhum	*Transfer conditions – human capital:* Indicates whether transfers are conditional on the utilisation of social services aimed to enhance human capital.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
conenrol	*Transfer conditions – school enrolment:* Indicates whether transfers are conditional on school enrolment of school-aged children in the household.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes

conatt	<u>*Transfer conditions – school attendance*</u>*:* Indicates whether transfers are conditional on school attendance of school-aged children in the household.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
conhealth	<u>*Transfer conditions – health*</u>*:* Indicates whether transfers are conditional on periodic health check-ups.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
conimmu	<u>*Transfer conditions – immunisation*</u>*:* Indicates whether transfers are conditional on immunisation of children in the household.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
connutri	<u>*Transfer conditions – nutrition*</u>*:* Indicates whether transfers are conditional on nutritional activities.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
conwork	<u>*Transfer conditions – work*</u>*:* Indicates whether transfers are conditional on the supply of labour.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
sanctions	<u>*Sanctions:*</u> Specifies whether sanctions for non-compliance with conditions are specified by the programme agency.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
exit1	<u>*Exit strategy 1:*</u> Indicates whether the programme includes an exit strategy for participants.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
exit2	<u>*Exit strategy 2*</u>*: If exit1=1,* it describes in words the programme's exit strategy for participants.	String
	B. Programme Institutionalisation	
agenname	<u>*Implementing agency:*</u> Identifies the agency responsible for the implementation of the programme. When multiple agencies are involved, it reports on the executing agency.	String
agentype	<u>*Agency type:*</u> Identifies the type of executing agency.	Categorical: 1=Governmental 2=Multilateral (or bilateral) donor agency 3=Private 4=Non-profit organization 5=Hybrid
centra	<u>*Centralisation of decision-making:*</u> Assesses the degree of decision making centralisation of the programme. None describes a programme fully designed and implemented at the community/district level. Low centralisation describes a national/regional programme allowing full decision-making at the community/district level. Medium centralisation describes	Categorical: 1=None 2=Low 3=Medium 4=High

	programmes where local government can modify or complement programme design and implementation. High centralisation describes a programme designed and/or implemented by central government.	
locdis	*Local government discretion:* Assesses the extent to which local government, or community, can select participants and/or set transfer values for different households.	Categorical: 1=None 2=Low 3=Medium 4=High
interm	*Intermediation:* Indicates whether participants have access to a social worker.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
legfram	*Legal framework:* Indicates the legal framework under which the programme operates.	Categorical: 1=Constitutional law 2=Ordinary legislation 3=Presidential decree 4=Agency regulations 5=None
legframch1	*Changes in the legal framework:* Identifies whether changes to the legal framework took place since the start of the programme.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
legframch2	*legframch 2:* If *legframch1* =1, it identifies the year the last changes were made.	Numeric
evapro	*Evaluation protocols:* Indicates whether a programme includes evaluation protocols.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
registry	*Unified Registry:* Identifies whether there is a unified registry for this programme.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
partreg	*Participant registration:* Identifies whether there is a dedicated registry for this programme.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
appep	*Appeals procedure:* Measures whether a programme includes an appeal protocol against selection decisions.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
socacc	*Social accountability and participation:* Indicates whether there is community accountability of decision-making by the programme agency.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
budarr	*Budgetary arrangements:* Indicates the requirements for modifying budgetary arrangements. Formal arrangements are embedded in legislation. Informal applies where budget adjustments are contingent, e.g. donor funding. Discretionary applies where budgets are modified by presidential or ministerial discretion alone	Categorical: 1=Formal (legislated) 2= Informal (revelation) 3=Discretionary (finance or presidential discretion)
web	*Website:* Indicates whether there is a	Dummy:

	website for the programme.	0=No 1=Yes
URL	*URL:* Provides the actual website of the programme.	String (URL)
	C. Country-level Institutionalisation	
povstra	*Poverty strategy:* Indicates whether a programme has been implemented as part of a national poverty reduction strategy or social protection policy strategy.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
natco	*National coordination:* Indicates whether a single agency has responsibility for poverty reduction, managing programmes, and coordinating government efforts.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
	D. Programme Budget	
bugt	*Budget:* Measures the budget assigned to the programme in the corresponding year, in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric
exbugt1	*Budget period 1:* Indicates whether the reported budget is for the fiscal year, calendar year or multiyear period.	Categorical: 1=fiscal year 2= calendar year 3= multiyear period
exbugt2	*Budget period 2:* If *exbugt1* = 3 (multiyear period), it indicates the number of years covered.	Numeric
cost	*Actual expenditure:* Measures the executed expenditure on the programme in the corresponding year, in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric
excost1	*Cost explanation 1:* Indicates whether the cost reported is for the fiscal year, calendar year or multiyear period.	Categorical: 1= fiscal year 2= calendar year 3= multiyear period
excost2	*Cost explanation 2:* If *excost1* = 3 (multiyear period), it indicates the number of years covered.	Numeric
dfin1	*Donor financing 1:* Indicates whether the programme received donor contributions.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
dfin2	*Donor financing 2:* If dfin1 = 1, it indicates whether funding is through a loan or a grant, or both.	Dummy: 1=Loan 2=Grant 3=Both
dfinex	*Donor financing expenditure:* Measures the executed donor contribution to the programme in the corresponding year, in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric
exdfinex1	*Donor financing period 1:* Specifies whether	Categorical:

	the amount was reported for the fiscal year, calendar year or multiyear period.	1= fiscal year 2= calendar year 3= multiyear period
exdfinex2	*Donor financing period 2:* If *exdfinex1* = 3 (multiyear period), it indicates the number of years covered.	Numeric
govfin	*Government financing:* Indicates whether the programme is financed by the domestic government, partially or fully.	Dummy: 0= No 1= Yes
govfinex	*Government financing expenditure:* Measures the governments' executed contribution to the programme in the corresponding year, in domestic currency at current prices.	Numeric
govfinex1	*Government financing period 1:* Indicates whether the amount is for the fiscal year, calendar year or multiyear period.	Categorical: 1= fiscal year 2= calendar year 3= multiyear period
govfinex2	*Government financing period 2:* If *exgovfinex1* = 3 (multiyear period), it indicates the number of years covered.	Numeric
findom	*Whether programme is financed domestically:* Indicates whether the programme is financed totally or partially from domestic sources.	Dummy: 0=No 1=Yes
findomsour	*Sources of domestic financing:* Identifies the sources of domestic financing, whether by central or local government. Earmarked or hypothecated taxes are collected explicitly for the purpose of financing transfers. Several categories can be selected, e.g. a programme financed through an earmarked local consumption tax is <24>	Categorical: 1= general govt. revenues 2= earmarked or hypothecated taxes 3=income taxes 4=consumption taxes or VAT 5= resource revenues 6=social security or poverty reduction funds

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